Madness in English-Canadian Fiction

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1. Introduction

When I started dealing with madness in English-Canadian fiction I had initially hoped to find something particularly Canadian about it. After all, the attempt of isolating certain themes and images in order to define what is central and characteristic to their literature appeared to be common practice among Canadian literary critics. One only has to assemble titles of the most influential essays or volumes for the thematic bias to become apparent. They either consist of dominant images to which Canadian literary experience is said to conform (*The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination; Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature; The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction*) or directly advertise the themes to be extracted from literature (*Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature; Patterns of Isolation in English-Canadian Fiction; Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: the Ancestral Present*).

However, after I had consulted various of these studies as a sort of guideline, while I was still snaking my way through the different primary works, I came to realise that this kind of approach was in fact the least promising or convincing way to come to terms with the topic. For as much as these works can be hailed for the interesting as well as illuminating aspects they contain in their desire to find a common denominator in Canadian literature, their attempts to fit and too often force their literature into a pretentious all-embracing schema only led to far-fetched or absurd generalisations. One will go astray if one starts extracting thematic plums in order to prove one's point and will only succeed in distorting the facts.[1] John Moss in his *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel*, for instance, claims that the abundance of violence evident in Canadian literature in the 1920s and 1930s is something significant for this country during this period. It could easily be proven though that this was a phenomenon which was just as common, if not more so, in the United States. Or consider Margaret Atwood's contribution towards the search of Canada. In *Survival* she argues that all Canadian literature is based on a collectively shared experience and that the central symbol for Canada, as she has detected its occurrence in both English- and French-Canadian literature, is "undoubtedly Survival, la Survivance."[2] One could, however, maintain, as Itwaru has, that

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1 Gladly enough I soon recognized that I was by no means the only one who came to doubt the overall validity of these influential and well-known studies. For further critical reactions against the dominance of thematic criticism see also: Powe, B. W.: A Climate Charged: Essays on Canadian Writers.- Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1984.-; Stuewe, Paul: Beyond Survival.- In: Books in Canada 12:1 (February 1983), pp. 7-10.-; Keith, W.J.: An Independent Stance: Essays on English-Canadian Criticism and Fiction.- Erin: The Porcupine's Quill, 1991.-

2 Atwood, Margaret: Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature.- Toronto: Anansi, 1972.- p. 31

> all literature, directly or by implication, addresses the problem of survival. The quest for meaning, the search for pleasure, the drive for power, the denial or acceptance of death, the desire to tell people how they live or even how they should live - are all dimensions of the question of survival. There is, therefore, hardly any singularity in this claim, or variations of it, in terms of a symbolic centrality which unifies and informs the literary imagination of Canadian writers. The identification of this as serving such a central role would seem reflective [merely] of that identifier's desire for coherence in a polyglot, ill-defined and changing social landscape.[3]

My own line of argumentation would be similar to Pache's who suggests

> Thesen wie die in *Survival* vertretene sind interessant, man sollte sich jedoch davor hüten, aus einigen Beispielen schon spezifisch kanadische Merkmale der Literatur abzuleiten.[4]

Finding recurrent characteristics in a given nation's literature and then declaring them to be nationally distinctive just does not work, especially if one "chooses to work with materials - literary themes - that are [...] international in nature."[5]

Another aspect which has to be emphasised is that even if it might hold true "that certain peoples and regions have their own distinctive literary and cultural traditions and attitudes, conditioned by shared language and habit and historical experience",[6] that a certain region produces its own type of literature, as a certain climate produces its own flora, in the case of Canada one would always be confronted with the size of the country. Geographically, as well as historically the country is divided into so many different regions that it will always be problematic to view them as a homogeneous entity, a fact which has led various writers and critics to the conclusion that any form of identity or sense of place can only be established locally or regionally, never nationally. Thus the national definition can be no more than a 'collective consciousness' based on various regionalisms.[7]

As far as madness is concerned, this study will therefore refrain from claiming it to be yet another centralising and unifying symbol of the Canadian mind, even if Margaret Atwood discovers in Moodie's approach to her country a schizophrenic ambiguity which she identifies as a central feature of the Canadian character:

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3 Itwaru, Arnold Harrichand: The Invention of Canada: Literary Text and the Immigrant Imagery.- Toronto: TSAR, 1990.- p. 24

4 Pache, Walter: Einführung in die Kanadistik.- Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1981.- p. 100

5 Davey, Frank: Surviving the Paraphrase.- In Canadian Literature 70 (1976) .- p. 8

6 Woodcock, George: Odysseus Ever Returning.-Toronto: McClelland & Stewart (NCL), 1970.- p. 131

7 cf. Woodcock, George: Odysseus Ever Returning.-Toronto: McClelland & Stewart (NCL), 1970.-

> If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia. Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she preaches progress and the march of civilisation while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness [...]. She claims to be an ardent Canadian patriot while all the time she is standing back from the country and criticising it as though she were a detached observer, a stranger. Perhaps that is the way we still live. We are all immigrants to this place even if we are born here: the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely, and in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders.[8]

Again, even if this state of mind is a rather common one and frequently thematised in Canadian literature, as the subsequent discussion will show, it is nevertheless not so much a specifically Canadian phenomenon as a typically colonial one.

Any attempt to prove that the theme of madness or schizophrenia is something central to the Canadian character and Canadian literature will not prove to be fruitful or productive. No argument could seriously be made that madness is an exclusively Canadian phenomenon. Neither is there some particular affinity between madness and the Canadian psyche. At all times there have been mad people everywhere. To that degree madness forms a universal fact of life, just as madness itself has been a recurring theme in every kind of literature. Mad characters, mad narrators, and the subject of madness suffuse the literature to such a degree that it is difficult to find a literature without at least some sort of thematisation of madness. Writers of all times have appropriated literary insanity for their own ends.

Yet, as the ways madness has been defined, understood, described, judged and handled differ quite profoundly from society to society, from era to era, as the language, ideas and associations surrounding insanity are both strongly culture-relative and shifting, madness as a theme of myth and literature has always been an excellent vehicle to mirror the assumptions and arguments, the aspirations and nostalgia, the beliefs and values, hopes and fears of its age and society. The literary madman does not exist alone. He both reflects and influences those involved with him. He embodies and symbolically transforms the values and aspirations of his family, his culture, his society and his times and thus provides us not only with his personal past but social and literary history as well.

Thus, while the overall intent of this study is to elucidate some discernible patterns of structure and style which accompany the use of madness in Canadian literature, to investigate the varying sorts of portrayal and the conventions of presentation, to interpret the use of madness as literary devices and to highlight the different statements which are made, the continuity, variation, and changes in the theme of

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[8] Atwood, Margaret: The Journals of Susanna Moodie.- Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970.- p. 62

madness provide an informing principle in terms of certain Canadian experiences and perceptions. By examining madness as it represents itself in Canadian literature and considering the respective explorations of the deranged mind within their historical context, I hope to demonstrate that literary interpretations of madness both reflect and question cultural, political, religious and psychological assumptions of their times and that certain symptoms or usages are characteristic of certain periods. Such an approach, it is hoped, might not only contribute towards an assessment of the wealth of associations which surround madness and the ambivalence with which it is viewed, but also shed some light on the Canadian imagination. As such this study can be considered not only as a history of literary madness, but a history of Canadian society and the Canadian mind. It should be noted, however, that I deliberately refuse to discuss madness solely on the grounds of Canadian identity and aspects of excentricity and marginality, which seems to be so *en vogue* these days, as it would not do justice to the overall variety of works dealing with madness.

A point which can nevertheless be made is that, due to its post-colonial situation and the corresponding identity crisis and specific geophysical aspects, such as its vastness and dangerous climate, which as part of the Canadian experience has entered its literature, compared to other countries or even post-colonial nations, Canadian literature lends itself to an even greater variety of situations in which to discuss the theme of madness. While Canadian writers in their literary depiction of madness, as the subsequent discussion will hopefully show, can be said to be firmly rooted within western thought tradition, it is with regard to the latter themes that they have come to appropriate this philosophical background for their own purposes.

To achieve my above mentioned aim I will proceed in an essentially combined thematic-chronological manner. I find this approach most effective in treating madness as a continuous subject of literature and necessary for the elucidation of developments and changes in aesthetic approaches to the manifestations of madness and their presentations from the inception of English-Canadian fiction to the present. Starting out with a brief history of the way madness has been perceived in western culture, I will then examine the various narratives for their engagement with and responses to specific discourses of madness (e.g. Romanticism, popularised Freudianism, antipsychiatry, feminism, poststructuralism, etc.) that have worked subtly and overtly to reinforce certain images.

As this study is basically organized with regard to chronological aspects Chapter 3 will deal with the colonial situation of the country and such early works as the journals of Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, which in our context assume great documentary interest, and Major John Richardson's gothic, historical novel *Wacousta* which can be regarded as the first major Canadian prose work to dramatise the unresolved tensions of colonial conflict, just as it problematises the whole notion of a

stable, coherent national or personal identity. The implications of terror and madness in this book perfectly reflect the experience of a whole generation of Canadians: the garrison situation, the early immigrant's struggle to survive and the way in which the exposure to the elements, disease, exhaustion, the new culture and the inappropriate upbringing to face the new conditions and the respective discouragement quite frequently led to mental instabilities.

It is this aspect of Canadian experience which will continue to be an important theme in Canadian literature as will become apparent when we turn to Chapter 4 which is concerned with the next major period in Canadian history as well as literature - the late 19th and early 20th century - when millions of people from Europe, the United States and Eastern Canada tried to cultivate the western hinterland - a literary period which, above all, saw the flowering of a huge body of realistic pioneering and prairie fiction. By taking a closer look at the works of Martha Ostenso, Laura Salverson, Frederick Philip Grove and Sinclair Ross I will try to demonstrate how the pioneering experience, the prairie landscape, the depression and the Dust Bowl were a major source for psychic disintegration and that the all-too-common phenomenon of madness during the pioneering period provided material especially adaptable to the fictional purposes of the novelist.

In Chapter 5 I will then focus on fictions where madness is perceived as an offering or sacrifice, as a form of martyrdom of the innocent or a surrender to the spirit of the true God as it is presented in Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* and Morley Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*.

The protagonists of Chapter 6, on the other hand, do not go mad because they are forced to choose between warring absolutes. Rather, they are ordinary people who are trying to live their lives but unable to deal with their respective situations and thus welcoming insanity as an escape from reality. The pieces of fiction dealt with here, which include works by Margaret Laurence, Mavis Gallant, Margaret Atwood and Margaret Gibson, not only draw attention to their protagonists sense of things, their psychic turmoil and intolerable experience of pain, but they also dwell on the causes, the impact, and the consequences of the respective imbalances. By such an emphasis, and by such an obvious sympathy for the one who suffers, the works speak to the frailty of consciousness, the precariousness of reason.

While Chapter 7 goes on to focus on the connection between genius and madness, exemplified by a discussion of Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* and *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Chapter 8 is dedicated to the link which has often been established between women and madness, for as universal as madness may be, there are various writers and critics which time and again have pointed to the affinity between the female gender and insanity. What is claimed is that women are not only

more prone to going insane due to their marginalized and oppressed position in society, but that within our dualistic systems of language and representation women are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind. After demonstrating the protean shifts undergone by the interdisciplinary topos of female mental illness in Western culture I will then trace these transformations and replacements from one stereotype to another - be it entrapment or rebellion, escape or visionary madness - by taking a closer look at the works of Margaret Atwood, Joan Barfoot and Audrey Thomas.

Chapter 9 will then deal with the postmodern approach to madness. What is argued is that postmodernism, where it does not engage in formalistic experimentation designed to show 'real' madness, continues the imbrication of mad and sane practised by modernism. Far from being a figure merely of pathos, the madman, the excentric, the demented is more often a tool for satire and social commentary, just as madness itself becomes an endemic condition which infects the entire novel, its structure, and, ultimately, the experience of reading as well. The emphasis here is on the works of Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch. Another writer which could have well been included in this chapter is Timothy Findley. As madness itself and the question of what constitutes madness or is supposedly sane and who is not is so much part of his work, where he variously expressed his attitude that the world itself needs radical correction for its insanity, I decided to dedicate a whole chapter to his fiction.

The study will close by a final summary discussion on the versatility of the image of madness in Canadian literature and its general significance.

It is freely admitted that the set of categories finally devised for organising the material is arbitrary and, of necessity, artificial. They do not constitute the sole and essential taxonomy of narratives whose theme is madness. Yet, they provide an opportunity to identify and discuss the patterns of images, and they operate as a working distinction between a number of main types of imaginative perception and literary treatment of madness. Furthermore, in the process of selecting texts for the various chapters there were border cases which seemed to me to present equally rich material on aspects which would justify their appearance in a different chapter, but I decided to discuss these texts under other headings whenever I felt that, beyond a general inquiry, they would be more fittingly placed in a more "indigenous" group.

I have had to limit myself primarily to the consideration of novels, although short fiction is not entirely ignored.

2. The Changing Faces of Madness

2.1. Antiquity

In ancient times the inner life, with its dilemmas of reason and conscience was not yet the centre of attention. Humans were perceived instead as mere puppets at the mercy of forces which were essentially beyond their control. Their fates were decided largely by gods, demons, fortune and furies. It was by these powers that they were cursed, pursued, punished, destroyed or driven mad. Yet, the more modern conception of the mental landscape was already emerging at the height of the Greek civilisation in the fifth and fourth centuries BC when Greek philosophy first declared man the measure of all things, stressing how each man must bear responsibility for his own fate, thereby making madness human. From Plato onwards the dichotomy between the rational and the irrational and the rightful sovereignty of the rational became fundamental to both their moral and their scientific vocabulary, and through them, to ours. Classical thinkers thus "defined the problem of madness for future ages by elevating the *mind* and by valuing reason and order so highly"[1].

2.2 The Middle Ages

While during the Classical Greek period there had been basically two ways of regarding madness: it was either considered a moral trauma or a disease, both of which already had a dreadful potential for judging the insane as less than fully human. The social and cultural milieu of the Middle Ages, on the other hand, provides us with a whole variety of options with regard to the causes of madness. While they made use of both the Greek alternatives, madness as badness and madness as sickness, they also fitted them within a cosmic Christian scheme. This is to say, that as opposed to the Greek man-centred philosophy, Christian theology would also see mental disorder as a mark of the war for the possessions of the soul waged between God and Satan. At least in theory, if perhaps less so in practice, medieval Christianity thought that the voice of folly might be a medium for the voice of God and bade it have its hearing, just as in the more secular sphere, court jesters were granted folly's privilege to utter truths denied to politic courtiers. Most of all, however, insanity was equated with sin and

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1 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- p. 12; see also Bennett, Simon: Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry.- Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.-

moral corruption, God's punishment for crime, as the favourite case of Herod's madness exemplified. Yet, while madness often resulted in "death and damnation"[2], it could also appear as a test, "serving as penance and leading to self-knowledge, confession, and reform"[3], and it could even be regarded as holy. Medieval minds could thus regard madness as religious, as moral or as medical, as divine or as diabolical, as good or bad. In any case, however, it is caused and can only be cured by supernatural intervention.

But even if the pervasive influence of the church's attitude towards madness throughout the Middle Ages was the chief determinant of social, legal, and aesthetic responses to the symptoms and effects of mental aberration, it did not preclude scientific inquiry into its causes because efforts were indeed made by both priests and physicians to distinguish between demonic possessions and other causes of madness - physical as well as psychological.[4] Historians of the theory and treatment of psychopathology during the Middle Ages have disclosed the various ways in which medieval philosophers and physicians sought to understand and provide remedies for madness, from drugs to simple forms of psychotherapy employed by the Arabs of the 8th through the 12th centuries to the surgical means used by the doctors at the celebrated medical school of Salerno.[5] Nonetheless, the cultural effects of the assumption that the roots of madness are sin cannot be underestimated.[6]

Even though there were examples to the contrary, such as the creation of Bethlem Hospital - more commonly known as Bedlam - in England in 1247, through the Middle Ages and well beyond, crazy people rarely had any special, formal provision made for them. At that point the mad usually lived as fools or village idiots in their social environment. Only if they were dangerous or an extreme nuisance were they confined to a cage and put on show or locked into dungeons. The degree of their social integration largely depended on the degree of their "otherness". They were hardly

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2 Doob, Penelope: Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature.- New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.- p. 54

3 Ibid., p. 12

4 For further detail see: Talbot, C. H.: Medicine in Medieval England.- London: Oldbourne History of Science Library, 1967.-

5 Cf. Alexander, Franz; Selesnick, Sheldon: The History of Psychiatry: an Evaluation of Psychiatric Thought and Practice from Prehistoric Times to the Present.- New York: Harper & Row, 1966.- pp. 61-66.-

6 Judith Neaman suggests that the major difference between the medieval and the modern response to insanity is that what the theologian of the Middle Ages called sin, we call sickness and that the conception of madness as sickness or disease is as medieval as it is modern. The notion that disease, both physical and mental, is punishment for moral corruption is, however, characteristically medieval. (Neaman, Judith: Suggestion of the Devil: The Origins of Madness.- New York: Anchor Books, 1975.- p. 55)

regarded as sick people in need of medical attention. They were perceived as unreasonable or as possessed by demons.[7]

2.3. Humanism and the Age of Reason

With the gradual abandonment of the theocentric, hereafter-oriented thinking of the Middle Ages, with the rise of humanism, at the close of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century, the revived study of the Greek and Latin classics, the rediscovery of classical antiquity with the triumph of the secular state and the assertion of the individual personality, signalling the ascendancy of the values of a secular civil society over those of an ecclesiastical and feudal one, the medieval conception of madness as something cosmic, dramatic and tragic loses its quasi-religious mystery. In the closing decades of the 17th century, perhaps because religious conflicts of the Reformation 1550 had been too bitter and fanatism too intense, the churches were not in the best position to meet the challenge presented by the new lines of thought. The revival of true classical spirit led to a philosophical outlook which centred on the autonomy of man as a dignified, rational being, possessing within himself the source of truth and right, and a fresh confidence in human creativeness and human reason was thus on its way. With its firm belief in man's power of reason, freedom of choice and innate ethical sense, the opening of "the age of reason" not only led to a new world view but to a new attitude towards madness as well. As insanity became naturally rather than supernaturally oriented, it was perceived to be arrestable, and subsequently medical intervention became an increasingly appropriate response, especially since the Enlightenment was marked by a growing trend towards empiricism and attempts at scientific reasoning. The more negative aspect of this process was that the insane came to be regarded as culpable in the creation of their disorder - a new "secularised notion of sin". With the attachment of shame to madness and the medical label of "malignant distemper" - possibly infectious and threatening - replacing "distraction", popular tolerance of the insane diminished. The distinction which the Greeks had drawn between 'reason' and 'unreason', between fully rational members of society and the sub-rational, came to weigh increasingly heavily, as all beliefs and practices which appeared idiotic or insane were evidently the products of stupid thought processes and were deemed inimical to society or the state - indeed could be regarded as a menace to the proper workings of an orderly, efficient, progressive, rational society.[8] That madness was thus in some way regarded as anarchy, which finds its confirmation in

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[7] cf. Osinski, Jutta: Über Vernunft und Wahnsinn: Studien zur literarischen Aufklärung in der Gegenwart und im 18. Jahrhundert.- Bonn: Bouvier, 1983.-

[8] cf. Dörner, Klaus: Bürger und Irre: Zur Sozialgeschichte und Wissenschaftssoziologie der Psychiatrie.- Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1975.- p. 190

the treatment of those designated as insane, who were not only expelled from society by virtue of their "differentness", but were also confined in special places at the limits of society, "hospitals", where they were imprisoned and "treated" along with other "dangerous" deviants from the social norm such as criminals and paupers.[9] Increasingly, institutions were provided for locking away the worst offenders, both to prevent society itself "from being swamped and sabotaged, and as engines to reform the delinquents"[10]. As Porter has furthermore pointed out, echoing Foucault, it would be a mistake, in any case, to simply "depict the movement to institutionalize the mad as repressive and punitive. What it principally was, was segregative"[11]. Internment is an invention which assigns to the madman the status of an outcast. This move of shutting away the difficult, the dangerous or just different was referred to by the French philosopher Michel Foucault as 'The Great Confinement'.[12] By this act of force - exclusion and confinement- madness was separated from reason, the mad were separated from the sane. While in the 16th century the figure of the "wise fool" had not yet been differentiated from connotations of knowledge and madness it had among others represented a knowledge of "an other world", a world beyond sense perception, the hospitalisation of the mad in the 17th century could be seen as an attempt to tame madness and preserve the realm of knowledge for reason. Madness retained its forms and images - madmen "frenzied and ranting" - but the voice of madness was silenced.[13] Reason contained madness within its categories, spoke of madness, but did not let madness speak its "wisdom".

In early public madhouses, lunatics were commonly handled with great harshness. This, however, seemed quite defensible to influential currents of opinion. After all, it was believed that the mad were the victims of their own vanity, pride, sloth and sin. And "were not those who lost their minds by that very fact reduced to the condition of a brute, capable to responding only to force and fear?"[14] The overwhelming evidence of mistreatment of the insane in the asylums throughout Europe in the 17th and 18th

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9 cf. Jimenez, Mary Ann: Changing Faces of Madness: Early American Attitudes and Treatment of the Insane.- Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987.- p. 29

10 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- p. 16

11 Ibid., p. 17

12 Although Foucault's approach to madness has to be localised within the structuralist framework, which I will come to at a later point, I chose to present some of his statements throughout this chapter as his works, *Madness and Civilization* (1963), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *The Order of Things* (1966), deal to a large extent with the discourses of psychiatry, medicine, and the human science respectively and the ways in which official discourse perceived, classified and distributed such insubstantial "things" as sanity, health and knowledge at different times in the history of Western culture.

13 Foucault, Michel: Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.- First publ. in French 1961.- Transl. by Richard Howard.- New York: Random House, 1965.- p. 36

14 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- p. 17

centuries led to the general agreement that during these periods fear and superstition still determined the reactions to madness. Disciplining, strengthening, and restoring the system through controlled courses of solitary confinement, drug therapies, electric-shocks, hot baths, cold showers and mechanical restraint played a large part in the technique devised for the treatment of mental disorder from the late seventeenth to the eighteenth century.

Things began to change when instead of expecting to find insanity rooted in organic, neurological or biochemical disorders, madness was no longer perceived as a symptom of physiological imbalance but as a manifestation of uncontrolled imagination. Classical theory, as modified by Enlightenment empiricist psychology, insisted that "imagination should not be wayward, idiosyncratic and visionary but should abide by the solid information of the senses and be tempered by judgement"[15]. Indeed, what was said to separate the mad from the sane was that their imaginations were not sufficiently controlled by judgement.[16] Philosophers, medical authorities and major imaginative writers of the period, however different their positions and their tone, cautioned against excessive imagination. The fear of imagination developed from and is related to the fear of passion. Foremost among the eighteenth-century distrusters of imagination is Samuel Johnson, who waged a lifelong battle against melancholy. Idleness and solitude were both to be avoided on the grounds that they provided a fertile breeding-ground for the imagination. Solitude

> is dangerous to reason, without being favourable to virtue [...] Remember [...] that the solitary mortal is certainly luxurious, probably superstitious and probably mad: the mind stagnates for want of employment, grows morbid and is extinguished like a candle in foul air.[17]

Idleness is condemned not because of its later association with poverty, but because it promotes inner stagnation and decay. In the name of enlightened progress the accent with regard to the treatment of the mad was now placed on regeneration and healing instead of shutting away for good, which was to be achieved by 'moral' methods such as kindness, reason, humanity. After all, since mad people were regarded as trapped in fantasy worlds, they needed to be treated essentially like children, who required a stiff dose of rigorous mental discipline, rectification and retraining in thinking and feeling. The objective was to combat confusion with control. The idea that, by first isolating people from bad influence and then rigorously reprogramming their minds, one

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15 Ibid., p. 62

16 cf. Hunter, Richard & Macalpine, Ida: Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry: 1535-1860.- London: Oxford University Press, 1963.- p. 233.-

17 Quoted in: Robillard, John (ed.): The Book of Quotations / ed. by John Robillard.- New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.- p. 247

would be able to cure them generated noble optimism. It was the new dawn in the treatment of the mad. In a gesture of psychiatric liberation the Parisian Dr. Philippe Pinel, in 1774, struck off the chains from the lunatics at the Bicêtre and the Salpetrière and almost simultaneously William Tuke essentially banished physical constraints and irksome discipline in favour of moral therapy at his new asylum, the York Retreat. Psychiatry was thus constituted and madness released from its physical chains. For many contemporaries this new emphasis of the intellectual over the physical seemed the hallmark of progress. As Foucault has stressed, this liberation, however, only masked a new form of confinement. The substitution of physical restraint by surveillance may well have imposed another and perhaps more absolute kind of restraint on the insane which implicated their whole being. It had its more sinister dimension, a potential for subtler and more masked mastery, for brainwashing, and later for the political abuse of psychiatry. In the very acquisition of its specificity, madness, according to Foucault, is still excluded the possibility of appearing in its own right still forbidden, still prevented from speaking for itself in a language of its own.[18] A similar conception of the Western world's attitude towards madness is held by Szasz:

> Instead of being born into sin man is born into sickness [...] And, as in his journey from the cradle to the grave man was formerly guided by the priest, so now he is guided by the physician. [...] Indeed, when the justificatory rhetoric with which the oppressor conceals and misinterprets his true aims and methods is most effective - as had been the case with tyranny justified by theology, and is the case now with tyranny justified by therapy [...].[19]

2.4. Romanticism

However, attacks against the general ideas associated with the Age of Reason and the triumph of the ratio were already being launched and the close of the century and the early decades of the 19th saw another change which manifested itself in the whole tone and tendency of intellectual life of the time. With the emergence of Romanticism, imagination as the power which gave form to visions was once again highly valued. Naturally, this mental revolution not only affected all spheres of thought, all artistic and literary standards and modes of expression, but its pronounced inclination towards the emotional, mysterious, strange, supernatural and fantastic also made their marks upon doctors of the mind. As the tyrant, the rationalist, and the materialist were opposed and the individual exalted over the masses, emotion, wonder, and

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18 cf. Foucault, Michel: Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.- Transl. by Richard Howard.- London, Sydney, Wellington: Tavistock Publ., 1965 [1961].-

19 Szasz, Thomas: Ideology and Insanity.- Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1969.- p. 5

imagination over cold reason and wild, unspoiled nature over so-called civilisation the madman came to be regarded as the unrestrained individualist capable of true vision. While the primary concern towards madness within the Age of Reason had been the suppression of its symptoms and effects, the new maxim was now to live it out. It was the age of the mad genius.

2.5. The Victorian Age

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, however, this area of uncontrolled passion and imagination was soon to be superseded by yet another triumph of self-control: the Victorian Age. In a decided retreat from Romantic associations of inspiration and madness it was once again purged of its fantastical properties. "Nothing is less like genius than insanity"[20], wrote George Henry Lewes. The key words in Victorian psychiatric theory and practice were once again self-control and moderation. Similar to the prevailing theories during the Enlightenment it was claimed that health depends upon the right relationship between the rational and the sensitive soul and that the will could be trained to cope with the possibilities of madness. Victorian doctors believed that in most cases insanity was preventable if individuals were prepared to use their willpower to fight off mental disorder and to avoid excess. Mental health was to be achieved by a life of moderation and by the energetic exercise of the will. Sanity might be restored by a regime that encouraged and supported will. Treating the patient like a rational person, they suggested, was the best way to cultivate the sense of self-esteem that would lead to self-control. Ultimately, the goal of this "moral management" was to cure insanity, and the prospect of cure was the major attraction of the new asylum techniques. This therapeutic optimism had clear affinities with the mid-Victorian belief in progress. Yet, no matter how benevolent their physical care of patients, moral therapists, Roy Porter reminds us, "were no more interested in entering into the witness of the mad, in negotiating with their testimony, even in exploring and decoding its meanings, than the advocates of mechanical and medical treatment had been"[21]. Instead the patient lost his or her personality and became only "a member of a machine so put together as to move with precise regularity and invariable routines"[22]. After all, madness was basically conceived as a defiance from socially accepted behaviour. Like other Victorian institutions - the penitentiary, the workhouse, and the factory - the reformed asylum

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20 Lewes, George Henry: Literary Criticism of George Henry Lewes / ed. by Alice R. Kaminsky.- Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.- p. 96

21 Porter, Roy: Being Mad in Georgian England.- In: History Today 31 (1981), p. 46.-

22 Arlidge, John: On the State of Lunacy and the Legal Protection of the Insane.- London: John Churchill, 1859.- p. 102.

was merely part of a paternalist tradition in which "humanitarianism was inextricably linked to the practice of domination".[23]

2.6. Darwinism

At the end of the 19th century another change occurred as Henry Maudsley in 1873 started to argue against the claims of the moral managers. He saw man's life as governed by genetic laws, and believed that thought and volition were determined by them as much as are all other aspects of human life. He wrote:

> Individuals are born with such a flaw [...] of nature that all the care in the world will not prevent them from being vicious or criminal, or becoming insane [...] No one can escape the tyranny of this organisation; no one can elude the destiny that is innate in him, and which unconsciously and irresistibly shaped his ends, even when he thinks he is determining them with consummate foresight and skill.[24]

Whatever the complex intellectual and social changes that contributed towards this position, it is a startling reversal of earlier accounts. Further encouraged by Darwin's theories of evolution in geology, biology and the social sciences, the second generation of nineteenth-century psychiatrists, sought to apply rigorous scientific methods to the study of insanity, rather than rely any longer on the vague humanitarian sympathies and administrative reforms of their predecessors. They insisted that insanity had a physical cause that could be discovered by a sophisticated medical practice. Their focus was on laws of selection and survival, which they believed operated as strongly in the mental as in the social world. Darwinism emphasised the hereditary disposition to madness and the congenital inferiority of the insane - madness as the mark of the impotent and unfit. Whereas at least some early Victorian reformers deplored the social problems that had brought so many wretched people to the asylums, Darwinian psychiatrists sternly maintained that hereditary organic taint compounded by vicious habits caused madness. Will, self-restraint and self-control were still considered the ultimate development of mental health. It was maintained that those who crossed the borderland into madness were individuals who due to hereditary degeneration or diseased cerebral development could not control their lower nature and emotions. In Darwinian terms, insanity thus represented an evolutionary reversal, a regression to a lower nature. It was essentially the rich and the well educated, although increasingly vulnerable to the neuroses of modern civilisation, who were perceived as a reservoir

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23 Ignatieff, Michael: A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution.- New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.- p. 214

24 Maudsley, Henry: Body and Mind.- London: Macmillan, 1870.- p. 154.-

of mental health, while the poor and disreputable were the breeding ground of madness. While the moral managers had hoped that the insane poor could be cured, the Darwinians thought that they could only be segregated. The circumstances of poverty and deprivation, of hopelessness and fear were no longer held accountable for the incidence of insanity. That the poor went mad proved that they were inadequate persons, who demonstrated their inferiority by being poor and crazy in the first place.[25] This in turn, Porter argues, matched the mood

> of a bourgeois socio-political elite anxious about the masses. The degenerationist school of psychiatry in the late nineteenth century also readily saw mental disease in the decadent effusions of artistic and literary geniuses, from the poètes maudits to the Impressionists and Cubists. Some psychiatrists believed such painters were suffering from moral, mental and visual disorders - indeed, denounced the 'decadents' so vitriolically as to pose questions about their own mental balance.[26]

2.7. Freud and Psychoanalysis

While Darwinian, determinist, evolutionist or degenerationist attitudes towards madness had came to dominant the psychiatric scene from about 1870 to the First World War, it was already at the turn of the century that the basic definition of mental illness was once again modified. Although the new movement concentrating on the study of emotions was initiated by several psychiatrists it was nonetheless most of all influenced by the works of Sigmund Freud.[27] Although Freud started his career as a neurologist and acquired full training in all branches of medicine, his general interest in philosophic and humanitarian problems always drew him to psychiatry. As he witnessed Jean Martin Charcot, the most celebrated neurologist at the time, devoting himself to the study of hysteria, he was encouraged him to do the same. His interests in the physical aspects of neurology shifted to the psychological, from the brain to the mind. Breuer informed him of a patient, Anna O., who had benefited from the cathartic method of reviving painful memories while in the state of hypnosis. It was while studying an hysterical patient, the celebrated Anna O., that Freud and Breuer developed many of the concepts upon which psychoanalysis came to be based. Freud observed that among the painful forgotten memories those of unacceptable wishes were predominant and this led to his conception of repression, one of the cardinal

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25 Cf. Alexander, Franz; Selesnick, Sheldon: The History of Psychiatry: an Evaluation of Psychiatric Thought and Practice from Prehistoric Times to the Present.- New York: Harper & Row, 1966.- p. 112

26 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- pp. 20f.

27 For extensive details on Freud see for instance: Freud, Ernst; Freud, Lucie & Grubrich-Simitis, Ilse (eds.): Sigmund Freud: Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten.- Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1989.-

elements of his theory. Together with Breuer he published in 1895 the epoch-making book *Studies on Hysteria*.[28] The essence of hysteria is that, in the face of intolerable stress, symptoms develop which provide a defence against the stressful circumstances. According to psychoanalytical theory, neurosis is an outward manifestation of deep-seated intrapsychic conflicts which were set up in early life. By this time, however, Freud had already abandoned the use of hypnotism in favour of the method of "free association". When he announced the startling conclusion that various psychoneuroses were indeed caused by unconscious sexual conflicts he was received coldly and almost condemned as a crank. In his *Interpretation of Dreams*[29], which later came to be regarded as his opus magnum, he dedicated himself not only to the puzzling problems of the dream world, which had baffled all previous investigators, and the complex mechanisms at work in the manufacture of dreams, but also to the structure and mode of how the deeper layers of the mind function, the unconscious.

With Freud, at the beginning of the twentieth century, madness thus basically came to be seen as a manifestation of intrapsychic conflicts. In his model forms of behaviour were not simply due to biological factors, inherent in the nature of the respective human being, but cultural constructs. In principle, although not always in practice, psychoanalysis was not moralistic either. It did not judge the hysteric as weak or bad, but saw hysterical symptoms as the product of unconscious conflicts beyond the person's control. Finally, psychoanalysis was attentive to the process of therapy, recognizing the fantasies that therapist and patient might project upon each other. The patient became an active, although not an equal, partner in cure. Foucault thus honours Freud as the first modern man to "listen" to what the insane were saying, to try to find reason in their unreason, the method in their madness. On the other hand, while Freud delivered the patient from "the existence of the asylum"[30], he did not liberate him from the authority of the doctor himself. That is to say, that Freud's 'talking cure' was, of course, not without its own deep ambiguities, both in theory and in practice. If asylum life encouraged scenes of silence, with Freud we sometimes have dialogues of the deaf, conversations conducted in different languages (in which 'no' typically means 'yes') and with an interpreter suffering from fixed ideas about the meanings of certain words. A similar point is made by Foucault when he hints at the fact that

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28 Freud, Sigmund; Breuer, Josef: Studies on Hysteria.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.-

29 Freud, Sigmund: The Interpretations of Dreams.- In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. IV / ed. by James Strachey.- London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74.-

30 Foucault, Michel: Mental Illness and Psychology.- Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987.- p. 85

> although the success of psychoanalytic intervention is one with the discovery of the 'truth' of the neurosis, it uncovers it only within the new psychological drama in which it is caught up. […] [S]een from a wider angle, it is the emergence, in the forms of knowledge, of a Homo psychologicus, possessor of internal truth, fleshless, ironical, and positive of all self-consciousness and all possible knowledge.[31]

English psychiatry, for a long time, remained resistant to Freudian theories and preferred to stick with Darwinian approaches instead. As Elaine Showalter points out it was not until hysteria was purged of the image of being basically a female malady by the evidence of male war neurosis that the talking cure entered English psychiatric practice.[32] It was thus the appearance of the so-called shell shock[33] which initiated the era of psychiatric modernism in England.

2.8. Schizophrenia and the Emergence of Antipsychiatry: Laing and Foucault

Another new illness which begins to take centre stage at the turn of the century is dementia praecox, a term coined by the French psychiatrist Bénédict-Augustin Morel in 1856. This diagnostic category was then revitalised by Emil Kraepelin in 1896. In 1898 he then made the now classical distinction between two major types of functional psychosis. He contrasted manic-depressive psychosis[34] with its recurrent gross swing in mood with a more severe and progressive illness starting in young adulthood which he termed *dementia praecox*. He claimed that the more severely affected people became so preoccupied with their delusions and hallucinations that they tended to

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31 Ibid., pp. 86 f.

32 Showalter, Elaine: The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980.- London: Virago, 1987.- p. 167

33 The term shell shock was coined by Charles Myers in an article describing his treatment of the functional nervous disorders in men returning from the war. Myers assumed that the physical force or chemical effects of the shell bursting at close range had caused symptoms such as impairment of vision and loss of memory. It turned out, however, that it was not the shells as such which were to blame for the neuroses and since the breakdown was often gradual, the term 'shock' was a mislabelling. However, although somewhat ill-chosen, the term was a singularly memorable and popular term that struck. It only gradually became apparent that the real cause of shell shock was the emotional disturbance produced by warfare itself, that war neurosis was an escape from an intolerable situation - a compromise negotiated by the psyche between the instinct of self-preservation and the prohibitions against deception or fight, which were rendered impossible by ideals of duty, patriotism, and honour. For more detailed information see: Myers, Charles S.: Shell-Shock in France.- Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940.- pp. 38 f. and Stone, Martin: Shellshock and the Psychologists.- In: The Anatomy of Madness / ed. by W. F. Bynum, Roy Porter, and Michael Shepherd.- London: Tavistock, 1985.-

34 One has to distinguish between neuroses and psychoses. Neurotic symptoms correspond to what is commonly called 'nerves' and comprise feelings and thoughts which most people have experienced at some time or other, albeit in a relatively minor form. However, if they become persistent and severe, such symptoms can become markedly disabling and result in a frank neurotic illness or 'nervous breakdown'. Psychotic symptoms, on the other hand, are not part of normal experience and are almost invariably severe. The picture of psychotic illness is quite distinct from normality and corresponds to what in popular usage is called 'madness' or 'insanity'. (cf. Compi, Luc: The Psyche and Schizophrenia: The Bond between Affect and Logic.- Transl. by Deborah Lucas Schneider.- Cambridge, MA: Harward University Press, 1988.- p. 123)

withdraw from social contact and lose touch with reality. As a result their social and occupational functioning deteriorates and about 10 % of all those initially affected become long-term hospital in-patients.[35] What Bleuler, some years later introduced as schizophrenia was an expansion and elaboration of Kraepelin's *dementia praecox*. Bleuler believed that its variable manifestations were due to a splitting of psychic functions or a loss of co-ordination between the cognitive (intellectual) and the conative (emotional) aspects of the personality. The subject ceases to experience his mental processes and his will as under his own control. Above all, the patient loses his vivacity and drive, he loses his interest in and capacity to respond emotionally to other people and he becomes increasingly more apathetic, eccentric and isolated.[36]

Since Emil Kraepelin first isolated this disorder from a confusing array of psychic disturbances and Eugen Bleuler introduced the broader term schizophrenia, it has been the focus of twentieth-century psychopathology and an immense amount of data have been amassed on the subject. Nonetheless, the state of knowledge remains far from satisfactory. Not only do generations of researchers in every conceivable discipline disagree on what schizophrenia is, they are also highly uncertain about what causes it and no really decisive progress in forms of therapy has been made. Striking fluctuations occur even in the definition of the illness.[37]

There is no sound evidence that its incidence has changed in the past 100 years, and it occurs in much the same form and with much the same frequency throughout the world, regardless of differences in environment, language, creed, or social structure. Neither do wars or other catastrophic events appear to influence its incidence.[38] Due to its severity schizophrenia, of all mental illnesses, is the most feared and the most fascinating, just as it is the model for the layman's concept of madness. The fears and frustrations it engenders are also a fertile breeding-ground for fanciful theories of causation. In the beginning schizophrenia had been perceived as a suffering from some type of alteration in the relation to the sense of self or a flight from reality caused by biochemical and genetic disfunctions. It was defined as a disease with an (almost) inevitably bad outcome which caused many patients to be labelled as incurable. Such negative concepts set in motion vicious circles with the worst consequences: self-

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35 Gilman, Sander L.: Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness.- Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.- p. 225

36 cf. Bleuler, Manfred: Forschungen und Begriffswandlungen in der Schizophrenielehre, 1941-1950.- In: Fortschritte der Neurologie und Psychiatrie 9/10 (1951), pp. 385-453.- Janzarik, Werner: Themen und Tendenzen der deutschsprachigen Psychiatrie.- Berlin: Springer, 1974.-

37 Cf. Stephens, J. H. et. al.: Long-term Prognosis in Schizophrenia.- In: American Journal of Psychiatry, 126 (1969), pp. 498-504

38 For more information on statistics see Compi, Luc: The Psyche and Schizophrenia: The Bond between Affect and Logic.- Transl. by Deborah Lucas Schneider.- Cambridge, MA: Harward University Press, 1988.-

fulfilling prophecy, social discrimination, enforced hospitalization, prejudices of all kinds, including the erroneous belief that schizophrenics are especially dangerous[39], lack of understanding or even ridicule from those around them, increasing isolation, disorientation, loss of self-esteem and resignation.

At some point, however, sociologists such as the American Thomas Scheff started to claim that the symptoms of mental illness were primarily "offences against implicit understandings of particular cultures", forms of "residual rule-breaking" that, in being labelled as madness, were stabilised and fixed, launching the offender into career as mental patient.[40] Critical voices like this gave rise to a new approach to madness where some therapists were beginning to investigate the social context of psychosis. One of the leading figures who tried to render madness intelligible this way and who made an effort understand schizophrenic experience was Ronald D. Laing. His unorthodox theories about madness as laid down in *The Divided Self* (1960), the basic purpose of which was "to make madness and the process of going mad, comprehensible"[41], soon established him a reputation as the psychiatric spokesman for intellectuals, writers, artists, and radicals and made him the "guru" of an anti-authoritarian and non-medical existential psychiatric movement commonly referred to as 'antipsychiatry'[42]. In his early work, Laing explained the schizoid condition as follows:

> The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself 'together with' other or 'at home in' the world but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, or two or more selves, and so on.[43]

The sense of reality and substantiality, he argues, depends on the sense of "embodiment", of unity between body and mind, of temporal continuity, and on the sense of relatedness to other persons. In psychosis, however, the person experiences an acute division between the body and mind. The inner or "true" self is relegated to a

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39 Cf. Böker, W and Häfner, H.: Gewalttaten Geistesgestörter: Eine epidemiologische Studie auf Bundesebene.- Berlin, New York: Springer, 1973.-

40 Scheff, Thomas: Labeling Madness.- Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975.- pp. 7,10

41 Laing, Ronald D.: The Divided Self.- New York: Pantheon Books, 1969 [1960].- p. 9

42 The term was introduced by David Cooper, who connected it with an attack on psychiatric power in institutions, on the hierarchical authority structure of the doctor-patient relationship, on psychosurgery and shock treatment.

43 Laing, Ronald D.: The Divided Self.- New York: Pantheon Books, 1969 [1960].- p. 15

disembodied mind, which becomes the detached spectator of the behaviour of the "false self"[44] located in an unfeeling, mechanized body. The disembodied self protects its perilous autonomy by cutting itself off from relation to others and functions primarily through observation and fantasy. In Laingian terms madness itself became intelligible as a strategy, a form of communication in response to the contradictory messages and demands of society[45], a form of protest. Or as Foucault puts it:

> The contemporary world makes schizophrenia possible, not because its events render it inhumane or abstract, but because our culture reads the world in such a way that man himself cannot recognize himself in it.[46]

In the special strategy that a schizophrenic person invents in order to live in an unliveable situation[47], he becomes perceived as other.

At this point it seems advisable to take a closer look at the publications of Michel Foucault as they form a basis for the understanding of what is to follow. Foucault's ambitious, detailed and encompassing work began in the early 1950s with an impressive inquiry into the social, economic, political, and philosophical conditions of the modern definitions of sanity and insanity in the so-called Western civilisation. Since then, his unfolding interdisciplinary production has triggered a profound intellectual appeal which cuts across a wide diversity of academic interests traditionally separated into various fields and disciplines. What he is basically concerned with is a dismantling of our modern, naturalized conception of insanity as 'illness', and of psychopathology as the science that seeks to understand it.

> The recognition that enables one to say, "This man is mad", is neither a simple nor an immediate act. It is based in fact on a number of earlier operations and above all on the dividing up of social space according to the lines of valuation and exclusion. When the doctor thinks he is diagnosing madness as a phenomenon of nature, it is the existence of this threshold that enables him to make such a judgement. Each culture has its own threshold, which evolves with the configuration of that culture [...].[48]

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44 Ibid., p. 82

45 What, according to Laing, is happening in schizophrenic experience is that, feeling existentially threatened, people convince themselves that they are someone else because then they themselves are no longer threatened by the untenable situation. Alternatively, they may pretend to be deaf or dumb, for then they cannot be expected to give an answer. It is at the cost of a split into an inner and an outer self that the separation between self and world, between thinking and being, between end and means is healed.

46 Foucault, Michel: Mental Illness and Psychology.- Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987.- p. 84

47 Laing, Ronald D.: The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.- p. 79

48 Foucault, Michel: Mental Illness and Psychology.- Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987.- p. 78

One of the major points Foucault is hinting at in *Madness and Civilization* is that a culture which establishes absolute dichotomies in its experience of the world, which sets up mutually exclusive spaces with absolute boundary lines between them, which approves of one aspect and consequently disapproves or represses another, is schizophrenic.[49] It is a divided world of separate spaces we live in where everything is made up of either-ors: inner-outer, good-bad, fantasy-reality. It is a world picture not of unity but of exclusion. Caught in this dualistic trap it is only logical that a culture thus characterised should also create an absolute division between madness and sanity. By putting into question our habitual, taken-for-granted understanding of absolute dichotomies he calls for the denaturalisation of the founding significations of our culture as it is structured at the present time. His historical study is in fact the philosophical search for a new status of discourse, which would dissolve the line of demarcation and the opposition of reason and madness.

> We must try to return, in history, to that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself.[50]

However, as long as this step has not been made, whatever the symptoms may be, the madman is always regarded as an outsider, his behaviour as being ex-centric.

At this point I would like to return to Laing and his followers as it is this exclusion and the intolerance of different fundamental structures of experience which is the point of departure for their approach to schizophrenia and has as its main concern the violation of the rights of the person labelled as schizophrenic. According to him, the social system, and not individuals, must be the object of study if we are to understand the etiology of schizophrenia.[51]

> [...] to the best of my knowledge, no schizophrenic has been studied whose disturbed pattern of communication has not been shown to be a reflection of, and reaction to, the disturbed and disturbing pattern characterizing his or her family of origin.[52]

He sees the family and the community as repressive forces, unwilling to permit the schizophrenic to experience his unusual perceptions without interference, unwilling in fact to accept the fact that others experience the world in a radically different way to

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49 Foucault, Michel: Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.- First publ. in French 1961.- Transl. by Richard Howard.- London, Sydney, Wellington: Tavistock Publ., 1965.- For a similar line of argumentation see also: Vernon, John: The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in 20th Century Literature and Culture.- Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973.-

50 Foucault, Michel: Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.- London, Sydney, Wellington: Tavistock Publ., 1967.- p.xi

51 Laing, Ronald D.: The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.- p. 79

52 Ibid., p. 78

themselves. In transferring the burden of inadequacy from the schizophrenic to society or the family, in particular, Laing and his contemporaries announced a shift that had historical significance.[53] Laing, along with Foucault, Szasz and others claimed that all chronic conditions - which constitute the essence of 'true schizophrenia' for many adherents of traditional psychiatry - represent a 'social artifact'. In other words, an acute psychosis is transformed into a chronic state mainly by social and psychological influences in the patient's environment. The hospital is a total institution which invalidates human beings. The very act of diagnosis and examination no less than the impersonal processing of mental hospital admission were perceived as degradation ceremonials performed on patients by doctors and nursing staff. Once in the hospital, the patient hardly ever leaves, because he manifests more and more the behaviour for which he was hospitalised. Traditional psychiatric practice is severely criticised, for what is called 'treatment' is really getting the patient to abandon his subjective experimental perspective for the therapist's objective ones. The patient's experiences are interpreted away by the therapist, and said to mean something other than what the patient says they mean.

In the mid-Sixties Laing went significantly further. By this time, he had come to believe that schizophrenia was merely a sociological label applied to those who had not adapted to a mad society by those who had, and that psychiatry was not merely detached but pathological. More and more antipsychiatrists in general came to doubt the objective reality of 'mental illness', suggesting that to a greater or lesser degree mental illness is a repressive invention of society and psychiatry. According to Scheflen schizophrenia is merely a convenient label used by society for coping with troublesome deviants. In order to deal with this deviance, society uses a network of institutions, all of which serve to limit and stabilise the deviance and to keep it under control.[54] Rather than being an illness, schizophrenia came to be regarded as a social fact and a political event and the schizophrenic's experience as indictment of the conventional world's standards of what is sane and insane. His or her confinement and punishment in the mental hospital thus necessitated a critical appraisal of "the larger context of the civic order of society - that is, of the political order, of the ways persons exercise control and power over one another"[55].

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[53] Another theorist who consistently condemned the patriarchal family as primary institution of sexual and political repression in general, and of female enslavement in particular, was Wilhelm Reich. Much like Freud, Reich found sexual repression at the heart of every neurosis and psychosis. Its purpose was the ultimate and total submission of the individual to the family, the state and work. David Cooper, in his book *The Death of the Family*, presents a poetic summary of much of Reich's and Laing's condemnation of the nuclear family, the family or state-like tyranny over individual liberty, sexual repression, and society's misunderstanding and brutalisation of madness.

[54] cf. Scheflen, Albert: Levels of Schizophrenia.- New York: Brunner und Mazel, 1981.-

[55] Laing, R. D.: The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness.- New York: Random House, 1960.- p. 107

From 1964 onwards Laing became associated with an interpretation of schizophrenic experience which was not entirely original[56] , but which has since become identified as Laing's personal vantage-point on the field. This approach to madness came to be known as the 'psychedelic model'[57] and led to a general celebration of schizophrenia. While *The Divided Self* was a smoothly written and carefully organized work in a familiar and even fashionable intellectual tradition, *The Politics of Experience* (1967) was an emotionally charged and almost surrealistic collection of essays that came as a shock and an affront to other psychiatrists. Far from being a form of mental illness to be treated or a psychiatric disability, schizophrenia was hence-forth understood as merely one stage in a natural psychic healing process, containing the possibility of entry into a realm of 'hyper-sanity'[58]. "Madness", Laing claimed, "need not be all breakdown [...] It may also be breakthrough."[59] Laing, in short, came to regard the psychotic's experience of an alien reality as something akin to mystical apprehension, a mode of insight and prophecy: it is not "the effulgence of a pathological process" but the faithful reflection of another actuality which is concealed from us by the blinkers of our mundane civilization. The madman can be "irradiated with light from other worlds", and partakes "those experiences of the divine which are Living Fount of all religion"[60]. In *The Politics of Experience* he discusses the transcendental experience of Carl Jaspers as proof that insanity need not be "enslavement and existential death", it may be a "liberation and renewal"[61]:

> Can we not see that this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality?[62]

Paul J. Stern is urging the same reassessment of the value of insanity when he talks about "the Realness of the Unreal"[63] and endorses his patient's statement that "to accept common sense reality as all there is, is itself a sign of insanity".[64] Socially,

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56 Gregory Bateson had a few years earlier hinted at a similar perspective. See Bateson, G.: Introduction to Percival's Narrative: A Patient's Account of his Psychosis / ed. by G. Bateson.- Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961.-

57 The term was not used by Laing himself but introduced by Siegler, Osmond and Mann, who in their anasysis of *The Politics of Experience*, compared Laing's attitude towards schizophrenia with the psychedelic experiences that normal individuals seek when they take mind-expanding drugs. Ever since then the phrase has become a sort of standard expression.

58 Laing, Ronald D.: The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.- p. 129

59 Ibid., p. 93

60 Ibid., p. 114

61 Ibid., p. 110

62 Ibid., p. 136

63 Stern, Paul J.: In Praise of Madness: Realness Therapy - The Self Reclaimed.- New York: W. W. Norton, 1972.- p. 13

64 Ibid., p. 32

madness may be a form in which "often through quite ordinary people, the light begins to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed minds"[65].

> We have all been processed on Procrustean beds. At least some of us have managed to hate what they have made of us.[66]

What is the nature of the apprehension achieved by the mystical lunatic? It seems that the psychotic crisis may enable one to overcome the deep rift in the human personality, which is characteristic of "normal" man in our type of society which has created a fissure between the "inner" and the "outer" layers of existence, between "me-here" and "you-there", between "mind" and "body", divisions, which - as already pointed out by Foucault - are not inevitable or natural, but the outcome of "an historically conditioned split". It is to the point in human existence before this lapse from fusion occurred, Laing maintains, that the mystic and the schizophrenic both manage to return.[67] Schizophrenics, like children and primitives, are capable of thinking ways that are somehow prelogical, that is, their thinking can embrace what from a logical point of view would be called contradiction.[68]

The proper function of the therapist "in a truly sane society", Laing maintained, is to act as the patient's guide in the transforming journey. Occasionally we even find an explicit analogy drawn between the role of the psychoanalyst and that of the religious celebrant:

> I believe that if we can begin to understand sanity and madness in existential social terms, we, as priests and physicians, will be enabled to see more clearly the extent to which we confront common problems [...]. Among physicians and priests there should be some who are guided, who can educt the person from this world and induct him to the other.[69]

Psychiatry was thus transformed from a negative to a positive force. It ceased to be simply a remedy for mental disease. Instead it became "a tonic to personal psychic health, a romantic road to self-discovery, and eventually a licence to let it all hang out in what Tom Wolfe was to call the 'Me Decade' of the 1960s"[70].

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65 Laing, Ronald D.: The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.- p. 90

66 Ibid., p. 47

67 Ibid., pp. 50, 103, 113

68 cf. for example Doramus, E. von: The Specific Laws of Logic in Schizophrenia.- In: Language and Thought in Schizophrenia / ed. by J. S. Kasanin.- New York: 1964.- pp. 112-134.-

69 Laing, R. D.: The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.- p. 114

70 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- p. 190

The difficulty with approaches like this, however, is that its proponents are usually speaking of an insanity which ends, a voyage that one returns from. But what if it is not like some consciousness expanding drug? Laing has often been accused of having failed to distinguish two very different kinds of experience, psychedelic and psychotic. Although some schizophrenics may indeed have psychedelic experiences and although it is certainly true that some schizophrenics have been able to make creative use of their unusual experiences, it must still be noted that some creative individuals have always been able to make use of the experience of having a major illness to further their own self-development. But it is heartless to suggest to those suffering from schizophrenia that they should look on this as a rare opportunity for self-understanding. As far as his implication that schizophrenics will benefit from being seen as persons embarked on a voyage of self-discovery is concerned, it would be closer to the truth to see most of them as voyagers "who have been shanghaied, for unknown reasons, on to a ship which never reaches the port"[71]. Time and again Laing and his followers have been criticised for negating or ignoring the immense fear and anxiety that goes along with the mental illness and the dissociation of the individual personality in particular. The naive glorification of mental illness is considered dangerous on the grounds that one very important aspect is ignored: while psychedelic voyages are mostly induced consciously and voluntarily and the person usually knows what the agent of his changed perceptions is, psychotic states, for the person concerned, are not only involuntary but also incomprehensible and traumatic. The schizophrenic person rarely knows the cause of his strange new perceptions, and he is unlikely to receive much helpful information about it.[72] Apart from that the really difficult cases, the cases which do not fit in, are ignored. The cases presented, especially by Thomas Szasz, who goes as far as claiming that schizophrenia simply "does not exist"[73], are more neurotic than psychotic and thus indeed very suitable to demonstrate the thesis that madness is merely a myth and a social artifact.[74]

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71 Siegler, Miriam; Osmond, Humphrey; Mann, Harriet: Laing's Model of Madness.- In: Boyers, Robert (ed.): R.D. Laing and Anti-psychiatry / ed. by Robert Boyers and Robert Orrill.- New York: Harper & Row, 1971. pp. 14 f.

72 To name but a few, see Crowcroft:, Andrew The Psychotic: Understanding Madness.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975 [1967].-; Jahoda, M.: Current Concepts of Positive Mental Health.- New York: Basic Books, 1958.-; Siegler, Mriam; Osmond, Humphrey: Models of Madness: Mental Illness is not Romantic.- In: Psychology Today (8:6) 1974, pp. 71-78.-

73 Szasz, Thomas: The Manufcture of Madness.- New York: Dell, 1970.- p. 67 See also: Weitz, Don: Manufacturing Madness: How Psychiatric Institutions Drive You Insane.- In: Canadian Dimension 22:4 (June 1988), pp. 16-21.-

74 Most psychiatrists or mental healers who see themselves as establishing a new order also have 'pet' patients who serve them as the ideal example of the efficacy of their method. These patients illustrate the 'creative' response that the new system enables them to make to their own madness. This clearly holds true for Anna O and Dora in the case of Breuer and Freud and Mary Barnes with respect to R.D. Laing. Barnes validates Laing's treatment by literally becoming a creative artist, a painter. She shows that she has recovered by painting her vision of the world rather than internalizing it in her psychotic fantasies. Together with her therapist, the American psychiatrist Joe Berke, she also wrote an account of her journey through madness. Yet, all these patients do, is simply accept their 'master's' presuppositions and live them out.

Another point of criticism which has variously been raised is that schizophrenic living experience is presented as psychologically accessible and generalized as the truth about schizophrenia while traditional psychiatry is condemned in general and the relationship between the schizophrenic and society is perceived as that of martyr and executioner. Others even go as far as to suggest that in the case of anti-psychiatry narrow-mindedness is sold as ideological criticism. The possibility that not the others, but the demented, could be in error is not considered, as the state of schizophrenia certifies the pathological person as in possession of the truth.[75] Where the truth is anthropologically founded beyond the social critical level, the antipsychiatry pays tribute to a concept of totality in which all intellectual contradictions are cancelled out. According to Glatzel, it is a tendency towards irrationalism and totality which leads to a "mystische[...] Überhöhung der Krankheit als eigentlicher Gesundheit".[76] Glatzel traces the popularity of the antipsychiatric, or late romantic, movement back to the need of the sane for transcendence of the rough reality to which the self of the insane person is supposed to have access. On the basis of the interpretation of insanity as truth, antipsychiatric social and psychiatric criticism indeed appears not only as a confrontation with concrete social defects and problems, but also as a justification and reason for an unspoken yearning for the original, all-in-one and contradiction-free in the pre-rational non-differentiated.[77]

2.9. The (Post-) Structuralist Approach to Madness: Barthes, Derrida and Lacan

Michel Foucault, who throughout this chapter has proved to be a very helpful and eloquent source to underline and exemplify various aspects introduced so far, can be seen as the perfect link between this social-critical approach to madness presented above and yet another movement which forms the latest context within which to view the subject of madness. Although Foucault's own work is largely preoccupied with social, cultural and historical issues and he often joins forces with Marxist radicals over specific causes, his investigation of Western thought tradition is also closely related to the theoretical and philosophical concepts expounded by a group of innovative French thinkers, such as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the literary and cultural critic Roland Barthes, the philosopher Jacques Derrida and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan,[78] who can loosely, or for want of better classification, be

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75 Glatzel, Johann: Die Antipsychiatrie: Psychiatrie in der Kritik.- Stuttgart: Fischer, 1975.- p. 106.-

76 Ibid., p. 108.-

77 Ibid., p. 110.-

78 (The works most relevant here are: Lévi-Strauss, Claude: Structural Anthropology.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.-; Barthes, Roland: Mythologies.- First publ. in French 1972.- Transl. and ed. by Annette Lavers.- Frogmore: Granada, 1973.-; Derrida, Jacques: Of Grammatology.- First publ. in French 1967.- Transl. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.-

labelled structuralist and poststructuralist[79]. Their various works in their respective disciplines have created, if not a movement, - for they would certainly wish to stress their disagreements with one another - than at least a force. Whether or not their pronounced ideas form a coherent whole is a problem to which I will not address myself in this discussion as it would go beyond the scope of the present considerations.[80] What is important for this study is that their works share certain aspects which are of importance to the treatment of madness particularly in the works of postmodernist writers. It is thus the convergence of their ideas rather than their divergence which I would like to stress here.

Whatever their individual differences, these influential and controversial thinkers are united in their rigorous questioning of so-called naturally givens in Western thought tradition. A further point of intersection in their work is that all of them are attacking the commonly held assumption that language is founded on a logical structure which faithfully rejects an objective reality, which brings us to yet another common ground to justify their appearance together: all of them depend fundamentally on Ferdinand de Saussure's insight into language, an insight without which none of the works of these authors would have been feasible. With his recognition of the nature of the basic unit of any language, the linguistic sign, and his famous summation that language is a form and not a substance, Ferdinand de Saussure, the 20th century father of semiotics, the science of signs, thus unpredictably constructed the groundwork for intellectual crisis in our time. According to Saussure, all signs conjoin a form and a concept, a signifier and a signified, both of which are arbitrary. This arbitrary nature of both components of the sign renders the relationship between signifier and signified as differential or relational. Saussure insists on the linguistic system as the place of the sign. Signs do not exist outside a system, and it is always a system of differences. "Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system"[81]. To accept the theory of the sign is to accede the primary place of the linguistic system. Language as system provides the very possibility of the sign. There is no "before" or "outside" language.

The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, to whom I will pay major attention here, early recognised Saussure's distinction and he set about reformulating traditional Freudian

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London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976.-; Lacan, Jacques: Ecrits: a Selection.- Transl. by Alan Sheridan.- New York: Norton, 1977 [1966].-)

79 although Derrida himself is more often "designated" as a post-structuralist

80 It is, however, precisely due to the fact that structuralism and its aftermath does not constitute a unified theory, but a complex network of writings interacting in various ways, that it is extremely difficult to map and to interpret.

81 Saussure, Ferdinand de: Course in General Linguistics.- Transl. by Wade Baskin.- New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.- p. 120

theory using linguistic and semiological insight. In this recasting of Saussure and Freud, Lacan called for renewed attention to Freudian texts and the revision of psychoanalysis along structuralist lines. Freud already insisted that a future "college of psychoanalysis" should not only teach disciplines familiar within medical faculties but should "include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine and which the doctor does not come across in his practice: the history of civilisation, mythology, the psychology of religion and the science of literature. Unless he is well at home in these subjects, the analyst can make nothing of a large amount of his material"[82]. Lacan's addition to this list would include linguistics. Meticulously working out the implications made by Saussure and Freud, Lacan fathered a contemporary psychoanalysis which became of major importance within and outwith of psychiatry. One of the main reasons for this is that his writing proposes itself consciously as a critique of all discourses and ideologies.

The rupture between the old and the new psychoanalysis is initiated through several significant extensions of Saussure's sign theory. Lacan claims, for instance, that the primordial position of the signifier and the signified is that of "distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification"[83]. This strategic fracture of a simple harmony between signifier and signified, between spoken word and its intended concept, allows Lacan to hold to one side of the dividing edge and dwell on the signifier.

Ultimately, Lacan will warn us not to "cling to the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever"[84]. In this crucial moment, Lacan sets the signifier free of the signified. Henceforth we encounter a "sliding signified" and "floating signifier". Celebrating this primordial difference as impassable, the more intensely does his signifier not represent the signified, it need not signify at all. That this insight has far-reaching consequences with regard to psychological perspectives will become evident when placed in the following context.

Lacan points out that human subjects, as they acquire speech, are inserting themselves into a pre-existing symbolic order and thereby submitting themselves to the systemic pressures of that order. In adopting language, they enter into a network of pre-existent signifiers and therefore allow their free instinctual energies to be operated upon and organised. It is thus the peculiar privilege of man, the language-user, to remain

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82 Freud, Sigmund: The Question of Lay Analysis.- In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. XX / ed. by James Strachey.- London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74.- p. 246

83 Lacan, Jacques: Écrits: a Selection.- Transl. by Alan Sheridan.- New York: Norton, 1977 [1966].- p. 149

84 Ibid., p. 150

oblivious, while making things with words, of the extent to which words have made, and continue to make, him. The signifier, however, does not only constitute and govern the subject - Lacan speaks of the "supremacy of the signifier in the subject" and of the "preeminence of the signifier over the subject"[85] - but positively requires the subject as its mediating term. The subject therefore has a relationship of interdependence with the signifier.

What is important though is the fact that between our immediate experience and use of signifiers there lies an obvious gap. When we explain and envision ourselves and our world to ourselves in discourse, we undermine any possibility of immediate relation between self and experience. We construct "self" in language - as we wish it to be, or want it to appear. Seeking to organise and mould experience, our reflection diverges from that experience: our signifiers deflect our reflection. Experiences of reality are mediated through signifiers, as is experience of self. Thus the barrier at the core of the sign, the fraction in sign, designates the wandering space of the signifier as it cuts away from and towards any signified. With this in mind Lacan, recurs to the discovery he places at the centre of Freud's achievement and uses as his own essential conceptual tool in this correcting of Freud from within: the unconscious - the unconscious which appears as an independent system. For Lacan Freud's essential insight was not that the unconscious exists, but that it has structure, that this structure affects in innumerable ways what we say and do, and that in thus betraying itself becomes accessible to analysis. The unconscious is presented as endlessly self-revealing: in our dreams, forgettings, misrememberings, slips of the tongue, jokes, symptoms, verbal and physical mannerisms, it insists on being heard. The physical energy by which repression takes place and is maintained is thus met and challenged by another energy which seeks to propel the repressed contents of the unconscious into the open.[86] Lacan himself defines the unconscious as "that part of the concrete discourse [...] that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his discourse"[87], and as "that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter". Even so, it can be rediscovered - in monuments, in archival documents such as childhood memories, in semantic evolution, in traditions, and in surviving, i.e. conscious, traces.[88]

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85 Ibid., pp. 150 ff.

86 The discovery of the unconscious is, however, itself subject to repression in so far as the unconscious which, according to the very definition on which psychoanalysis is founded, is the realm of free instinctual energy and knows no stability or containment or closure, is immobalised and domesticated by professional observers.

87 Lacan, Jacques: Écrits: a Selection.- Transl. by Alan Sheridan.- New York: Norton, 1977 [1966].- p. 49

88 Ibid., p. 50

Extending Freud's theories now by integrating his former mentioned insight on the signifier, Lacan suggests some rather provocative ratios in which "the unconscious is the whole structure of language"[89] and its "dream-work follows the laws of the signifier"[90]. So where Freud sees the general dynamic of psychic "distortion", Lacan sights the floating signifier. Examples for Freud of such distortions formed in the unconscious include dream substitutions, reversals, inversions, associations, and identifications.[91] According to Freud, these distortions ultimately disguise the signified beyond recognition. In other words, the formative processes of the dreamwork in the unconscious distort and thereby create floating signifiers. Just here Lacan revises Freud, observing that all signifiers float since they are always already productions of the human psyche. To the extent that signifiers have psychological values and associations, they have undergone some degree of distortion. All signifiers are distorted from the start. While Freud implies an originally undistorted signifier that unfortunately undergoes later distortion, Lacan posits distortion at the source, so that no uncontaminated signifier exists to start with.

One of Lacan's major aims in his analysis throughout has been to persuade us to abandon whatever belief we cling to in the autonomy of the ego, not as an agent in society, but as an agent controlling our own words and actions. Lacan, after Freud, dwells on the function of the Id, those disruptive impulses of the subconscious which refuse all authority and stability to the Ego. The Ego, in Lacan's scheme is a false construct which we are induced to make after our earliest experiences as an infant on seeing ourselves in the mirror and so assuming that we possess a permanent and unchanging identity. This fictional Ego soon engages the Other, society and language, whereupon the pure subject encounters the whole human world of knowledge and experience: the world of signifiers quickly comes into play. It is here that Lacan's favourite objections to psychoanalysis as traditionally practised is located, for even though this imaginary "I" created in infancy remains important life-long psychic material for psychoanalysis, it is still no more than an imaginary precipate and it thus seems rather absurd for proponents of "ego psychology" to appoint themselves to the task of stabilizing that ghostly entity.

It is largely due to Lacan's influence that the traditional sense of subject as an abbreviation of the conscious or thinking subject, meaning the self or ego, or individual cogito, has become a target of attack for the belief that the individual

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89 Ibid., p. 147

90 Ibid., p. 161

91 cf Freud, Sigmund: The Interpretations of Dreams.- In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. IV / ed. by James Strachey.- London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74.- Chapter 4 and 6

human beings are possessed of valid self-knowledge and are self-actuating or in charge or control of themselves. For (post-)structuralists the subject is not primary, unified, self-present, self-determining, autonomous and homogeneous, but rather, secondary, fleeting, self-divided and constructed - by language or ideology, for instance. Compare, for example, Jonathan Culler's suggestion that the self is broken down into component systems and is deprived of its status as source and master of meaning, it comes to be seen more and more like a construct: "a result of systems of convention", such that "even the idea of personal identity emerges through the discourse of a culture: The "I" is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed by and relates to others"[92].

However, what are the methods of interpretation in Lacan's psychoanalysis now? Passing through the "defiles of the signifier"[93], the psychoanalyst tries to track the flights and conventions of reality and fantasy in the subject so as to let him see "to what signifier - to what irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning - he is, as subject, subjected"[94]. Strictly speaking, the analyst does not search for meaning. For Lacan the psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious, a writing system constituted as the structure of language, requires rhetorical exegesis of the dreamworks, which follow the laws of the signifier. Working at the level of the signifier in the unconscious, the Lacanian analyst seeks the signification of irreducible, nonsensical signifying elements. The "effect of interpretation is to isolate in the subject a kernel, a *kern*, to use Freud's own term, of *non-sense* [which] does not mean that interpretation is in itself nonsense"[95]. The disabling nonmeaning in a primary signifier is approximated as signification by the analyst and revealed to the subject. In this procedure

> it is false to say, as has been said, that interpretation is open to all meaning under the pretext that it is a question only of the connection of a signifier to a signifier, and consequently of an uncontrollable connection. Interpretation is not open to any meaning.[96]

The kernel of non-sense, the primary signifier lodged in the unconscious, destroys meaning for the subject, which interpretation reveals to him. This is to say that before him there are empty signs waiting to be read. The sign takes on meaning or signification in an act of interpretation and the emptiness is filled. Interpreting the

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92 Culler, Jonathan: The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction.- London: Routledge & Paul, 1981.- p. 33

93 Lacan, Jacques: Écrits: a Selection.- Transl. by Alan Sheridan.- New York: Norton, 1977 [1966].- p. 255

94 Ibid., p. 251

95 Lacan, Jacques: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis.- Transl. by Alan Sheridan.- New York: Norton, 1978.- p. 250

96 Ibid., p. 252

modes of psychic errancy in the floating signifier, Lacan thus bears witness to the values of nonsense and cracked style.

That interpretation is not open to any meaning could just as well be applied to the exegesis of Lacan's works as most of his main ideas and cherished controversial positions are presented to the reader in a consciously ragged and inconsequential form. If one looks at the insistent play of ambiguity which permeates his writing, it becomes plain that even the basic psychoanalytic paradigms, and the habit of psychoanalytic explanation itself, may be called into question from within. Lacan's theory seems to necessitate a certain kind of literary performance. His prose is an elaborate mechanism for multiplying and highlighting the connections between signifiers. Word-play abounds. Wherever words collide and fuse an atmosphere of play prevails. If the signifier plays and the signified slips beneath, then the unconscious is speaking in its native tongue. Characteristic features of Lacan's style would include: ambiguity, disturbances of conventional word order, literal and metaphorical senses interwoven, ellipsis, leading notions alluded to rather than declared, abstractions personified, persons becoming abstractions, widely different words becoming synonyms, synonyms being given widely different meanings. All this keeps the signified as a feeble and drifting presence behind the raging signifier.

It is plain that a writer who uses these devices so frequently and in such close conjunction is not merely running the risk of writing nonsense, but is envisaging nonsense as a positive literary goal. For Lacan irony and contradiction are inherent in language and psychology, in so far as it studies discourse, is "the realm of the senseless"[97]. Lacan was decisively influenced by Surrealism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and to everyone familiar with Surrealist writing, it is easier to understand how it is that nonsense may be thought of as a plenitude rather than as an absence of sense and given a special role in exploring and proclaiming the truths of the unconscious. Nonsense in the Lacan text appears as much as a heady atmosphere of meaning, promised but not given, as an offensive intruder into the world of rational argument. However, in both cases nonsense is an agent of intellectual provocation. In Lacan's view every person who speaks and is satisfied with what he/she says is not simply misguided but wrong. Every statement that does not provoke change and strangeness within itself is wrong and truth which seeks to remove itself from the contradictory process of language becomes falsehood.

Lacan offers us a new conception both of science and of truth and asks us to abandon many of the procedures for verification or falsification on which the credibility of

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97 Ibid., pp. 249 f.

scientific enquiry traditionally rests. Truth-to-the-unconscious is the only truth worth the name. The desiring unconscious and language which is its structure is plural, layered, uncodifiable and unstoppable. The speaking unconscious is a model for the intellectual life.

Lacan's attention to facts of language as they appear in Freud's thinking and to the ways in which structural linguistics may be used to reorganise the psychoanalytical account of the unconscious, have had numerous practical and theoretical consequences. Lacan's assertion that the Unconscious is structured like a language involves an extension of the linguistic paradigm into the realm of psychoanalysis and has been seen to have important implications for our understanding of the concept of the subject and of language itself. Psychoanalysis itself has been recalled to an awareness of its intellectual responsibilities.

> Psychoanalysis will provide a scientific basis for its theory or for its technique only by formalizing in an adequate fashion the essential dimensions of its experience which, together with the historical theory of the symbol, are: intersubjective logic and temporality of the subject.[98]

An ambition of this kind sets Lacan apart from such well-known psychiatric radicals as R. D. Laing, David Cooper, and Thomas Szasz. For these writers ideas have a limited warrant: they are of use mainly as a means of exposing the faulty premises on which repressive notions of sanity and madness are based, but contribute weakly if at all to descriptive and analytic accounts of psychical process. For Lacan, on the other hand, the exposure of faulty premises is merely part of a continuous process of physical model-building in which ideas, gathered from a variety of sources, play a vital role.

Lacan's main target is the international psychoanalytical movement itself. According to him most later psychoanalysts not only misunderstood Freud, they also lost the innovative power of Freud's ideas as they were first formulated by him. In Lacan's writings psychoanalysis is repeatedly made to turn back upon itself and to re-examine its concepts, rituals and institutions from the vantage-point offered by its own discoveries in their original unsystematised state. Rather than create a monument and leave time, history, or opinion to bring it down, Lacan writes works which displace and deconstruct themselves as they are produced. The thinking he shows us is one which proclaims itself as process and finds its truth in its incompleteness.

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98 Lacan, Jacques: Écrits: a Selection.- Transl. by Alan Sheridan.- New York: Norton, 1977 [1966].- p. 76

Derrida makes a similar point on a more general level when he extends this criticism to other disciplines. His critique of his contemporaries bears on their failure to scrutinise with sufficient rigour the status of their own discourse, as Derrida himself is continually doing. They are engaged in a critique of knowledge, truth, objectivity and at the same time are producing impressive analyses of cultural products and human activities. Their awareness of the problem of their own discourse, which claims knowledge yet at the same time calls knowledge into question, is in a sense beside the point. This awareness, Derrida suggests, should issue a rigorous questioning of their own categories which will serve to displace those categories.

This sort of attack could, for instance, be launched at Foucault - as much as his insight can be admired. Since Foucault, everyone who speaks about insanity these days cannot avoid historically and systematically pondering over his or her own relationship to logical reason. However, reflection on his position of reason is necessary too. For him all rational knowledge about insanity appears as the rule of power of a misinterpreted rationalism disjoined from the true nature of the "whole human being", first of all observation, experience and empirically gathered facts are rejected as possible correctives for thought and, secondly, every kind of criticism based on these correctives is suppressed from the outset. Foucault imposes absolutism on his own thoughts in that he himself projects a structure into the affair and then discovers the projected as its secret truth legitimated this way as objective. This has the inevitable consequence that all external criticism appears as an expression of just this secret truth and can therewith be devaluated. Foucault does not reflect his own approach as conditioned by the present and does not analyze the problems of the present. Instead he declares them to be something which has come of secret and malicious powers: progress, technology, science, state, society, politics - in principle the entire occidental history as the story of rationalism and progressive cognition have made human beings lose touch with their original unity with themselves, which lies in the unity and not the antinomy of reason and madness.

Michel Foucault, the primary voice of the critique of speaking for others, can only speak for himself and his own enterprise therefore can only be another attempt by reason to define madness and not a project of a different order. Despite his ambition to let madness speak for itself, he cannot avoid speaking for madness in the language of reason, which excludes madness in the first place. That any translation of madness is already a form of its repression, a form of violence against it and that the praise of folly can only be made in the language of reason, is one of the fundamental points of criticism in Derrida's analysis of Foucault.[99] Madness, suggests Derrida in his response

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[99] Derrida, Jacques: Writing and Difference.- Transl. by Alan Bass.- Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978.- pp. 31-6

to Foucault, is contained or limited by language, but that containment does not constitute a separation between madness and reason. Derrida writes,

> It can be proposed that the classical crisis [the apparent division of madness and reason] developed from and within the elementary tradition of a logos that has no opposite but carries within itself and *says* all contradictions.[100]

The "logos" that has no opposite would exceed even the totality of language, making speech, and therefore reason, possible without positioning the "excess", madness, as "other". "Logos", if thought of a an open set, is somehow containing without borders, "carrying within itself", the two smaller sets: madness and reason. "Logos", as Derrida suggests, would be an opening of language that makes possible both meaning and non-meaning.[101] The logic of a "borderless container" may not appeal to the reasonably-minded, but the significant point of Derrida's discussion is that the language of reason is not free from, nor can it protect itself against, madness. Derrida reads beyond the "popular and equivocal notion of madness" in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*,[102] seeing madness as present in Foucault's passion, his literariness. Derrida says, "the silence of madness is not said in the logos of this [Foucault's] book, but is indirectly, metaphorically, made present by its pathos - taking this word in its best sense".[103] Excess or madness must be contained or "not said" for "reasonable" speech to be possible, but madness takes refuge in writing. Metaphors particularly that seek contradictions or multiple meanings, acknowledge the presence of madness. As he points out:

> [A]ny philosopher or any speaking subject [...] who is trying to evoke madness inside of thought [...] can only do so in the dimension of possibility and in the language of fiction or in the fiction of language.[104]

It should have become apparent by now that the conception of madness is of a rather relative nature and depends to a large degree on cultural, philosophical and political tendencies. Changing attitudes towards the subject inevitably affect both the writer and the critic, i.e. depending on the current trend the picture of madness as it is presented in the imaginary literature of the respective period varies accordingly, be it in Canada or elsewhere. Darwin, Freud, Laing, Lacan and others before them not only dominated their generation's thinking, but their lives and ideas also established the psychiatric

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100 Ibid., p. 42
101 Ibid., p. 61
102 Ibid., p. 41
103 Ibid., p. 37
104 Ibid., p. 84

context for the discussion of insanity in each period and for the ways it was experienced, diagnosed, treated and represented over two centuries. As psychiatry itself has formed part of a common consciousness in much of 20th century imaginative literature in particular, overt psychological and psychoanalytic allusions are thus commonplace and the various psychiatric theories actually become part of the symbolic structure of novels.

Particular developments imaginative literature and literary criticism, for instance, can be traced to the influence of Freud and his various interpreters, where many western writers assimilated the conceptual framework and the symbolic language Freud used to describe the psychic struggle for the integration of unconscious and conscious processes. At a later point Laing exemplified in his attitudes and in his career the psychiatric ideologies of his generation and in this respect became a crucial figure of orientation for many writers at the given time. If Laing helped as it were to legalise the personal and the subjective, the theories of Lacan and others have placed pressure on the writer to deconstruct the subject, to take it not as a starting-point and reliable measure, but as a lumber-room of mainly and wholly false ideas stacked there by a range of external forces.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the literary criticism influenced by or based upon psychoanalytic theories of the pre-Second World War period, and that based upon psychoanalytic theories of the past few decades, is that the latter is unlikely to be built purely upon such psychoanalytic theories. Freudian literary criticism of the 1920s and 1930s, for example, generally presented a rather exclusive appearance: distinguishing itself from other literary criticism and relying very little upon theorists other than Freud and his followers. In contrast, the modern literary critic or theorist relies heavily upon the writings of Lacan and, for instance, is also likely to exhibit a more general interest in deconstructionist and (post-)structuralist theory. As it enters into literary theory and criticism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, which has in this area been most influential in recent years, opens new territory and affirms the structuralism already at work. Exposing the mimetic fallacy from a new angle, Lacan assists in subverting any naive belief in the referential function of language and, in doing so, he further insures the growing prominence of linguistic determinism.

What this shows is that while literary madness is to some extent modelled on actual madness, "a mad literary character must [still] be approached on his own terms, through the verbal, dramatic, and narrative symbols that convey the unconscious processes he portrays and reveals" and through "the mythical or literary tradition" in

which he is rooted.[105] Even when a writer draws on his own experiences of insanity as the subject or emotional source of his work, what is of most interest in this study is his adaptation of delusion, dissociation or other aberrations to the creation of a unique view of his society, his art, and his own mind.[106]

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105 Feder, Lilian: Madness in Literature.- Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.- p. 9

106 As interesting, stimulating and fertile as the interelationship between psychological theory, madness and literature may be, in terms of literary analysis it is bound to give rise to a certain problem which I will briefly hint at. It is the question of who is influenced by whom or put differently: Are fiction writers influenced by the prevailing cultural climate and respective psychological thinkers or is it the other way round? The answer is obviously not an easy one and certainly depends on the respective circumstances. It is, however, necessary, in each case, to take a clear stance in order to avoid circularity. The problem can best be demonstrated by taking a closer look at Hädecke's line of argumentation in his article "Das Thema Wahnsinn in der neusten Literatur" where he intoduces, among others, the novels and reports of Kipphardt, Augustin, Barnes, Green and Erlenberger, justifying their interpretation of madness by stating: "[S]olche Darstellungen gesellschaftlich verursachter Verrücktheit sind von bestimmten unorthodoxen wissenschaftlichen Theorie und Therapien beeinflußt, zum Beispiel der Anti-psychiatrie [...]."When the contents of literature are being discussed, literature is assumed to be influenced by antipsychiatry or by Foucault, but when the possibility of these contents is involved, literature is supposed to be autonomous, because the novelist or poet, like the mentally disturbed person, is considered to be closer to the truth than "die blockierte Phantasie des 'normalen' Bürgers". That this literature, like the interpreter himself, has long since been surpassed through the popularisation of antipsychiatry against the background of the psycho-boom, is not taken into consideration. Instead, Hädecke deduces its social function from the seismographic character of literature: "Die Literatur durchschaut, daß die Abtrennung des Irren aus Furcht vor dem Skandal erfolgt; [...] sie weiß, daß der Skandal die Wahrheit enthalten kann, und da auch die Literatur Skandal sein kann, enthüllt sie im Wahnsinn den Skandal der Wahrheit, die wir ungern hören." This kind of argumentation mystifies madness as well as literature.
(cf. Hädecke, Wolfgang: Der taube Lärm unterhalb der Geschichte: Das Thema Wahnsinn in der neusten Literatur.- In: Neue Rundschau 89 (1978), p. 130)

3. Colonial Madness

3.1 The Chroniclers of Colonial Madness: Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill

The first writings in the new territory, which in 1867 was to become the nation of Canada, were the reports by various travellers. Diary writers foremost, the purpose of their works - if they intended their words for publication at all - lay in conveying the flavour of their personal experience to armchair travellers at home. These reports later gave way to the journals and narratives of explorers among which T.D. MacLulich delineates three categories: quest, odyssey, ordeal - each of which transforms the central explorer-character into a narrative hero of a different kind: tragic, romantic, picaresque, realistic.[1] The basic function of these exploration journals, however, was to chart coastlines accurately, claim territory for the empire, and also collect, describe and classify the flora and fauna they found. They are full of details about the crops and daily routines, and sometimes transparent in their exhaustion and frustration with the work of missions, the political tension of colonial life and the struggle to survive.[2]

Those who came to live in Canada in those days were confronted with great hardship. Exposure to the elements, disease, exhaustion, and the corrosive pressures of humiliation and discouragement quite frequently led to mental instabilities and premature deaths. Regarded as inevitable casualties colony deaths or instances of madness were often recorded with the same dispassion as the grinding of grain.

In order to keep themselves sane and in some way mentally deal with the harsh realities of mud and months of endurance a lot of pioneers, especially the women who were often trapped at home, wrote diaries which in later years have assumed great documentary interest. Probably the most famous chronicler of the early Canadian pioneer experience was Susanna Moodie. Her *Roughing It in the Bush*, based on her experiences of the 1830s, when she accompanied her husband to settle on uncleared ground, is in fact "a conceded classic"[3] and Moodie herself has become such a vivid

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1 MacLulich, T.D.: Canadian Exploration as Literature.- In: Canadian Literature 81 (1979), pp. 72-85.-

2 For more detailed information see: MacLulich, T.D.: Canadian Exploration as Literature.- In: Canadian Literature 81 (1979), pp. 72-85.-; New, W. H.: A History of Canadian Literature.- London: MacMillan, 1989.-

3 Stouck, David: Stouck, David: Secrets of the Prison-House: Mrs. Moodie and the Canadian Imagination.- In: The Dalhousie Review 54 (1974), p. 643

historical-cultural figure that she has been made a character or voice in a number of contemporary works. A mixed assemblage of anecdotes, pious reflections, conventional descriptions and exemplary scenes, the intention behind *Roughing it in the Bush* was not, as Moodie wrote,

> to give a regular history of our residence in the bush but merely to present to my readers such events as may serve to illustrate a life in the woods.[4]

As such it does, however, provide various responses to the new environment and the social conditions of the time which proved immensely valuable to anyone interested in Canadian history, politics and formative culture. Mrs. Moodie's vivid account of her struggles in Ontario's frontier region shows the shock that her upper-class breeding, manners and sense of social differences suffered from pioneer crudities. Like many other pioneers she was faced with two main obstacles: the new land and the old culture. The new land was thus not only a physical challenge for the immigrants but a psychological one as well. Not only did they have to fight with an often hostile environment they were, at the same time, full of dreams and fears, torn between yesterday and tomorrow. For these people the need to understand what they have left behind and what was being experienced here was crucial to survival. Uprooted from an indigenous culture and transplanted in another, their lives will occur amidst many shifting images of the self, between a yesterday always alive within, but situated now in a different country and culture. Bailey has pointed out that the phenomenon of immigration so profoundly affects these individuals that they spend the rest of their lives adjusting to their uprooting.[5] Their search for meaning within the country named Canada is also the search for Canada as a domain of experience. As Atwood points out, the difficulty was that there was no new Canadian identity ready for the immigrant to step into. "[H]e is confronted only by a nebulosity, a blank; no ready-made ideology is provided for him".[6]

Apart from that there was also the factor of isolation. Scheflen notes the negative influence of social isolation which may occur among immigrants or otherwise poorly integrated families. It is known that immigrants face an increased risk of schizophrenia during the first few months in new surroundings, especially if ties to their own ethnic group have been broken.[7]

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4 Moodie, Susanna: Roughing It in the Bush.- Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962 [1852].- p. 18

5 Bailey, Leuba: The Immigrant Experience / ed. by Leuba Bailey.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1975.- p. 2

6 Atwood, Margaret: Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature.- Toronto: Anansi, 1972.- p. 150

7 Scheflen, Albert: Levels of Schizophrenia.- New York: Brunner und Mazel, 1981.- p. 18

Both Moodie and her sister Catherine Parr Traill[8] abundantly warned that the new settlers from Britain were likely to be middle class and ill adapted to life in the Ontario bush of the early 1900s:

> To the poor, industrious working man it presents many advantages; to the poor gentleman, none! The former works hard, puts up with coarse, scanty fare, and submits, with a good grace , to hardships that would kill a domesticated animal at home. Thus he becomes independent, inasmuch as the land that he has cleared finds him in the common necessaries of life [...] The gentleman can neither work so hard, live so coarsely, nor endure so many privations as his poorer but more fortunate neighbour. Unaccustomed to manual labour, his services in the field are not of a nature to secure for him a profitable return. The task is new to him, he knows not how to perform it well; and, conscious of his deficiency, he extends his little means in hiring labour, which his bush-farm can never repay. Difficulties increase, debts grow upon him, he struggles in vain to extricate himself, and finally sees his family sink into hopeless ruin.[9]

Traill advised men to consult with their wives before deciding upon emigration, and Moodie alluded to the "Canada mania" that sent many unprepared people into an unfamiliar and formidable environment.[10] Current estimates of the two writers emphasise Traill's practicality, open-mindedness and the ability to deal with the trials of bush life. Qualities which distinguish her from Moodie, who is often described as stuffy, incompetent, resistant to change. Critics have contradictorily portrayed Mrs. Moodie as a "one-woman garrison"[11] a Methodist bluestocking, a heroic pioneer, a Crusoe ill-equipped for anything but middle-class society, and a schizophrenic torn between her life and her mind.[12]

On the whole she was the typical representative of the reluctant pioneer - in love with the idea of nature but always suspicious of the actual wilderness - which became in Ontario a kind of prototype for cultural memory. Edward Dahl's study of Susanna Moodie and her contemporaries nicely outlines their simultaneous aversion and attraction to the wilderness.[13] In brief, the wilderness is loathed for concrete reasons, for its danger, hardship, and solitude. It is seen as useless in its raw state and

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8 Traill, Catherine Parr: The Canadian Settler's Guide.- Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969 [1855].- p. 1

9 Moodie, Susanna: Roughing It in the Bush.- Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962 [1852].- pp. 236 f.

10 Ibid., p. 17

11 Frye, Northrop: Conclusion.- In: Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English / ed. by Carl F. Klinck et. al..- U.S.A: University of Toronto Press, 1967.- p. 839

12 For a critical overview on the literature published on Moodie see: Peterman, Michael A.: Susanna Moodie.- In: Canadian Writers and Their Works: Fiction Series: Vol. 1/ ed. by Robert Lecker, Jack David and Ellen Quigley.- Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press, 1983.- pp. 63-104.-

13 Dahl, Edward H.: 'Mid Forest Wild': A Study of the Concept of Wilderness in the Writings of Susanna Moodie, J. W. D. Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill and Samuel Strickland, c. 1830-1835.- Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1973.-

aesthetically displeasing and conceived of as inherently anti-literary. At the same time, however, the wilderness is regarded as beautiful and inspirational in that beauty. It offers possibilities for independence and may be cultivated, civilised, and rendered valuable, just as it is the eventual location of right living and worship. The same ambiguity is noted by Atwood:

> Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she preaches progress and the march of civilisation while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness [...]. She claims to be an ardent Canadian patriot while all the time she is standing back from the country and criticising it as though she were a detached observer, a stranger. [14]

Taking all this into consideration it thus comes as no surprise that in the early literature madness was basically presented in two ways. It was either the madness that emerged out of the confrontation of the Age of Reason and the New World which was thematised or the hostile wilderness itself and everything that was concerned with it which was conceived as the embodiment of the other, the strange, the unknown, the dangerous and mad. That life in the Canadian bush was not just hard, or even dangerous, but devastating to mental stability is demonstrated in the most compelling chapter of *Roughing It in the Bush* called "Brian, the Still-Hunter". Brian, a friend of the Moodies who "fell into a moping melancholy, which ended in self-destruction"[15], embodies the feeling that, in the forest, the human moves as an alien and invader. Until it is civilised, the wilderness is primarily perceived as an enemy since the virgin wilderness seems to negate man's perception of his own value. All his cultural and metaphysical assumptions about the value of the human are undermined. The wilderness invades the mind and can reduce it to madness. As Frye says,

> It is not terror of the dangers or discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something these things manifest. The human mind feels it has nothing than human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values.[16]

This is an aspect which came up time and again as a consciously national literature began to establish itself in the mid 19th century when the first full-length novels began to appear. Though formally far from original these early historical romances became

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14 Atwood, Margaret: The Journals of Susanna Moodie.- Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970.- p. 62. Atwood further identifies this ambiguity as a central feature of the Canadian character in that she continues: "Perhaps that is the way we still live. We are all immigrants to this place even if we are born here: the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely, and in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders."

15 Moodie, Susanna: Roughing It in the Bush.- Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962 [1852].- p. 135

16 Frye, Northrop: The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination.- Toronto: Anansi, 1971.- p. 127

an important vehicle for the formulation and interpretation of a shared history which, at that point, formed a sort of national consciousness. Canadian novelists were beginning to look for ways to express the distinctiveness of the new Canada, identifying it somehow with the wilderness. Common to most of the early works is the thematic emphasis on the preoccupation with nature and the confrontation with the native population.

3.2 Madness and Terror in the Garrison: The Colonial Conflict and John Richardson's *Wacousta*

One of the major representatives of early colonial literature, who saw as his task the recording of the English-Canadian past, was John Richardson, author of the historical novel *Wacousta* (1832). Although once marginalised, ignored, and even censured in his own country Richardson is nowadays often regarded as "The Father of Canadian Literature"[17], just as *Wacousta* itself by dramatising the unresolved tensions of colonial conflict, and indeed problematising the whole notion of a stable, coherent national or personal identity, has often been regarded by Canadian critics as their first national prose epic.[18]

As a late contemporary of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper Richardson combined elements from the historical romance with those of the gothic novel, a combination which is as common in nineteenth-century Canadian fiction, as it is elsewhere. Yet, as many of the Canadian writers at that time, he imitates the styles rather than the motives of the great Romantics. The unmistakably romantic and gothic dimensions of *Wacousta* are evident in the depiction of the central character as well as action and in its "narrative pattern of opening mystification followed by gradual clarification of events and motifs"[19]. The whole book reeks of terror, evil, chance circumstance, violent encounters, sudden deaths and theatrical feeling. It provides us with fast-paced plots of shattered hopes and renewed catastrophes and melodramatic characters who were larger than life in their villainy or virtue. While it is at times stylistically contrived and not significantly original it is still worth paying attention to since it reveals a variety of currents in the literary imagination of early Canadians and illuminates the characteristic hesitation between tradition and naturalization in colonial literature. Above all, however, the implications of terror and madness in this book not only reflect the Canadian experience of the man referred

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17 Reany, James: Letter: Globe and Mail, 4 November 1977.-

18 cf for example Hurley, Michael: The Borders of Nightmare: The Fiction of John Richardson.- Toronto; Buffalo; London: Toronto University Press, 1992.-

19 MacLulich, T.D.: The Colonial Major: Richardson and Wacousta.- In: Essays on Canadian Writing 29 (1984).- p. 73

to by Duffy as "our certified madman"[20], but the experience of a whole generation of Canadians.

Set in 1763 it purports to describe the last of the Indian uprisings led by the famous chief Pontiac against the British forts of Detroit and Michilimackinac. The two forts Richardson describes are outposts of civilisation lost in a terrifying and alien wilderness, desperately defending the rituals of British culture. The only project seems to be to hold the fort, the symbol of British imperial conquest in the New World. Nature is in total opposition to culture and holds no possibility except nightmare. Civilisation itself, embodied in England and preserved nostalgically within the safe walls of the fort, is surrounded by a huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable wilderness, haunted by the Indians, the irrational children of nature. The forest formed, as it were, the gloomy and impenetrable walls of the prison house. It has no identity in its own right, it is pure projection - a psychological space that reflects the dark fears of the human mind. However, Wacousta's terror is not solely associated with nature, it is rather a feeling of menace from within civilised society as well as from without.

The novel's main action grows out of Reginald Morton having, in Scotland some twenty-four years earlier, fallen in love with Clara Beverley. There he persuaded the maiden, whose misanthropic father raised her in a hidden oasis in the Highlands, to run away from the secluded eyrie, only to lose her to the envious rivalry of his deceitful friend and fellow soldier, De Haldimar, to whom she is eventually married. An idyllic order of sorts is thus shattered by treachery which leads to anguish and carnage on a grand scale in Canada where Morton and De Haldimar meet again. De Haldimar, widowed with three children, has meanwhile risen to become commanding officer of Fort Detroit. Morton on the other hand, having transported his enmity, originating in Europe, undiminished across the Atlantic, in his maniacal hatred of the husband and the family of the woman he loved, rejects the world of civilisation and sinks deeper and deeper into dementia until he not only becomes "a savage both in garb and character"[21], but metamorphoses into the raging Ottawa chief, Wacousta. The course of his exile has thus led him to the frontier not only of civilisation, but also of morality and sanity, for not only does he adopt a new 'Native' self, his shifting of identities is also accompanied by a transformation from sanity to madness.[22]

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20 Duffy, Dennis: Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada / Ontario.- Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982.- p. 45

21 Richardson, John: Wacousta; or, the Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1832].- p. 268

22 Klooß, Wolfgang: From Colonial Madness to Postcolonial Ex-centricity: A Story about Stories of Identity in Canadian Historio-graphic (Meta-)Fiction.- In: Engler, Berd; Müller, Kurt (eds.): Historiographic Metafiction in Modern

In all-consuming desire to be revenged for an ancient personal wrong done to him by De Haldimar, Wacousta's motive for siding with the Indian interests and with Pontiac, the great chief, and leading the Indians against the whites is above all personal vengeance. He is manipulating and using the Indians to serve his personal purpose.

> In Wacousta's mind, this past wrong justifies him in turning against the society in which he was nurtured. The besieged fortress, commanded by the uneasy De Haldimar, therefore becomes the emblem of a civilisation troubled by a guilty conscience over its mistreatment of a noble and proud individual such as the former Sir Reginald Morton.[23]

And although Richardson creates sympathy for his gigantic outlaw, who is often depicted as a magnificent figure, a noble looking warrior and a fine fellow, he does not make him a wholly blameless figure. In his satanic defiance and rage he is still a villain, a "terrible warrior"[24] with eyes that sparkle with "deep and ferocious"[25] pleasure, whose presence commands increasing terror. The point is that in his metamorphosis he has gone too far. In his enormous hatred and obsession he has been driven to the outer bounds of rational experience. His lot shows us what happens when a child of nature, a free-spirited man, who exhibits an extraordinary capacity for strong feelings, transgresses the borders, when genteel surfaces are blotted out by dark and mad shadows: "[L]ove for the one and hatred for the other has rendered the savage you now behold."[26]

His incurable psychic wound has reduced him to the level of a creature possessed, a beast driven by a lust for evil and vengeance. He has become the embodiment of natural chaos. "Interestingly enough," as Klooß points out, "this transformation achieves a full effect only in a border situation, where civilisation, represented by the English garrison, and nature, which also comprises Pontiac's native tribes, have a disastrous encounter."[27] Or as Wacousta himself states

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American and Canadian Literature.- Paderborn; München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1994.- p. 63

23 MacLulich, T.D.: The Colonial Major: Richardson and Wacousta.- In: Essays on Canadian Writing 29 (1984).- p. 72

24 Richardson, John: Wacousta; or, the Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1832].- p. 181

25 Richardson, John: Wacousta; or, the Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1832].- p. 246

26 Ibid., p. 428

27 Klooß, Wolfgang: From Colonial Madness to Postcolonial Ex-centricity: A Story about Stories of Identity in Canadian Historio-graphic (Meta-)Fiction.- In: Engler, Berd; Müller, Kurt (eds.): Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature.- Paderborn; München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1994.- In: p. 63

> "the hour of retribution is at hand, and revenge, the exclusive passion of the gods, shall at length be mine. In no other country in the world - under no other circumstances than the present - could I have so secured it." [28]

However, if Richardson's portrait of Wacousta is ambivalent, so is the portrayal of his opponent, Colonel de Haldimar. A "rigid disciplinarian [...] proud and inflexible, and bigoted to first impressions"[29] with "much of [his] despotic military character [...] communicated to his private life"[30], one finds him even more loathsome and despicable in his inability to admit any weakness to himself or to his family, his rage for order, haughty coolness and strict rationalistic observance of rules, his snobbish, complacent assumptions of class privilege and hierarchy, his tight-lipped propriety masking hypocrisy and his ruthless ambition disguised as law and order.

That obedience or destruction seem to be the only choices society presents is exemplified in an incident where Frederick de Haldimar, the colonel's older son, beseeches a young soldier, Frank Halloway, to help him leave Fort Detroit in order to secure mysterious and important information. When asked to open the gate of the fort against the orders of Colonel De Haldimar, who acts viciously as a result of seeing Wacousta again, Frank is faced with a conflict between obedience to the code of personal honour and obedience to the arbitrary order issued by a superior officer. The young man gives his aid and thereby chooses the code of honour. At his trial he proclaims, "if I failed in my duty as a soldier, I have, at least, fulfilled that of a man"[31] by which he means "gentleman". And although Halloway, at a different point, had barely saved the life of the younger De Haldimar, Colonel de Haldimar, in his rigorous reading of military rules still has him shot - as a result of which the young soldier's wife, Ellen Halloway, goes insane.

> She flew to the fatal bridge, threw herself on the body of her bleeding husband, and imprinting her warm kisses on his bloody lips, for a moment or two presented the image of one whose reason has fled forever.[32]

The description of Ellen passionately throwing herself upon Wacousta soon after heightens the horror of her derangement. At De Haldimar she shouts:

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28 Richardson, John: Wacousta; or, the Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1832].- p. 482
29 Ibid., p. 413
30 Ibid., p. 414
31 Ibid., p. 54
32 Ibid., p. 156

"you witness the destruction of your accursed race. Here - here - here [...] shall their blood flow till every vestige of his own is washed away." [33]

The fact that Halloway is really, as it turns out after his death, the nephew of Wacousta, also called by the name of Reginald Morton, increases his bitter feelings of revenge and mental derangement as well. He exclaims: "when next you see us here [..] tremble for your race."[34] Ellen is then carried off by the triumphant Wacousta to become, demented, his wife. In a way they form the ideal couple in that they both represent the world of feeling, instinct and natural passion and, just like him, she has been reduced to a state of animal dementia, their unbridled sexuality reinforcing the impression of savagery. The two of them symbolically indicate the ambivalence of Richardson's response to nature. In one way they suggest the destructiveness of natural life. The picture given of the 'natural life' in the forest is far from the romantic notion of the 'noble savage', and Richardson makes an apparent equation here of primitive nature, irrationality, and savagery. Just as their madness is a sign of ultimate estrangement from the world. However nature is not unequivocally evil. Ellen's unfortunate condition may be viewed as the disastrous result of the suppression of nature, or man's rationalistic attempt to master it. Wacousta and Ellen have been victimised by the intellectual wilfulness and unnatural heartlessness of Colonel de Haldimar. There is a suggestion that 'civilised' rationality is as much to be feared as primitive nature.

The open conflict in this novel is thus between the perverse expression of law and order and the perverse expression of romantic individualism. While Wacousta is the personification of the world of feelings gone berserk and is thus turned into a virtual beast, De Haldimar is the "moral monster"[35] for in him order and civilization are taken to extremes, which could also be said of his younger children. Only here it is a different aspect of a civilised society which is criticised. Through their gentle, sexless purity, feminine beauty, weakness and timidity Clara and Charles are the incarnation of the decadence of the old world. This, moreover, also holds true for Sir Everard Valletort who asserts that he would prefer the life of a barber's apprentice in London to his role as lieutenant in the midst of Canadian "savage scenes"[36]. For Valletort, the civilised world of Europe and its extensions in the forts of North America are always preferable to a surrounding wilderness. I agree with Moss when he claims that they are the portrayal of

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[33] Ibid., p. 156

[34] Ibid., p. 157

[35] Campbell, Joseph: The Hero with a Thousand Faces.- New York: Princeton / Bollingen, 1973 [1945].- p. 337

[36] Richardson, John: Wacousta; or, the Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1832].- p. 234

> the moral sterility of the civilised world that made them, which must necessarily fall victim to the forces of natural chaos. Theirs are the effete and gutless and artificial traits of the old world that cannot possibly survive the confrontation with the frontier conditions of the new.[37]

What we are confronted with are two mental forces pitted against each other in deadly combat: the authoritarian, repressive, militaristic ego committed to an ideal of order which willingly sacrifices personal feeling and the unconscious passionate mind rising in nightmare violence against all that constrains it. They are twin tyrants in that they are both destructive, exploiting land and people for self-regarding ends.

On the one hand the opposition between De Haldimar and Wacousta is a wonderful symbolic paradigm for two aspects of the human mind at war. However it is more than that. Besides constituting the twin poles of the human psyche the De Haldimar-Wacousta relationship also presents "the twin poles of the Canadian psyche" in that it reflects "the border dichotomy between civilisation and wilderness"[38], the tension between Englishman and colonial, between white man and Indian, between deference to Old World authority and enthusiasm for the New World's egalitarian spirit, between order and chaos. In this respect it is, as Northey rightly points out, symbolically and dramatically fitting that the bridge between the town and the forest is the scene of much of the important action starting with the execution of Frank Holloway and his wife's prophesying.

> [I]t is the meeting place of the conflict between the two ways of life. Significantly, it is by falling into the abyss below the bridge that Wacousta as well as Clara meet their death.[39]

Early Canadian fiction is, among much else, a record of man's naked confrontation with his environment, a conflict which remains central to Canadian experience and to Canadian fiction, or any colonial experience and fiction for that matter, especially with regard to immigrant literature where it most often manifests itself in the form of the portrayal of one or more fragmented personalities in search for wholeness. Confrontation with the new environment challenges the individual's established identity since part of the very establishment of identity is the achievement of a balance between inner and outer reality. When outer reality changes drastically, a new accommodation within is necessary. One way of meeting this challenge is to react defensively. The result will be the establishment of a psychic fortress which holds the

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37 Moss, John: Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: The Ancestral Present.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977.- p. 89

38 Hurley, Michael: The Borders of Nightmare: The Fiction of John Richardson.- Toronto; Buffalo; London: Toronto University Press, 1992.- p. 12

39 Northey, Margot: The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction.- Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976.- p. 25

dangers of the environment at bay. Because of the utterly foreign nature of the Canadian environment, this was the way in which most of the earlier settlers, including De Haldimar and the ones associated with him, reacted, a mentality which Northrop Frye in his conclusion to Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* referred to as the "garrison mentality"[40]. Wacousta's reaction to the New World represents the second alternative: total atavistic accommodation of inner reality to outer reality. Together, De Haldimar and Wacousta represent the 'schizophrenic' attitude to the Canadian environment. It is both liberation and threat. Certainly, Reginald Morton is liberated from the constraints of civilised behaviour in embracing the wilderness, much like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, while De Haldimar retreats, like the typical colonial, even further into them. De Haldimar is repressive civilisation personified, while Wacousta is the very opposite. Together, as doubles, they represent the fragmentation of identity upon being confronted with utterly new conditions.

Any form of productive growth and survival, however, can only be established if these extreme and destructive qualities are brought into harmonious reconciliation. This is why, at the end of the novel, both of the domineering forces are rejected. Neither wins. Both Wacousta and De Haldimar - as well as those associated with them - are destroyed by the close of the novel. There is, however, a third group of people who evidently share the author's favour for they are most sympathetically treated in the book. It is this group of representatives consisting of Oucanasta and her warrior-chief brother, together with Frederick and his cousin Madeleine, to whom he is betrothed, who are allowed to survive in the end. Meeting in harmony, they exemplify the denial of the extremes represented in Colonel De Haldimar and Wacousta. Significantly, as soon as Wacousta is killed, Pontiac arranges for peace with the garrison. The malevolent savagery of Wacousta gives way to the benevolent savagery of the young Indian who slays him. The final prospect of peaceful friendship between the Indians and the children of Frederick and Madeleine suggests something like a reconciliation of barbaric energies with civilisation. Peace is eventually restored and the outcome of the conflict can be seen as an effort on the part of the author to imagine the re-establishment of a balanced identity by bringing realities within and without the garrison into harmonious correspondence. Madness and destruction can thus only be met by way of compromise, by gradually, maybe painfully readjusting oneself to one's new surroundings, a fact which in the end was also acknowledged by Susanna Moodie.

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40 Frye, Northrop: Conclusion.- In: Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English / ed. by Carl F. Klinck et. al..- U.S.A: University of Toronto Press, 1967.- p. 342

4. Pioneer and Plains Madness

4.1 Moving Westward: The Experience of the Plains

The second major period in Canadian history as well as literature was between 1885 and 1928 when Sir John's National Policy succeeded in moving a million people into the western hinterland. These people came from Eastern and Western Europe, the United States, and Eastern Canada in search of free land and new beginnings. In some respects the problems these people were confronted with hardly differed from the struggles of the pioneers presented by Susanna Moodie some fifty years earlier. As in the days of the early pioneers people were often moulded by cultural factors which determined their minds and the baggage of an outmoded or inappropriate culture quite frequently led to mental breakdown. Apart from that life on the plains was extremely rough. Men and women alike faced the limits of their capabilities. Many won out over the environment, forcing it to allow their habitation. Others succumbed to it, going home, going mad, dying. Those who stayed in place tried to ward off the dangers of mental instability in two ways.

One way was to re-establish, as closely as possible, an older culture. This was of particular importance to women, whose roles, especially if they were married and had children, were generally modelled after the cultures from which they came. Given the conditions of the plains, however, this mode of retaining sanity was a difficult one. Because not only did the re-enacting of the old way of life often magnified the contradictions between expectations and reality, but neither the kind of farming nor the mode of housekeeping was conducive to an easy application of old ways. Women were hard pressed to maintain the image of the frail Victorian while washing clothes on a scrubboard, chasing pigs, and killing bed bugs. In Nellie McClung's Gully *Farm*, Mary Hiemstra describes her mother as a woman who hung hand-made lace curtains over the unglazed windows of their log shack and swept the dirt floor every day.[1] Both of these actions represented "a type of human order this civilized woman depended on to protect her from the rude and chaotic world she had been confronted

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1 McClung, Nellie: Gully Farm.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1955.- p. 186

with"[2]. In their effort to retain the old way of life these pioneers furthermore isolated themselves from the surrounding in which they lived.

Given the nature of the difficulties, the only sane alternative was active engagement, accompanied by a change of old values and expectations, to become part of the landscape rather than fighting it. This second approach often proved to be the more promising one because in the long run only an active response to the challenges of life in the plains guaranteed survival. Still, this required a strong self and many of the pioneers, it seemed, just couldn't take it.

What made it additionally difficult for the prairie pioneers to cope was the constitution or nature of the new land. As Walter Prescott Webb has pointed out the plains surrounding exerted a peculiarly appalling effect on people. It was above all the wind which caused some people to migrate while it drove many of those who stayed on to the verge of insanity.[3] A similar point was made by the American prairie writer Willa Cather :

> Insanity and suicide are very common things on the Divide. They come on like an epidemic in the hot wind season. Those scorching dusty winds that blow over the bluffs from Kansas seem to dry up the blood in men's veins as they do the sap on corn leaves. [...] It causes no great sensation there when a Dane is found swinging from his windmill tower, and most of the Poles after they have become too careless and discouraged to shave themselves keep their razors to cut their throats with. [4]

The force with which this element made itself feel present and encroached upon the mind of the pioneers is most vividly and memorably captured in the following passage from Sinclair Ross' short story "The Lamp at Noon":

> There were two winds: the wind in flight, and the wind that pursued. The one sought refuge in the eaves, whimpering, in fear; the other assailed it there, and shook the eaves apart to make it flee again. Once as she listened this first wind sprang inside the room, distraught like a bird that has felt the graze of talons on its wing; while furious the other wind shook the walls, and thudded tumbleweeds against the window till its quarry glanced away in freight. But only to

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2 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.-p. 2

3 Webb, Walter Prescott: The Great Plains.- Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936.- p. 506

4 Cather, Willa: On the Divide.- In: Willa Cather's Collected Short Fiction / ed. by Virginia Faulkner.- Lincoln: University of Nebraska University, 1970.- p. 495.-

> return - to return and quake among the feeble eaves, as if in all this dust-mad wilderness it knew no other sanctuary. [5]

Drought and dust storms produce inevitable imagery of the desert as distinct from earlier wilderness. Where a wilderness is chaotic and threatening, a desert is barren and suggests spiritual emptiness. It was also the sheer physical fact of the prairie, its enormous vastness, which cannot be underestimated for how "do you establish any sort of *close* relationship in a landscape - in a physical situation - whose primary characteristic is *distance*?" [6], Kroetsch asked. Similarly Beret Holm's reaction to the South Dakota landscape at the beginning of O. E. Rölvaag's *Giants in the Earth:* "Here there was nothing to hide behind"[7], has to be seen as an outcry which hits the core of the landscape's effect on the pioneer who wants to make his home there. Space remains inhospitable, presenting a blank surface to the human seeking a protected place with borders around it, a home from which he can orient himself. This denial of a shelter to serve as a refuge necessary in order to separate the self from the outlying world makes the plains remain an uncivilized wilderness.

More than being inhospitable, the plains become an oppressing force dwarfing and entrapping the fragile self. As Wallace Stegner points out in *Wolf Willow*, there is something suggestive of eternity in the "hugeness of simple forms"[8] which makes up the prairie landscape. They reduce man and his temporal progress to a speck on an apparently interminable expanse. There is thus a curious transformation of the plains from a presence simply rejecting the self into an aggressive force penetrating the fragile self's innermost recesses. The wilderness becomes a demonic agent violating the helpless self. A self which at the same time experiences an entrapment by and a defenceless exposure to the encroaching landscape of plains. While to some of the pioneers the prairie conveyed a sense of liberty and a feeling of man as the giant-conqueror it was more often felt that the openness of prospect which frees the spirit also threatens it with loss of security, order, and ultimately all human meaning. Many decades later Kroetsch, in his *Alberta,* still describes the prairie population as "locked between dream and nightmare"[9]. In each case, however, the pioneer's nature or outlook will be linked to his position in this vast and uninterrupted landscape, which

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5 Ross, Sinclair: The Lamp at Noon.- In: The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English / selected by Margaret Atwood & Robert Weaver.- Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.- p. 27

6 Kroetsch, Robert: The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space.- In: Crossing Frontiers: Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature / ed. by Dick Harrison.- Edmonton: Alberta University Press, 1979.- p. 73

7 Rölvaag, O. E.: Giants in the Earth: A Saga of the Prairies.- New York: Harper & Row, 1955 [1927].- p. 36

8 Stegner, Wallace: Wolf Willow.- New York: Viking, 1955.- p. 7

9 Kroetsch, Robert: Alberta.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1968.- p. 7.-

is why all "discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian west must necessarily begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind"[10].

What should also be noted is that in order to somewhat cultivate this vast unusable space they had to fence themselves in and by doing so they were "aggravating the loneliness and isolation which were among the most threatening aspects of the prairie landscape"[11]. As the fiction of the pioneer and post-pioneer periods reveals, the women left at home - in sod hut, shanty, or ranch house - felt the effects of isolation most acutely. This is not to say that men did not feel entrapped by the landscape, but they were otherwise engaged, confronting their new land, working it, making it pay. It was in this lonely struggle, however, that they most often became isolated. Apart from that there is an implicit danger that the outward struggle with the land can even become an escape from more complex human problems and when the real struggle within is neglected and the personal disintegration ignored the outcome may be just as disastrous as if someone is left at home to brood. Grove furthermore pointed to the fact that, unfortunately for pioneer women, the qualities in their husbands which made them successful pioneers were "incompatible with that tender devotion which alone can turn the relationship between the sexes into a thing of beauty".[12] Unable to obtain satisfaction in marriage, bereft by husbands, these women were left at the mercy of the vast landscape surrounding them. The Canadian novelist Edward McCourt in his *Music at the Close* captures a woman's response to Saskatchewan vastness in the following phrase: "For years my Aunt Em had been combating the terrifying loneliness of her environment by carrying on audible conversations with herself [...]."[13]

With regard to isolation Harrison directs the attention to the fact that "by working to cut themselves off, physically, from nature, they were rejecting some part of their own natures.[14] Kreisel's argumentation goes along the same lines when he says that "in order to tame the land and begin the building, however tentatively, of something approaching a civilization, the men and women who settled on the prairie had to tame themselves" and that "it is not surprising that there should be sudden eruptions and that the passions, long suppressed, should burst violently into the open".[15] He

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10 Kreisel, Henry: The Prairie: A State of Mind.- In: Essays on Saskatchewan Writing / ed. by E. D. Dyck.- Regina, Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Writers Guild, 1986.- p. 44

11 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.-p. 22

12 Grove Frederick P.: In Search of Myself.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1946.- p. 97

13 McCourt, Edward: Music at the Close.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966 [1947].- p. 21.-

14 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.- p. 22

15 Kreisel, Henry: The Prairie: A State of Mind.- In: Essays on Saskatchewan Writing / ed. by E. D. Dyck.- Regina, Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Writers Guild, 1986.- p. 51

also suggests, however, that "the knowledge of the vast space outside brings to the surface anxieties that have their roots elsewhere".[16] This is to say that even though the physical environment may be a force with which frail humans must reckon and though some people were in fact not able to face its roughness, the land itself may not necessarily or singularly be blamed for the various kinds of mental instabilities which have been documented. More often personality and cultural factors underlie the aversion to the harsh land and produce loss of control. As Moira in McCourt's *Music at the Close* who points out:

> "It's not the land that is sour [...] and you know it. It's our fault that we're in a mess, not nature's." [17]

In other words, while the plains sometimes provoked outbreaks of insanities, the primary cause is often to be found elsewhere. These causes range from economic frustration, isolation from the people like oneself, frustration growing out of an inability to adapt, personal displacement and loss of identity, to guilt and isolation. All these are parts not only of a physical environment but of a mental landscape. But whatever the causes madness itself became accepted as part of the normal burden of life or as a regular element in the life of most of the pioneers. Their nerves overstretched, women usually became depressed and silent whereas men more often turned to violence in order to act out their rage and frustration. In some cases these states were permanent, in others they were temporary and subsided after a finite period of time.

4.2. Dramatising the Experience: Madness in Pioneer and Prairie Realism

Permanent or transient, the all-to-common phenomenon of madness in the pioneering period of the plains provided material especially adaptable to the fictional purposes of novelists. It serves them as a major dramatic device, for plot, for contrast, or for awakening a character to new possibilities. Above all, however, it is used as a means to dramatically emphasise the roughness of the country.

Among the Canadian novelists heralding this new realism in prairie fiction were Laura Salverson, Frederick Philip Grove, Martha Ostenso and Sinclair Ross. What they share is an increasing disillusionment with the romance of pioneering and the naive assumptions underling it, a recognition that in spite of material progress, the foreign

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16 Ibid., p. 47

17 McCourt, Edward: Music at the Close.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966 [1947].- p. 185

settlers remain spiritually alienated from the land. It is the varied, complex nature of this alienation which is explored in their works.

The setting we are dealing with most often in prairie realism is that of the small and rigidly defined community of the family farm. Inseparable from the land it occupies this enclave embodies the work of hands and minds shared by overlapping generations of ordinary people. It is a work which

> demands obedience to the forces of nature rather than of society, yet nowhere are people more constricted by their social roles in order to make the natural life a working proposition.[18]

Teeming with heroes - and heroines - who reflect epic stature in their contest with nature, these books generally include the "prairie patriarch". Filled with the righteousness of his own purpose he is usually presented as a land-hungry, work-intoxicated tyrant. The farm women are subjugated, culturally and emotionally starved, and filled with a smouldering rebellion. All in all a fertile ground for conflict and all kinds of mental instabilities. According to Moss the novels of the family farm can be regarded as

> the Canadian version of Greek tragedy. In a context where territory and personality are interdependent, where social and natural orders merge or clash, where genealogy determines continuity [...] the family farm provides Canadian writers with tremendous possibilities for weight drama.[19]

4.2.1 Laura Salverson's *The Viking Heart*

A potential which is richly realized, for instance, in Laura Salverson's study of the early West as presented in *The Viking Heart*, an epic saga which portrays the exigencies of Islandic settlement in Manitoba. Although Salverson is usually placed among the prairie realists and does indeed, treat realistically the day to day life of ordinary people, her work is still of a dual character in that it sometimes also contains elements of romance and melodrama. Significantly it is only when she tries to describe life in the Old Country that she often loses touch with realism and ends up with romanticism. This holds true for her novel as well as for her autobiography *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* published in 1939, where we learn of all her relatives' fierce pride in their origins and of her own dismay as a girl at belonging to

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18 Moss, John: Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: The Ancestral Present.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977.- p. 186

19 Moss, John: A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart,1987.- p. 153

such a strange 'ethnic' group. Belonging to what is termed an 'ethnic' group carries with it the built-in problem of dividing the self into *us* and *them* and often during the telling of her life, Salverson seems unable to decide which camp she would rather belong to. If identity is shaped by external circumstances, then it is not surprising that Salverson, just as many other pioneers and the characters in her novel, should posit a division in their sense of themselves, since they were shaped by two cultures simultaneously.

The Viking Heart is the story of Borga Lindal who, as a young girl the mid1870s, is driven from Iceland by the vulcano that claims her brother's life and it is her son Thor who dies as a Canadian medical officer in the Great War. Between these two event Salverson traces the history of several families from their mud hovels to homesteads to prosperous farms or life in the city. Her attempt to chronicle the activities of more than one family through several generations makes it an episodic book. For an exemplification of the above mentioned difficulties the prairie pioneers were faced with and how their situation was translated into fiction I would like to turn to Salverson's story about Anna and Loki. Anna is a gracious woman who had been brought up carefully in a honourable home. Through "some freakish idea of romance"[20] she had run off with a handsome fisherman named Loki Fjalsted. As their fortune had not been favourable in the old country, Loki had immigrated to Canada. She had been glad enough to leave the land where her own kindred shunned her. Loki was a good workman, he was doing as well as any settler, probably a little better. But she never noticed it. And if he, half hopeful of gaining semblance of approval from her, mentioned it, she showed no interest.

> She was like a flower which had been nursed in the soft warm earth, and cannot sink its roots into coarse rocky soil and flourish.[21]

Moreover, she could not understand that every time she winced at some rudeness of his, she wounded him by making him conscious of her superior breeding. And as the years went on the gap widened and he became increasingly brutal. But it was not until after the birth of their son Balder that she hated him utterly, and that he took every opportunity available to wound her. The child had been born with a slightly twisted foot and Anna was beside her with grief. To him, after all, it had been nothing so very terrible. The child was perfect in every other way and he felt inclined to like it all the more for its infirmity. But to Anna, with her mad love for perfection and beauty, this was just another proof of the terrible misfortune she had taken up by marrying this

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20 Salverson, Laura Goodman: The Viking Heart.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975 [1923].- p. 76
21 Ibid., p. 84

man. Blind with rage he tells her brutally that with all her superior claims she was so degenerate that she could not even mother a normal child.

One early morning Loki decided to kill a young calf and asked his wife to help him bleed it. Astonished because in all the years of their married life "he had never commanded her to do anything quite so repulsive" she scornfully replies, lifting her head up high: "You are joking, I suppose". I will quote what is to follow at length because it vividly indicates both his bottled frustration and rising anger as well as her anguish and panic and her utter inability to face the situation which causes her final retreat into madness.

> As a matter of fact, Loki did not know why he had made the request. He had been thinking that someone should do it. But now all the sleeping devil in him avoke.
> "Loki, you forgot yourself. I am not a butcher's daughter."
> "I know that to my sorrow. But you are a farmer's wife. I've had all of your damn squeamishness that I intend to stand." […]
> She was white with anger. […] He was enjoying her horror […]
> "Loki, even you could not be so cruel!"
> This appeal added fuel to the fire. Even he! The words cut him deeper than she could have believed. […] He took her roughly by the shoulder and pushed her outside. He picked up a pail and thrust it into her nerveless fingers. […] She wanted to run as he led the unsuspecting creature out, but she was under a strange hypnotic spell which his brutality always exercised over her. […] She obeyed him like some puppet on a stage, and sank on her knees beside the quivering beast.
> There was a swift movement of Loki's hand and then a spurt of something hot and red that trickled and shuddered into the pail. A nauseating odor arose from the crimson stream. Anna felt it rising to her face. She lifted one hand swiftly as if to ward it away. And as she did so. the pail tipped and the hand she raised was wet and red.
> Then something snapped in her weakened brain. [22]

They later find her in a clump of silver poplars singing to herself, rocking to and fro. Loki calls her, goes up to her and touches her and but she only keeps on singing. He lifts her to her feet, half dragging her along. She is passive enough and never stops singing. As they near the barn, however, she stiffens, screams and tears herself away. When her son comes up to her she stares at him quite puzzled:

> "Such a pretty face! Such a pretty face! Quick, little boy, run away! Run away! It is red here and wet. See! The sky and the grass - all red! All red!" She pushed him away, hiding her face

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[22] Ibid., p. 87

> in her arms. [...] She leaned back against the wall and her face assumed a strange expression, like the face of a statue with a fixed smile. But her eyes were glassy, lighted now and again with red flashes. [23]

At this point Loki realized that the woman he had vowed to love and care for has lost her reason through his abuse and her isolation. Salverson effectively presents us here - through character and event - with the perfect example of how an upbringing according to the bourgeois European standards made it impossible for some people to cope with the given reality of pioneer life. Though the reconciliation of two realities does not come easily, on the whole The *Viking Heart* is still about the goodness of struggle and the victory over despair .

4.2.2 Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*

Though passion for the land is, of course, potentially positive and in some cases crucial for survival, in Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* we are made aware of how perverted passion, a passion poisoned at its roots, may become spiritually destructive. In this novel Ostenso bares the lives of the Gare family and the futility, even insanity, of their daily stifled existence which is dictated by Caleb Gare's distorted vision of life. "In the life of the Gare household there was no apparent change, no growth or maturing of dreams or fears, no evidence of crisis in personal struggle, no peak of achievement rapturously reached."[24] They are slaves to the land.

> "That's what's wrong with the Gares. They all have a monstrously exaggerated conception of their duty to the land - or rather to Caleb, who is nothing but a symbol of the land."

"We are, after all," remarks one of the protagonists, "only the mirror of our environment. Life here at Oeland, even, may seem a negation"[25]. The apparent negation of life is naturally epitomized by Caleb who is given "the larger-than-life dimensions of a romantic villain"[26]. The tyranny of Caleb is the tyranny of the land, and Ostenso describes him as someone "who could not be characterized in terms of human virtue or human vice - a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence".[27] Caleb's way of doting upon his land is revealing. At night he walks out alone with a lantern to

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23 Ibid., p. 89

24 Ostenso, Martha: Wild Geese.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1925].- p. 78

25 Ibid., p. 78

26 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.- p. 108

27 Ostenso, Martha: Wild Geese.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1925].- p. 33

inspect it, a Judith says, "to assure himself that his land was still there".[28] He obviously sees land not as something he lives with, or from, or upon, but as a possession, almost as though it were a movable property which someone might steal. Caleb's passion for the land has been perverted because it is born out of disappointment and nurtured by frustration. Before her marriage Amelia had acknowledged Caleb that she had an illegitimate son who was being raised in an orphanage. Over the years Caleb's life is embittered by this knowledge. Feeling cheated by life, Caleb turns from Amelia and his children. At the same time he exploits her fears that he may reveal her secret. In rejecting the love of another human being and denying his own potential for loving others, Caleb concentrates all his energies on his land. Caleb's ambitions for his land are epitomized in his flax whose care he jealously reserves for himself:

> While he was rapidly considering the tender field of flax - now in blue flower - Amelia did not exist to him. There was a transcendent power in his blue field of flax that lifted a man above the petty artifices of birth, life and death.[29]

His arrogant conscious will must be unchallenged by the spontaneous and irrational, even at the cost of losing touch with all nature including his own. As D.G. Jones explains it was through their unrelenting efforts to subjugate these unruly elements inside and outside themselves that many people alienated themselves from their natural surroundings.[30] But as much as Gare seems to be an agent of a malevolent physical environment, he still fights for a supremacy over it and may in some ways even be regarded as its victim. From the outset he senses that natural forces are stronger than his will. Viewing the physical deterioration of his neighbour Anton Klovacz, he reflects anxiously, "Disease - destruction things that he feared - things out of man's control"[31] . Since he can never be sure of mastering the land or fully control nature, it is clear that Gare will go to any length to impose his will on his family.

> Caleb felt a flow of satisfaction as he stood there on the ridge peering out over his land until the last light had gone. He could hold all this, and more - add to it year after year - [...] all this as long as he held the whip hand over Amelia.[32]

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28 Ibid., p. 18

29 Ibid., p. 119

30 Jones, D. G.: Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature.- Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.- p. 57.-

31 Ostenso, Martha: Wild Geese.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1925].- p. 57

32 Ibid., p. 19

Whereas Caleb sacrifices everything for the sake of the land and his flax, Amelia's all-consuming obsession is her attempt to remain the secrecy of Mark Jordan's illegitimacy. Her inordinate desire to protect Mark for his father's sake rather than maternal love becomes exaggerated and destructive for herself as well as for her other children. Amelia is fully aware of the wrong she is doing her children. But the admission of her guilt is on the intellectual rather than the emotional level.

It is their daughter Judith's lot therefore to grow up in a harsh surrounding with nothing but hard work and a lack of love. Yet, she is the only one who can be identified with the land as natural environment, contrary to her father who can be identified with the land only in the sense that "land" is a human construct, property, a means to power. Where he represents power over the land, Judith represents communion with the it and is thus the only one of the Gares who responds to the beauty of her environment from which she draws identity and strength from it turning her into, as Moss puts it, a "magnificent maverick"[33] . This again makes her strong enough, contrary to her sister Ellen, to rebel against both Caleb and Amelia who, ironically, are united in their opposition to their daughter. As long as Amelia regards Judith and her other Children as "Caleb's children"[34], she surrenders fearfully to her husband and becomes his ally. However, when Judith reveals to her mother that she is pregnant, Amelia suddenly identifies with Judith. Dreading a repetition of her own tragedy, she knows that the girl must be allowed to leave with Sven, the father of the child. With Judith's departure, Caleb has suddenly lost his hold over his wife. Though he cruelly whips Amelia, both recognize that for the first time Amelia is no longer afraid of him. This marks the beginning of Caleb's defeat which reaches its peak when, at the end of the novel, the flax to which he gave his soul claims his life, as he makes a desperate attempt to safe his burning crop. Yet, the vision of the individual person as a victim of the self and of life leads to an understanding of those, like Caleb Gare, who may be responsible for the destruction of dreams in others - those whose fate is a death-in-life existence, whose passions take the form of perversion, obsession or madness.

4.2.3 Frederick P. Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* and *Settler's of the Marsh*

While in *Wild Geese* the cultivator and the exploiter are separate protagonists, their conflicts external and visible Grove includes both in one character, Abe Spalding, the main protagonist of his novel *Fruits of the Earth*. Denying Ostenso's black and white

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33 Moss, John: Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: The Ancestral Present.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart,1977.- p. 188

34 Ostenso, Martha: Wild Geese.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1925].- p. 135

morality Grove is offering us instead a more complex and problematic moral universe, claiming that "We do not, in life, meet with heroes and villains." [35]

The main internal tension embodied in typical pioneer heroes like Abe Spalding is between the desire to work harmoniously with the land and the temptation to dominate and exploit it. As D. G. Jones suggested people tended to exploit what they should have cultivated. To him Grove's heroes embody "the arrogant and aggressive masculine logos" of Western civilization which attempts to tyrannize over nature, both external and the more spontaneous, irrational aspects of human nature.[36] Men like Abe Spalding seek to dominate nature by forcing wealth from the fertile soil and by erecting tall buildings and windbreaks to challenge the monotonous level to which nature would reduce all life. But their efforts are pitifully mutable. "The moment a work of a man was finished", Abe reflects, "nature set to work to take it down again [..] And so with everything, with his machines, his fields his pool; they were all on the way of being levelled to the soil again."[37] If the material things built by man are so ephemeral, so inexorably destroyed by nature, what greater folly can there be than devoting one's life to a philosophy of materialism. It is a question Abe himself is painfully aware of. But even though he has moments of an almost poignant realization of "the futility of it all"[38] he at the same time admits: "Can't be helped. I've got to have the land."[39] What Grove wants to emphasize is that the main drama is not between man and external nature - though his characters frequently misunderstood it to be - but within man, between his conscious will and his own nature.

To be successful a pioneer encountering the resistance of nature and society had to be dominant and rigid, with a single-minded preoccupation with the specifically-'pioneering task. But what leads this type to success is at the same time his defeat in that - when the goal is reached - he finds himself a spiritual pauper. As Grove says, "it is one of the fundamental tenets of my creed that an ideal realized is an ideal destroyed".[40] The imagination, committing Grove's pioneers to dreams and visions in this way, is as much a creative as a destructive force. Because not only has the pioneer's own spirit suffered immensely through this one-sided effort to make the land pay, but the almost inevitable neglect of the other family members is bound to lead to alienation, suffering and deterioration as well. His material struggle absorbed him to

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35 Grove, Frederick Philip: It Needs to be Said.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1929.- p. 73.-

36 Jones, D. G.: Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature.- Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.- p. 73

37 Grove, Frederick Philip: Fruits of the Earth.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965 [1933].- p. 67

38 Ibid., p. 50

39 Ibid., p. 54

40 Grove, Frederick Philip: It Needs to be Said.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1929.- p. 88.-

the point where he began to totally neglect them. Obsessed with his task as he was, he merely "tolerated them as an adjunct to his life"[41] Tragic as it may be, it therefore comes as no surprise that the children who were to inherit the empire he had slaved himself for to build it never succeed him. Charly, his favorite son, is accidentally killed. Jim, the remaining son, becomes an addict of the machine and leaves the farm to work as a mechanic in town. Marion marries a lawyer and settles down in Winnipeg and Frances, who disgraces Abe by becoming a devotee and victim of the fast living that corrupts the younger generation, will never assume Abe's burden. Terribly disappointed in his family he is too blind to see that it is hardly their fault and that this was bound to happen. The one who suffers most of all throughout the novel is once again the wife. Ruth, herself not much of a fighter, is, in fact, a woman fitted for the life in towns or cities rather than the life of the open prairies. Utterly depressed by her general situation and his neglect she gains weight, becomes slovenly in her dress and less and less careful with regard to the common amenities of life, "consciously isolating herself, making that a point of pride which had been a grievance"[42]. In a feeble cry for help she observes:

> "It's like being in a prison, cast off by the world. [...] This isn't a country fit to live in." "Exactly," Abe said with rising anger. "I am making it into a country fit to live in. That is my task. The task of a pioneer." [...] "Where do I come in?" "Aren't you going to profit from my labours?" "Profit! You probably pride yourself on being a good provider. You are. I've all I want except what I need: a purpose in life."[43]

By fixing doggedly upon his own limited vision, he fails to assimilate the realities around him, and thus in the process of amassing wealth and power becomes increasingly out of touch with time and nature, alienating himself from his wife and children.

Grove's earlier novel *Settlers of the Marsh* is yet another novel which illuminates the relationships between free will and fate, between the natural world and man's effort to make it yield. It is the story of Niels Lindtstedt's pioneer dream to build a dynasty out of the primeval land and his own labours. His farm grows prosperous. To make his dream perfect, however, he wants to get married to Ellen Amundsen with whom he is madly in love. But Ellen has been witness to her father's sexual brutality, which led to her mother's death, and she has promised her mother to avoid men.

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41 Grove, Frederick Philip Fruits of the Earth.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965 [1933].- p. 45
42 Ibid., p. 47
43 Ibid., p. 48

Amundsen's farm is a model of human order carefully asserted and the old Amundsen is a prairie patriarch a good deal like Caleb Gare, as harsh and demanding, as hypocritically pious and as sterilizing, and like Caleb he is killed by nature. And as so often in pioneer literature women are presented as perfect slaves and mere helper of man. Man who force themselves upon the women and then expect them to get rid of the "fruit" as her work will be needed and there are already enough hungry mouths to be fed. Left with no choice the most common solution to the problem is suggested by one of the characters as she explains in a rather matter of fact manner

> "when I'm just as far gone as you are now, then I go and lift heavy things; or I take the plow and walk behind it for a day. In less than a week's time the child comes; and its dead. In a day or two I go to work again. Just try it. It won't hurt you. Lots of women around here do the same."[44]

Niels himself is the perfect example of how the outward struggle with the land can become an escape from more complex human problems. When he, for example, cannot bear to test his dream of marriage by asking Ellen Amundsen, it is said that "a sort of intoxication came over Niels; work developed into an orgy"[45]. At this point and elsewhere in the course of events, the real struggle with himself is neglected and the real danger of personal disintegration toward which he drifts is ignored.

Throughout the novel communication in the harsh northern life is sparse, fragmentary, not just unfulfilling but dangerously unilluminating. The more Niels struggles to master his environment, the more isolated he becomes. Furthermore, the hopelessness of his love for Ellen and his own nativity and the pressure of his conscience lead him to marry a woman to whom he has been sexually attracted, realising too late that she has been the town prostitute. When Niels cannot face the moral dilemma of his marriage, he retreats to the security of his implement shed where he paces among his machinery unable to communicate his sorrow since human relationships have deteriorated as his preference for machinery had grown. When he is finally overbalanced by the inescapable assertion of his wife's whoredom, he eventually, pitiably, murders her. Though Niel's vision was in one way merely childish, it turned out to have serious consequences. His ignorance and his idealism made him intolerant of human imperfection. It was his naive black and white morality, which leads him both to marry and to murder Clara Vogel. Like many other immigrants and pioneers Niels has been "misled, in a sense, by the "virgin" land into believing that he can begin anew and impose order upon chaos in a way he cannot

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44 Grove, Frederick Philip: Settlers of the Marsh.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966 [1925].- p. 108
45 Ibid., p. 67

do"[46]. The novel closes as Niels arrives home from prison after he has served out a modified term in jail. He is met by Ellen, and their future is left ambiguous. Significantly, while both Amundsen and Lindstedt fail in their attempts to realize their dreams, it is the Lunds who ultimately succeed in keeping their sanity. Though their farm is by no means as rigorously and prosperously run but rather haphazard it reflects both a concern for human comfort and indulgence of human weaknesses. In their acceptance of life they manage to endure, yielding to fate yet clinging to their humanity.

That in the new country sanity - to a great extend - depended on the strategy of dealing with the given circumstances is also explicated in an early Joyce Marshall story, "The Old Woman" published in 1913. Though this story is not set in the prairies but in Northern Quebec, and is therefore somewhat out of place here, it still a piece of fiction dealing with the pioneer experience which nicely implicates how dangerous it was to be out of touch with the land. It is the story about a couple that got married during the war in England. He soon after left for Canada while she had to stay there to nurse her sick mother. Way up in the Canadian North, all by himself, Toddy develops a dangerous, passionate love for the power plant he works at and which to him forms the only distraction from the nature and isolation which surrounds him. When Molly comes to join him three years later he picks her up at Montreal and they head 'home' to Missawani at the tip of Lake St. John. Passing the power-house on their way he introduces it to his wife as "My old woman".

> In England his habit of personalizing an electric generating plant had charmed her, fitting her picturesque notions of the Canadian north. But now she felt unease prod her. It was a sinister-looking building, and the sound of falling water was so loud and engulfing.[47]

He, however, regards it as "a cheerful sound" and is so obsessed with his 'old woman' that he leaves their house right away to check on her. Molly slowly realizes how cut off they are in this place "cut off from town by thirty odd miles of snow and tangled bush and roadlessness"[48] but is still optimistic, simply stating that "[s]he would have to learn to keep busy". While in the time to follow she is constantly trying to establish some sort of link to her husband, he becomes more and more distant, still less talkative and more absorbed in the power-house: "[Nothing] was real to him - not the

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46 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.- p. 142

47 Marshall, Joyce: The Old Woman.- In: The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English / selected by Margaret Atwood & Robert Weaver.- Toronto; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.- p. 35

48 Ibid., p. 35

dinner; nothing but the turbines and generator."[49] When she is trying to hint at the fact that he might have suffered from his surroundings, after all he had been alone in this deserted place for three years, with nothing but snow most of the year and the wild and roaring water and the wind screaming up the hill at night, he is angrily refusing to acknowledge the fact he is bushed. But the way he looks at her is terrifying her: "It was a watchful look, a powerful look, as if he were still in the presence of his machinery."[50]

Although he is badly neglecting her, he does not want her to go and become friends with or work for other people either. In order to cope with her isolated existence and retain her sanity she feels the desperate need, however, to keep herself occupied in some way or the other:

> "[...] I am the sort of woman who must have some work to do. If I don't, my mind will grow dim and misty. Already I can feel the long sweep of the snow trying to draw my thoughts out till they become diffused and vague. I can feel the sound of the water trying to crush and madden me."[51]

She eventually finds a sort of distraction and something useful to do when she is helping a neighbour to take care of her baby. From that point onwards she becomes something of a nurse to the people around and is called whenever a new baby is born. When Toddy demands her to make an end to this 'nonsense' she defies him as she finally feels needed. After another quarrel about this issue he takes off to the power-house she follows him only to find out that now his mind has gone for good. It is Louis-Paul, one of the workers at the plant, who remarks: "For years I watch him fall in love with her. Now she has him for herself."[52]

In Marshall's story there is a sharp delineation between the two possible approaches to the foreign territory. Since the machine has always been between Toddy and the land, he has been unable to relate adequately to others. In his limited and confined existence he has thus thwarted any other kind of growth and in the end even goes insane. At the same time his wife - in her commitment to creative life - discovers a personally satisfying role as midwife in a French-Canadian community. Her productive approach thus carries her across apparent linguistic and cultural boundaries and across her isolation.

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49 Ibid., p. 36
50 Ibid., p. 37
51 Ibid., p. 38
52 Ibid., p. 43

4.3. As Things Get Worse: The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl

The third period arrived with the depression and the Dust Bowl. While the rest of Canada reeled under the economic hardship of the Great Depression, the prairies, to which the Depression would have been especially disastrous under any circumstances, in 1929 suffered from an additional unprecedented drought. It was a trauma of the worst kind, which forced people to question their most basic beliefs about God and life. When one experiences a traumatic event, the natural inclination is to tell the tale over and over in an effort to rationalize it. In the period from the early 1940s, when the rains began again, until roughly 1960, prairie writers, beginning with Sinclair Ross, told the tale of the Dust Bowl over and over, seeking understanding and reconciliation. In the process of telling the tale, the pain is eased and eventually resolution of the trauma occurs. However, the trauma itself, the actual twelve years of drought, fractured any continuity in the region's early history. The novels of the early Depression years reflect much of the desperation of the time, both in their initial groping for new character types and settings and in their eventual preoccupation with an amoral society and the inefficacy of once sacred values. The ravages of the Depression and drought years and the attendant reaction against the land thus led to a completion of the disillusionment introduced by the first prairie realists. The new works are haunted with images of the desert and the barren waste land suggesting man's ultimate isolation and loneliness, spiritual emptiness and a vacancy extending to an eventual dissolution of human understanding, to madness or idiocy.

4.3.1 Sinclair Ross

One of the authors who gave major attention to the disastrous effect the given circumstances had on the people living in this region was Sinclair Ross who published his earliest stories of prairie deprivation in the 1930s. His tonally bleak stories exhibit a great sensitivity both to the physical and the social prairie landscapes of the 1930s. Plaintiveness and protest repeat themselves in conjunction with the seasons, as Ross's characters continue to hold out against a hostile environment. Their individual miseries are highlighted by the tragic mode in which their stories are written, a mode whereby nature assumes the personality of an angry, vengeful presence bent on destruction. All is tense with oppression, which in turn derives from the apparent powerlessness of an entire community to affect the weather, the economy, or their own future. It is the tension of living with uncertainties one finds so dislocating and yet so wants, and the tension of living with the certainties one cannot abide. Again what is stressed is those who are particularly affected by this tragic circumstance are the

women who were most often "trapped in their houses alone in blizzard or sandstorm more isolated and more helpless against the elements than their husbands".[53]

4.3.1.1 "The Lamp at Noon"

That the isolation hit women particularly hard and that they are often driven to the brink of insanity, and sometimes beyond, by the plains landscape is exemplified in an early short story entitled "The Lamp at Noon" where Ellen, the wife of a hardly well-to-do farmer, pleats with her husband as he is about to leave her in order to fulfil his daily tasks:

> "Don't go yet. I brood and worry when I'm left alone. " [...]
> The eyes frightened him, but responding to a kind of instinct that he must withstand her, that it was his self-respect and manhood against the fretful weakness of a woman, he answered unfeelingly, "In here safe and quiet - you don't know how well off you are. If you were out in it - fighting it - swallowing it-" "Sometimes, Paul, I wish I was. I'm so caged-" [54]

Life is tough for both of them. Yet, there is a difference in attitude and outlook. Though beneath "the whip of sand his youth had been effaced" to him "the struggle had given sternness [and] an impassive courage"[55], whereas to her, a woman "that had loved the little vanities of life, and lost them wistfully", the same debts and poverty had brought "a plaintive indignation, a nervous dread of what was still to come"[56]. Contrary to him she has no faith or dream with which to make the dust and the poverty less real.

> "I wouldn't mind the work or the skimping if there was something to look forward to. It's the hopelessness - going on - watching the land blow away. "
> "The land's all right"' he repeated. "The dry years won't last forever. "
> "But it's not just the dry years, Paul! " The little sob in her voice gave way suddenly to a ring of exasperation. "Will you never see? It's the land itself'. " [57]

As she sees no future to look forward to under the given circumstances she seeks to convince her husband Paul to abandon the farm and thereby end the fruitless nine-

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53 McMullen, Lorraine: Sinclair Ross.- Boston: Twayne, 1979.- p. 137

54 Ross, Sinclair: The Lamp at Noon.- In: The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English/ selected by Margaret Atwood & Robert Weaver.- Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.- p. 30

55 Ibid., p. 27

56 Ibid., pp. 27 f.

57 Ibid., p. 29

year struggle with the soil. Ellen's solution is for Paul to work in her father's store, his is to hang on and ply the earth for a few more years.

> "Even as a desert it's better than sweeping out your father's store and running his errands: That's all I've got ahead of me if I do what you want. " "And here -" she faltered. "What's ahead of you here? " [...]"I can't go, Ellen. Living off your people - charity - stop and think about it. This is where I belong. I can't do anything else. " "Charity! [...] And this - you call this independence! Borrowed money you can't pay the interest on, seed from the government - grocery bills - doctor bills-" [58]

In this instance, the argument is fuelled by a three-day dust storm that literally cages Ellen in the house with the baby and Paul in the shed with the livestock, an arid gulf of blowing sand between them. The atmosphere is claustrophobic for both characters, but Paul finds solace among the horses, whose loyalty simultaneously comforts and upbraids him with his present failure. For her part, Ellen - caged by a dust storm that forces the lightning of a lamp at noon - paces the floor like a trapped animal, throat so tight it aches, eyes frightened and glazed, listening to the howling wind and frantically longing to "break away and run".

> [Paul] would only despise her if she ran to the stables looking for him. There was too much grim endurance in his nature ever to let him understand the fear and weakness of a woman. She must be quiet and wait. Nothing was wrong. At noon he would come - and perhaps after dinner stay with her a while. [...] Yesterday, and again at breakfast this morning, they had quarrelled bitterly [...] it was only the dust and the wind that had driven her. [59]

Alone in the shed, Paul patches together is dream of success. Hope kindles again, and determined to reclaim his farm from the wilderness he promises himself to heed Ellen's suggestion about rotating the crops. Appropriately the wind begins to slacken, reflecting externally the emotional calm Paul now feels. But his is a false hope, for unknown to him Ellen's mind has snapped at the height of the storm and she has indeed broken away and run off with the baby in order to 'protect' it from the storm. The deserted kitchen, the empty cradle, and the extinguished lamp forebode the extent of his calamity, which is confirmed when he comes upon Ellen in the field

> crouched down against a drift of sand as if for shelter, her hair in matted strands about her neck and face, the child clasped tightly in her arms.
> The child was quite cold. It had been her arms, perhaps, too frantic to protect him, or the

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58 Ibid., p. 28
59 Ibid., p. 27

> smother of dust upon his throat and lungs. "Hold him, " she said [...]"So - with his face away from the wind. Hold him until I tidy my hair. " [60]

Driven beyond the brink of insanity, her attempted escape has resulted in the baby's death. The child is smothered by both the storm and his mother's attempt to protect him. Ellen's wide, immobile stare indicates that her release from reality is no less permanent than her child's. Paul's earlier premonition that "not a blade would last the storm"[61] is mercilessly fulfilled with regard to the crops and his family. Paul and Ellen's predicament is but another chapter in a continuing saga of frustration and failed dreams.

4.3.1.2 *As For Me and My House*

Another work of this period which emphasizes the effect of the plains landscape on isolated home-bound women is Ross's *As For Me and My House*. Although the desert is hardly as physically and psychologically menacing as it is in the previous story not leading to actual madness either the book is pervaded by a depressing sense of dispirited loneliness, its main protagonist always on the verge of insanity. It is the story of Mrs. Bentley - she has no first name - and her husband Philip within the tiny prairie community of Horizon where they newly arrive at the beginning of the novel and where Philip is to be the local minister. Horizon is the latest of a succession of similar Saskatchewan towns in which the Bentleys have lived since their marriage twelve years previously. In some ways their predicament as it is presented to us is an extension of the general pattern of unfulfilled marriages characterized by the plodding, unsuccessful husband and the dispirited, neglected wife already introduced in "The Lamp at Noon". Lorraine McMullen notes that one essential similarity between the situation of Mrs. Bentley and her fictional predecessor is Philip's habit of making his marriage bearable "by preserving the same dour, grim-lipped silence as Ross's struggling farmers. Whereas they escape from their wives to the barn, he escapes from his wife into his study".[62] He quietly resists his wife's efforts to draw him in the way of life she wishes to create for them to share. In her more honest moments, Mrs. Bentley guiltily recognizes how desperately he struggles against her efforts to possess him: "His own world was shattered and empty, but at that it was better than a woman's. He remained in it."[63] While Philip's resistance on the one hand has thus become an

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60 Ibid., p. 33
61 Ibid., p. 31
62 McMullen, Lorraine: Sinclair Ross.- Boston: Twayne, 1979.- p. 137
63 Ross, Sinclair: As For Me and My House.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1941].- p. 84f.

impenetrable barrier, placing him apart from his wife, on the other hand it forms an unbreakable link, bonding his wife to him.

> It's the reason perhaps I still care so much, the way he's never let me possess him, always held himself withdrawn. For love, they say, won't survive possession. After a year or two it changes, cools, emerges from its blindness, at best becomes affection and regard.

Yet, deep down inside of her she knows that their bond is a feeble one, noting that: "These false-fronted little towns have been holding us together, nothing else."[64]

Unlike the protagonists of the earlier novels or their rural counterparts in Ross' short stories, the Bentley's struggle is internalized, their concern being less with physical than with psychological survival. As Ricou has suggested it is "with the absence of emotional, intellectual and cultural vitality" rather than "literal death" that they have to deal with.[65]

The novel is narrated through Mrs. Bentley's diary entries which cover over a year between the day of the Bentleys arrival to the day they leave. The perceptions and judgements are thus all hers. But even though we are seeing everything through Mrs. Bentley's eyes, which means that everything that she tells us is, like first-person narration in general, highly subjective, it is still a very effective form in terms of presenting her personality, the isolation she experiences and the futility which haunts her existence. She is in fact writing to explain and justify to herself her own actions, almost as an act of self-therapy. In some ways, her account could be seen as "a journey of inward discovery which proceeds through the year of changing seasons."[66]

The overall impression left by the book is certainly one of aridity: of dust and heat, the Depression on the prairies and the drought which went with it. Accompanying the unproductivity of the land is the dryness of the people. A land without rain, the dust bowl is barren of growth just as Mrs. Bentley is physically barren. Their only child is stillborn. A fact which causes a lot of anxiety and is a great strain to the Bentleys' marriage because it leaves Philip's longing for a son, a longing born out of his fatherless childhood unsatisfied. Philip's father, a young divinity student, had impregnated a waitress, the daughter of the proprietor, and had died before the child was born. As a boy Philip worked in the restaurant and had to endure the customers' derision at his bastardy, which not only made him extremely sensitive to the Main

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64 RIbid., p. 85

65 Ricou, Laurie: Obscured by Violence: Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.- In: Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960 / ed. by Terry Goldie and Virginia Harger-Grinling.- St. John's: Memorial University, [1981].- p. 77

66 Mitchell, Ken: Sinclair Ross: A Reader's Guide.- Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan: Thunder Creek Publ., 1981.- p. 38

Street mockery of his origins but also detest his mother, whom he saw as the source of his misery. In order to come to terms with his childhood and to break down the isolation he wanted to create a family of his own, which was denied to him. A lot of the Bentley's discontent thus springs from the failure of crops in a metaphoric sense. It is, however, not just the physical barrenness which is leads to distress but a spiritual one as well. Throughout the book there is a growing implication that the prairie is in some way inimical to imagination leading to spiritual sterility.

Ross' originality lies in the extent to which the outer emptiness brings about and mirrors the inner one as well. As in his short fiction, Ross does not simply present the landscape and weather as a cause for psychological disintegration but also employs it as a metaphor to develop the inner landscape of his characters, the landscape thus serving as the objective correlative of the feelings and the states of mind of his protagonists. If we take Philip for instance. He is one of the typical spiritually deprived anti-heroes we come across in much of the depression literature. While he has long since lost his faith in God he still remains frozen within the Puritan framework from which he cannot free his spirit, hiding himself behind the social mask of a pious man. Though he tries with some desperation to find his salvation in art and is claimed to be an artist by his wife he is still seen as artistically impotent. His early attempt at a novel is an exhausting failure. Drawn to painting as well it is through his pictures that we see the frightened man behind the mask, the endless prairie scenes he captures mirroring his own frustration:

> Something has happened to his drawing this last year or two. There used to be feeling and humanity in it. It was warm and positive and forthright; but now everything is distorted, intensified, alive with thin, cold, bitter life. Yesterday he sketched a congregation as he sees it from the pulpit. Seven faces in the first row - ugly, wretched faces, big-mouthed, mean-eyed [...] Something has happened to his drawing, and something has happened to him [...] Now in his attitude there's still defiance, but it's a sullen, hopeless kind. [67]

Bearing in mind that this is Mrs. Bentley's interpretation, it is nonetheless a powerful statement of the artist's frustration.[68] Philip's despondency takes on the form of an endlessly repeated withdrawal. His study, to which he constantly retreats, and his silences become refuges in his effort to sustain his freedom not only in the broader Main Street world, but within the House of Bentley itself. Alone in his study he sits

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67 Ross, Sinclair: As For Me and My House.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1941].- p. 23

68 Woodcock points out that Canadian writers and painters who in the 1940s worked outside the main metropolitan centres of Montreal and Toronto had no supportive literary or artistic community, and often worked in what now seems astonishing isolation. (Woodcock, George: Introducing Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House.- Toronto: ECW Press, 1990.- **p. 89).**

> hunched over his table, groping and struggling to fulfill himself - intent upon something that can only remind him of his failure, of the man he tried to be. I wish I could reach him, but it's like the wilderness outside of night and sky and prairie, with this one little spot of Horizon hung up lost in its immensity. He's as lost, and alone. [69]

Drawn more and more into himself, becoming aloof and unknowable his wife is certain that "there's some twisted, stumbling power locked up within him, so blind and helpless still it can't find outlet, so clenched with urgency it can't release itself"[70]. While he decides for himself that retreat is the only way for him to cope Mrs. Bentley, craving her husband's affection, existing in desperate loneliness, isolated from the community as well, is left alone to brood and wonder, vexed wherever she turns. Trapped within the doubtful reality of her obsessively oppressed imagination - "I wanted to celebrate and the walls disapproved"[71] - she is dangerously close to approaching insanity.

Apart from its aridity another aspect of the geophysical background of the prairie which threatens the Bentley's emotional balance is its already mentioned vastness and implied indifference, if not hostility, towards human existence which is itself a central expression of prairie experience. On a very early page Mrs. Bentley lies awake listening to the play of the elements stating:

> It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness [...]. The town seems huddled together, cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind. Close to the parsonage is the church, black even against the darkness, towering ominously up through the night and merging with it. [...] Above, in the high cold night, the wind goes swinging past, indifferent, liplessly mournful. It frightens me, makes me feel lost, dropped on this little perch of town and abandoned. I wish Philip would waken. [72]

As the wind continues to blow, relentlessly, through the book we are constantly made aware of the menace of a nature which though objectively indifferent is in practice so destructive that to Mrs. Bentley is seems malevolent.

> It's been nearly dark with dust. Everything's gritty, making you shiver and setting your teeth on edge. There's a crunch on the floor like sugar when you walk. We keep the doors and windows closed, and still it works in everywhere. I lay down for a little while after supper,

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69 Ross, Sinclair: As For Me and My House.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1941].- p. 34
70 Ibid., p. 106
71 Ibid., p. 77
72 Ibid., p. 8

> and I could feel it even on the pillow. The air is so dry and choking with it that every few minutes a kind of panic seizes you, and you have an impulse to thresh out against it with your hands.[73]

By being confronted with the menacing forces of nature almost daily and the awareness that such powers will never care for her predicament or hear her protest in Mrs. Bentley's inmost heart "the idea of a personal God, who might hear one's prayers, has been replaced by the idea of impersonal forces pitilessly governing the universe"[74]. In one frequently quoted passage from her diary, Mrs. Bentley expresses extremely well the insignificance and unmeaning insinuated by the prairie landscape:

> We've all lived in a little town too long. The wilderness here makes us uneasy. I felt it first the night I waked alone along the river bank - a queer sense of something cold and fearful, something inanimate, yet aware of us. A Main Street is such a self-sufficient little pocket of existence, so smug, compact, that here we feel abashed somehow before the hills, their passiveness, the unheeding way they sleep. We climb them, but they withstand us, remain as serene and unrevealed as ever. The river slips past, unperturbed by our coming and going, stealthily confident. We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude - we think a force or a presence into it - even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us - for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all.[75]

The Bentleys' response to this indifferent and dim prairie desert is a turning inward and stiffening of meagre cultural defences against the natural environment. As a strategy for survival, this form of the garrison mentality is as futile as it was in earlier times. When you have failed to establish physical or spiritual harmony with your environment, hostility is the only alternative to compete with emptiness and unmeaning. Hopelessly caught within themselves - avoiding open confrontation - life for the Bentleys is a continuing repression of their emotional and physical selves, "for of such must be the household of a minister of God".[76] It is small wonder that Philip is a failure, and his ministrations to the drought-stricken farmers a futile joke: "Five years in succession now they've been blown out, dried out, hailed out; and it was if in the face of so blind and uncaring a universe they were trying to assert themselves."[77]

In the face of such Divine neglect, greater believers than Philip Bentley have lost their faith. It is as though he has been sentenced to his hell on earth, forced to live a daily

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73 Ibid., p. 81
74 Woodcock, George: Introducing Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House.- Toronto: ECW Press, 1990.- p. 51
75 Ross, Sinclair: As For Me and My House.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1941].- p. 131
76 Ibid., p. 10
77 Ibid., p. 26

lie. Talking about lies we are coming to a third aspect which bears hard on the Bentleys' emotional balance. Unlike many other prairie characters the Bentleys do not live in physical isolation but are members of a community. As such their mental stability is not only affected by their barren and indifferent surroundings, they are further challenged by Horizon itself and the narrow-minded small town mentality it stands for. It is the term "Main Street" which echoes almost as insistently through the novel as the wind and the dust. By using the term Mrs. Bentley is not really referring to a specific place or specific places, but a collective state of mind that unites not only the people within a single community, but also the whole complex of lost prairie communities of the same kind and the first thing that comes to mind in this context is, of course, Sinclair Lewis' novel *Main Street* published in 1920. And indeed there are great similarities between the two novels. Both present a small town prairie community, hidebound, conservative and spiritually constricting, nurturing its prejudices and its jealousies in the ragged false-front buildings that line its Main Street. A community of so-called Christians, most of them biased, bigoted, and obsessed with power and status. As W.J. Keith has noted the "architectural false fronts of Horizon" most clearly "reflect the personal false fronts of its inhabitants (the Bentleys included).[78] Mrs. Bentley's hypocrisy is so ingrained that she is positively offended by Philip's compassionate sketches of the false fronts along Main Street.

> False fronts ought to be laughed at, never understood or pitied. They are such outlandish things, the front of a store built up to look like a second storey. They ought always to be seen that way, pretentious, ridiculous , never as Philip sees them, stricken with a look of self-awareness and futility. [79]

She cannot perceive that she is condemning herself with these words, for if anyone in Horizon has erected a false front, it is the wife of the new minister. It must be said, however, that Mrs. Bentley, despite a rather warped perception, makes many observations that gleam with insight, for there are other times when Mrs. Bentley herself is fully conscious that she, like Philip, is presenting her own false front, times when she seems to accept it as a necessary act. After a confrontation with the church leaders of Horizon, she notes: "I'm not so thin-skinned as he is anyway. I resigned myself to sanctimony years ago. Today I was only putting our false front up again."[80] But even though Mrs. Bentley prefers to think of her hypocrisy as an attitude she can set aside at will, a candid moment brings her to the conclusion that it is a more fundamental part of her than she usually cares to believe.

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78 Keith, W.J.: Canadian Literature in English.- London: Longman, 1985.- p. 140

79 Ross, Sinclair: As For Me and My House.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1941].- p. 7

80 Ibid., p. 81

> I speak or laugh, and suddenly in my voice catch a hint of benediction. It just means I suppose, that all these years the Horizons have been working their will on me. My heresy, perhaps, is less than I sometimes think. [81]

In her identification with all the Horizons, all the petty towns with their false fronts, Mrs. Bentley comes as close as she ever does to a genuine insight on her life. Yet her promises to reform her small-town mentality shrivel and die as regularly as her pathetic little flower garden which itself is yet another indication of the barrenness and futility of their situation. It does quite well for a while, but finally succumbs - a victim to her neglects as much as a victim to the drought and the wind. As Mrs. Bentley says of Philip, in words that equally apply to her own condition,

> "Because you're a hypocrite you lose your self-respect, because you lose your self-respect you lose your initiative and self-belief - it's the same vicious circle, every year closing a little tighter." [82]

There is no need to believe that Philip is any less aware of being a hypocrite or of the emotional consequences of sustained hypocrisy than Mrs. Bentley, yet it is she rather than he who has resolved to break the cycle of repeated pretence and eventual rejection by taking the deceased Judith's illegitimate child as her own and confronting her husband Philip with her knowledge that he is the father. "I've fought it out with myself and won at last." [83] After an emotional confrontation over Philip's affair with Judith the Bentleys reconcile. It is a kind of reconciliation in the light of common purposes - the adoption of young Philip and the final abandonment of the repeated spiral of small-town preaching to enter at least the verge of the world of culture and intellect by starting a bookstore with the money Mrs. Bentley has set. The novel ends with the Bentleys preparing to leave. Whether their dream will ultimately be fulfilled is undetermined in the novel, leaving it essentially open-ended. The concluding images are ambiguous, but to me it seems doubtful that their effort and new family situation will lead to renewal as their new life is once again based on a lie. Viewed objectively, the Bentleys appear quite monstrous in their treatment of innocent Judith. So enthusiastic is Mrs. Bentley about acquiring the baby that she fails to notice Judith's martyrdom, who died the day after the baby was born - alone, rejected by her family and community. She has gone out into the field where she is found, exhausted and ill, "wandering in her mind". With supreme irony, Judith's mother tells her,

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81 Ibid., p. 123
82 Ibid., p. 112
83 Ibid., p. 202

"You and your husband are good people, You're real Christians, and I'm glad you're taking the baby. I was hoping maybe she'd talk to you, so we could find out who it was and make him marry her - but maybe like this it's better. She was always a hard, unfeeling girl." [84]

Although Mrs. Bentley eventually distinguishes between mindless coping and mindful action the illegitimacy of their child is most likely to haunt them and the generation to come for even if Mrs. Bentley detects in the baby's eyes "a stillness, a freshness, a vacancy of beginning"[85], he is nevertheless, as his name and heritage ironically suggest, destined to be another Philip. And even if the way Philip's yearning for a family is finally fulfilled can be regarded as his "most triumphal defiance of the world of puritan values"[86] since it is a revolt against the traditional family by creating one based on illegitimacy, we still have to bear in mind that he is ironically continuing the lineage of illegitimacy which always suffered from immensely. Above all, however, it seems more than doubtful that they will really be able to cast off the ever-present menace of the environment which throughout the novel has been presented with such intensity.

As befits their situation early prairie writers favour a darker view of prairie experience, which is why it is usually the nightmarish aspect of the pioneers existence which is emphasized. If not a tragic view their works at least convey a painful sense of human failure and waste, weakness and suffering in prairie life. They no longer dramatized the prairie's promise but its threat. For them the millennial harmony between man and nature implied in the early romances of pioneering was an illusion.

The picture of madness presented here is thus by necessity basically one of suffering and breakdown and although the accounts of madness are fictional, the style of presentation is essentially realistic. The characters who feature in this chapter are losing the struggle for control and coherence as a person. They are individuals who, while grappling with private sorrows, enact a story of painful withdrawal, forced isolation, and personal confusion. One discovers that most of the pieces of fiction under discussion here dramatize the stages of psychic collapse, focus on the process of gradual deterioration until the protagonist finally loses his mind. Rarely is the plot restricted to the crucial turning point, instead there are a number of incidents or confrontations during which the character's dislocation is made increasingly apparent. The resolution tends to involve the elimination - through death or incarceration - of the character. The main preoccupation is with despair, suffering, disorientation, not

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84 Ibid., p. 211
85 Ibid., p. 216
86 Woodcock, George: Introducing Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House.- Toronto: ECW Press, 1990.-p. 93

with mental health. Consequently, the image of madness does not engage our fantasies of irresponsible escape; its focus is on the human cost of such affliction.

5. Madness as Sacrifice

5.1 Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*

In some ways Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* could be termed a prairie novel as the prairie wind is one of the activating forces in the novel, plunging father and son towards catastrophe. It could also be regarded as an immigrant novel as it depicts the weight of convention in the lives of a family of Jewish immigrants to Canada and portrays the distortion of Old World tradition and value, the distress between generations imposed by the New World and the clash of opposing cultures. Certainly containing elements of both it is of a still larger scope, because the immigrant experience here is not an end in itself, but the supporting structure upon which Wiseman builds "a complex allegory of spiritual compulsion"[1].

Abraham and Sarah had fled from the Ukraine and the horrors of a pogrom in which the two elder sons Jacob and Moses were murdered on an Easter Sunday, during Passover. Together with their surviving son Isaac they came to Canada and settled into the Jewish section of an unnamed Canadian prairie city. Isolated by language, by belief, and by custom from the Canadian world surrounding them, they are still nurtured by the Jewish community they live in and the conflicts which arise in the course of the novel, conflicts which will eventually lead to deadly sacrifice, murder and madness, are not so much the result of the immigrant situation, but rather grounded in Abraham's relation to his God, from whom he has subconsciously exiled himself ever since the death of his sons, "an exile which cannot be escaped"[2], even in Canada, and the relationship between father and son.

Abraham stands for all that is fine and responsible in the eastern European Jewish orthodox tradition. His characteristic statement is, "God willing, you will grow"[3], and his whole aim in life is to see his family flourish. Having lost his other sons Abraham puts all his hope in his remaining son which is bound to lead to conflict since Isaac, himself a doubter if not an unbeliever, does not share his father's faith. Abraham watches with distress Isaac's apparent assimilation to the new country and culture -

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1 Moss, John: A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987.- p. 378
2 Moss, John: Patterns of Isolation in Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974.- p. 97
3 Wiseman, Adele: The Sacrifice.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1988 [1956].-p. 93

especially when this assimilation leads to frequent breaks with orthodox Jewish tradition - as he is for instance working Saturdays.

Isaac's scepticism and Abraham's certainty lead to great anxieties and frequent dramatic debates. At some point Isaac asks his wife Ruth, "Do I really see things he doesn't see, or does he just see them in a different perspective?"[4] and later he poses the question to Abraham: "And if we can't seem to see the same thing in the same way at different times, how can we tell what is the true way of seeing it?"[5] Bearing heavy under the expectations of his father, Isaac is haunted by a dream in which he finds himself

> imprisoned in a transparent bubble of some plastic material. It pressed inward with a constant contracting pressure, forcing him to brace his feet and hands against its inner surface to prevent himself from being crushed. As long as he pushed outward with all his strength it maintained its size. If he relaxed slightly it shrank in on him.[6]

When Isaac later sacrifices himself to preserve what his father prizes most by rescuing the Sepher Torah from a fire in the synagogue, it is not an act of faith. He rather becomes a sacrifice to his father's conception of what he should be. It is as the widowed Ruth later accuses the old man, "You wanted one son should make up for three."[7] Isaac's weak heart could not endure the burden of expectation, nor the consequences of trying to fulfil it. Shortly before he dies from his burns and a ruined heart he tells Ruth about his dream. It is then that he comes to realize how divided his attitude towards this prison place really is and how much it symbolizes the dilemma he has always been faced with:

> If I broke through I'd no longer have the sphere as my boundary, but I'd lose its protection too. The bubble bursts, and I burst with it, into the unknown. On the other hand, if I give way I collapse, I am crushed, again into the unknown. Aren't the two things in the same, my victory and my defeat both illusory?[8]

Isaac's "breakdown" leads to a similar split in his father - a division within himself and a retreat from his fellow man. Ever since Isaac's heroism "there have been two voices" in Abraham: "all the time while one voice rejoices the other is whispering.

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4 Ibid., p. 117
5 Ibid., p. 147
6 Ibid., p. 197
7 Ibid., p. 290
8 Ibid., p. 199

What is wrong, then?"[9] Losing his determination after Isaac's death Abraham starts to give up on life:

> It was a sin against life for a man to pry into the ways of death. But his thoughts kept slipping back longingly. He would sink deep, deep down. He would no longer grasp after the bits and pieces of his life. He would forget. He would leave the surface noises. A deep current could carry him swiftly, noiselessly, indifferently .[10]

His desire to die, be relieved of his pain and join the others becomes more and more pressing. Thinking of all the ones he has lost he finds himself in a sort of terrifying dream where he rushes among their coffins

> trying to pry open the tops, trying to find something. But the lids had been closed very tightly. He tore at them with his fingers, hammered on them, cried out to them, one after the other, unintelligible things. [...] But the coffins remained still. [...] Like some four-footed creature he scuttled from one to the other calling out their names. "Let me in," he was begging them finally, and it seemed to him that all he wanted now was just this, for one of the lids to lift itself so that he could fling himself in too and lie silent with the rest of them, without having to see or hear or know or care.[11]

Unable to deal with the accumulation of tragedies in his life, Abraham listens less and becomes more stubborn and most of the final half of the novel is a build-up to Abraham's total disintegration and growing alienation which often find expression in the arguments with his daughter-in-law. From his grandson Moses' thoughts it becomes clear that the nature of arguments has changed in Abraham's household:

> There have been quarrels before in the house. But there was something about the way they used to argue long ago, when his father was alive, that had been different. There had not been the feeling then, hanging in the air, that they were somehow implacably, hatefully, opposed to each other, that each was somehow sure that the other was trying to do vital harm. [12]

As before, they make up, but it is obvious that they are pushing each other to the limit. Both are vacillating between controlling their feelings and their words and giving vent to their pain. Accusing him of being a wholly self-regarding egoist, Ruth accelerates his schizoid propensities as her words cut additional gaps in the old man's life:

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9 Ibid., p. 229
10 Ibid., p. 226
11 Ibid., p. 225f.
12 Ibid., p. 249

> He had come, begging to know, to understand and suddenly a mirror had been flipped up in his face and he himself stood revealed as he was to another - a stranger, an enemy, an egoist. […] It was as though another vital part of her had been slashed away with him, as he was all contorted, trying to hold his wounded members in place and at the same time trying to fend off with his own fury the fury that threatened to dismember him entirely.[13]

That they have reached the point of no return and that Abraham's reasonable side is not allowed to regain control is made clear as he comes to acknowledge that "at the back of his mind there was a horrified admiration for the way he could rip her words from his own wounds and with a twist send them, like knives, whistling back at her"[14]. "Tearing like beasts at the raw entrails and the naked heart"[15] their words have lost their productive nature having degenerated into weapons instead. It is at this point that Abraham comes to see the potential for evil in himself. He who has consciously chosen the path of creation finds himself assuming the role of destroyer. Distraught by this revelation, Abraham emerges from the violence of this argument, no longer in control of his actions, thoughts, and word.

> As though invisibly propelled, he headed through the hot summer air, unaware of direction, scarcely aware even of the piston movement of his legs, and totally unaware that he was speaking his thoughts aloud to the night air around him.[16]

In this state, completely divorced from the present reality, he almost mechanically goes to the one person whom he has come to identify with the negation of life: Laiah, the woman he became enthralled with after his wife had died. As the community's loose woman she is the individualistic anarchist whom Abraham with regard to her barren promiscuity comes to see as the embodiment of the denial of life: "She had denied creation, and to deny is to annihilate."[17] A challenge to which she had earlier replied:

> "So you had sons, so they're dead, and I have never had sons, never wanted children; they are dead in my womb. Where are we both now? Both empty, both interchangeable from the beginning. […] But the difference is in the choosing, he argued. I chose life. "[18]

Abraham's mind is "zigzagging" back and forth from past to present while Laiah unaware of the scope of his confusion and the contradictory, fragmenting forces within

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13 Ibid., pp. 286 f., 288
14 Ibid., p. 289
15 Ibid., p. 287
16 Ibid., p. 291f.
17 Ibid., p. 261
18 Ibid., p. 262

him approaches him with her body heat - an insensitivity which will turn out to have a disastrous effect. That it is an insensitivity which stems not so much from blackness or evil in her soul as from simplicity he does not see. As a result, he is incapable of taking Laiah's unambiguous advances for what they are. Laiah makes her intentions clear when she states that there is "an affinity" between the two of them and then squeezes Abraham's hand. However, her physical advance does not seem to register with Abraham. What is important to him is the word "affinity" and the suggestion, to his mind, that he and Laiah have something in common - namely, evil.

> Of all the voices that are given to a man I took the voice of praise; of all the paths I chose the path of creation, of life. I thought that merely in the choosing I had discarded all else. I thought that I could choose. One by one, with such ease, they were stripped from me. Wherever I look there is a shadow, a shadow that all my life I did not see, I tried to ignore. The shadow grows about me, filling in the corners of my emptiness, darkening my desire. You've waited for me, empty, all this time. [...] No matter what a man did, no matter how hard he tried, no matter how great his desire, was it all reduced to this, to a dream pantomime of life, a shadow of meaning? Did he come at last to accept the shadow, to embrace the emptiness, to acknowledge his oneness with the fruit without seed, with death, his other self? [19]

What grows within him is an awareness of the "other part of him - that was empty, unbelieving, the negation of life, the womb of death" so that in the imminence of the sacrificial murder of Laiah he acknowledges "his oneness with the fruit without seed, with death, his other self"[20] and gets rid of it by appropriately killing the woman who, despite her promiscuity had never borne children, and in Abraham's mind "was like a giant overripe fruit without seed, which hung now, long past its season, on the bough"[21].

Rather than investigating the evil, or at least the potential for evil, in himself, he has run away from it by placing it all on a scapegoat, someone who will become his sacrificial victim. Blinded by his too private perception of evil, he has come to see her not only as someone who negates life but as "the negation of his life"[22] Having surrendered all moral responsibility he murders her in a sacrifice to his own tortured concept of God. As he cuts her throat his dead sons are seemingly present:

> Life! cried Isaac as the blood gushed from her throat and her frantic fingers gripped first, then relaxed and loosened finally their hold on his beard. Life! pleaded Jacob as Abraham stared,

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19 Ibid., pp. 299 f.
20 Ibid., p. 300
21 Ibid., p. 261
22 Ibid., p. 303

> horrified, into her death-glazed eyes. Life! chanted Moses as he smelled, sickened, the hot blood that had spurted onto his beard. [23]

They appear to him together in Laiah's death, and the realisation of what he has symbolically if not actually done soon comes to him: "It was plain that in some way he confused the dead woman with his dead children. Sometimes from the way he spoke you could almost believe that he thought he had killed God himself." [24]

The physical and psychic horror of the murder of Laiah becomes, as Moss rightly suggests, "the violence of the Jew's relations with his God"[25]. Significantly, however, the novel does not end here. Instead, it concludes on a very positive note, a note of reconciliation. The murder was an act of exorcism. It is the killing of the false God he had carried around within him, the God of his own tormented consciousness, the killing of the God of death, which eventually frees his dead sons at last and restores Abraham to the true God. "The reality of Zion", Moss concludes, "is found in Abraham's madness transcended in the mountain asylum by Moses' vision of a joyous continuity"[26]. A tortuous existence which culminated in murder is finally brought to an end by the exchange of love and spiritual continuity in an asylum removed from the world. Moses has gone up Mad Mountain to visit his grandfather where after all this disintegration, the two of them are united in a reconciliation of vision and action. As such the ending of the novel is an interesting modification of the conclusion of *Wacousta* as the reconciliation between the past and the present, relativism and absolutism occurs in the third generation when Moses, the grandson, learns his humanity out of the complex play of relations.[27] His friend, Aaron, is going to Israel to help begin a new nation. Moses, however, elects to remain in Canada. In the closing sentence of the novel, Moses pulls himself together after the crucial meeting with his grandfather and looks "curiously about him at his fellow man"[28]. Abraham's sacrifice of Laiah and his own sanity are thus the sacrifices for a new beginning. Suffering and madness in *The Sacrifice* not only eventuated in a higher wisdom but a collective catharsis as well.

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23 Ibid., p. 304

24 Ibid., p. 327

25 Moss, John: Patterns of Isolation in Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart,1974.-p. 90

26 Ibid., p. 90

27 cf. Mathews, Robin: The Wacousta Factor.- In: Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of Sheila Watson / ed. by Diane Bessai and David Jackel.- Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1979 [1978].- pp. 295-316.-

28 Wiseman, Adele: The Sacrifice.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1988 [1956].- p. 346

5.2 Morley Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*

Another novel where the madness of the protagonist can be regarded as a surrender to the spirit of the true God is Morley Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved.*

What is important for the treatment of madness in this book, however, is to determine at the outset whether one regards *Such Is My Beloved* as written in a naturalistic vein or as operating on a symbolic level, a question which has been object to much dispute within literary criticism. Dahlie for instance holds that Callaghan has never been able to shake off completely the naturalistic bias of his earlier novels in which his indecisive protagonists were in part victims of economic, social, and sexual forces.[29] While such commentators as F.W. Watt, Desmond Pacey, and Victor Hoar agree that Callaghan's earliest work has shown the strong influence of naturalism or determinism, displaying people at the mercy of forces larger than themselves[30], they nonetheless hold that by the time of *Such Is My Beloved* Callaghan "gave up", as Pacey puts it, "the negative futility that marked the early novels [...] and concentrated upon the spiritual lives of his characters"[31].

While the apparent plausibility of background and of minor action may at first deceive the reader, neither the characters nor the structures of action in these novels are in any sense realistic. Considered as a probable human being, Father Dowling is absurd, as those who regard the novel as realistic have variously pointed out. If we consider him, however, as Woodcock has, as the 'Holy Fool' of a moral allegory, he at once assumes authenticity. The actions of the characters themselves are as unrealistic as the destinies that rule them. "Father Dowling's actions", Woodcock holds, "like his character, assume meaning - even in merely aesthetic terms - only if we regard them as contributing to the symbolic structure of a moral statement."[32]

Most critics of Morley Callaghan have thus come to focus on his predominantly moral qualities. Hugo McPherson views Callaghan as a "religious writer", one who "has given us a modern vision of the human condition".[33] Just as Brandon Conron points

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29 Dahlie, Hallvard: Destructive Innocence in the Novels of Morley Callaghan.- In: Journal of Canadian Fiction 1:3 (1972), p. 40

30 Watt, Frank W.: Morley Callaghan as Thinker.- In: Dalhousie Review 39 (Autumn 1959), pp. 305-313.- ; Hoar, Victor: Morley Callaghan: Studies in Canadian Literature.- Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969.-; Pacey, Desmond: Fiction 1920-1940.- In: A Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English / ed. by Carl F. Klinck.- Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.- esp. pp. 688-93.-

31 Pacey, Desmond: Fiction 1920-1940.- In: A Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English / ed. by Carl F. Klinck.- Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.- p. 691

32 Woodcock, George: Lost Eurydice: The Novels of Morley Callaghan.- In: Canadian Literature 21 (1964), p. 30

33 McPherson, Hugo: The Two Worlds of Morley Callaghan.- In: Morley Callaghan: Critical Views on Canadian Writers / ed. by Brandon Conron.- Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975.- p. 61

to Callaghan's explorations of the complexities of individual moral choice [34], George Woodcock views his works as "essentially moralistic"[35]. This critical appraisal is not surprising as Callaghan, above all, is an artist intent on the investigation of what is vital in individual human experience, issues such as freedom, responsibility, the extent of deterministic influences - in effect, the world of the self in relation to other men, society, and God. His fiction transcends the merely topical and dwells within the realm of the universal. This is to say that although the whole air and idiom of *Such Is My Beloved* belongs to the Thirties, the Thirties of the depression, of insecurity, unemployment, malnutrition, meanness and, although it is the depression conditions that originally drive Ronnie and Midge to prostitution, it is no more a novel of social analysis than it is one of political propaganda. As essentially all of his novels, *Such Is My Beloved* is a novel of moral predicament, as the titles already indicate.[36] Each one asks its question. How far can a man be free when his every act affects the lives of others? Can the individual assert and maintain his human dignity in an acquisitive society? Is sainthood merely pride? Is goodness recognizable without the presence of evil? In the case of *Such Is My Beloved* the basic questions posed are clearly: what are the bounds of Christian love and is goodness merely foolishness?

Father Stephen Dowling, the main protagonist, is an assistant priest at a Roman Catholic Cathedral in a district rapidly crumbling into slums. He shines with a special bloom of innocence, health and sincerity and performs his priestly duties with an eager devotion. He is eloquent in the pulpit, patient in the confessional and conscientious in visiting. He is a charming enthusiast and a strong believer in a Church founded on principles of humility, love, and charity, the true church of God, the spirit of man. In his genuine love for mankind he is deeply touched by the fate of two young prostitutes who operate from a hotel across from the Toronto cathedral and wants to help them. However, Dowling is predestined to failure in his redemptive quest by the world in which he lives. His endeavours to redeem Ronnie and Midge come to reflect Callaghan's exploration of the central dialectic between the restrictive, material forces of the earthly world, and the more comprehensive, spiritual ethos of the eternal world and its significance in human affairs.

Father Dowling, who is free of selfish or ulterior motives in the actions he finds himself involved in, soon has to find out that there is no room for genuine charity in his moral environment. Wherever he turns in his compassionate and idealistic

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34 Conron, Brandon: Introduction to Morley Callaghan: Critical Views on Canadian Writers / ed. by Brandon Conron.- Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975.- p. 4

35 Woodcock, George: Lost Eurydice: The Novels of Morley Callaghan.- In: Morley Callaghan / ed. by Brandon Conron.- Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975.- p. 89

36 *More Joy in Heaven* (1935), *The Loved and the Lost* (1951), and *A Time for Judas* (1983).

attempt to lead Midge and Ronnie out of sin, he meets with rebuff. Looking for help Dowling asks James Robison, a wealthy lawyer, "who had always been willing to assist the priests in their charitable work"[37], if he could get a job for the girls. Wealthy, upper-class, "aristocratic" and "devout",[38] the Robisons are seen as two of the finest people of the parish. However, appearances are deceiving. Dowling painfully comes to realise that the Robisons, who stand for the bourgeois world in general, embrace a corruption beneath the false front of social reputation. Despite his generous contributions to charity, Mr. Robison is characterised by a total lack of Christian love. His benevolent activities are inspired by little more than an ostentatious self-interest: "if he gave a large amount to charity he expected his name to be put at the head of the list in the newspaper".[39] He can view the girls only as "objects of charity", not human souls in need of compassion. The same holds true for his wife who, when Father Dowling brings them to their house, shows nothing but contempt for them. She sees the girls purely in sociological terms: "all prostitutes are feeble-minded".[40] Mrs. Robison responds to the girls as problematic aspects of a diseased society only. However, it is not only bourgeois society which is harshly criticised by Callaghan. He also points at the shortcomings of the supposedly more humane Marxist approach to society. To Callaghan the ultimate failure of Marxism can be seen in its neglect of the personal, in its reduction of the individual to a faceless extension of an economic phenomenon. This idea forms the basis of Charlie Stewart's approach to the prostitution problem:

> "In the perfectly organized state there would be no streetwalkers. If the state has a proper control of the means of livelihood, it's never necessary for a woman of her own accord would ever do such work. It's too damned degrading. But if in the idea state there were still women who were streetwalkers out of laziness or refusal to work steadily then they would be kicked out or interned somewhere for laziness, or as non-producers. Then they'd have to work or starve. Your mistake is seeing this as a religious problem. Its really an economic problem." [41]

In contrast to Father Dowling's intense love for the two streetwalkers, Charlie, despite his humanistic beliefs, fails to perceive the totality of the individual human personality. All in all we are confronted here with a harsh accusation of a society which, through selfishness and lack of charity, seems at times dedicated to the

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37 Callaghan, Morley: Such is My Beloved.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994 [1934].- p. 47
38 Ibid., p. 47
39 Ibid., p. 48
40 Ibid., p. 113
41 Ibid., p. 151f.

destruction of the innocent. This refers to the prostitutes as well as to Father Dowling himself.

Quite incapable of comprehending the perverse nature of the world he occupies Father Dowling already starts to question not only his surroundings, but his (worldly) church as well. After the incident with Midge and Ronnie at the Robisons' home he is walking home feeling

> that they had given him his hat and had put him out of the house, just as though he were the neighborhood nuisance [...] his anger and disgust alternated so sharply that he did not realize he was back at the cathedral till he looked up and saw the spire and saw, too, the cross at the peak thrust up against the stars and felt no sudden affection but just a cool disgust, as if the church no longer belonged to him.[42]

Urged by his wife Robison calls on the Bishop to "warn him that the young priest was apt to precipitate a scandal that would shame every decent Catholic in the city"[43]. The Bishop, himself as much a hypocrite as Robison, is also deeply worried about his good public relations. He too regards the whole episode as a trifling "piece of folly"[44] - a folly which could disrupt his charity campaign. Despite the later pangs of conscience he remains adamant in his decision to discipline the ardent priest and to have the two girls sent out of town, which they indeed are after they have been arrested.

The Church or rather the Church as a human institution, personified in the character of Bishop Foley, has thus failed Dowling just as much. While the point of religion should be the expression and refinement of humanity, it turns out that many of its attitudes are only ritualistic certifications of bourgeois prejudices. When Dowling is asked to see the Bishop once the girls have been forced to leave town the two of them get into an argument in the course of which Foley remarks: "I should imagine the notion of prostitution alone would make you sick with disgust." To which Dowling replies:

> "If I start hating prostitutes where am I going to stop? [...] These girls have prostituted their bodies. All around us here are all kinds of people prostituting their souls and their principles for money. I know people in this city who prostitute their faith for sake of expediency. I watch

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42 Ibid., p. 113
43 Ibid., p. 116
44 Ibid., p. 123

it going on all around and wonder how corrupt our faith can become before it dies. So if I can't have charity for those girls, certainly I can have no love for many others in higher places."[45]

The Bishop, unimpressed by Dowling's words and losing his patience, demands obedience nonetheless. Father Dowling is now faced with the dogma of infallibility, not simply with the Christian need to recognise and conform to the will of God. He is concerned with the Church in the world whose interpretations and machinations seem to pervert the service of God. In the Roman Catholic belief the dogma of infallibility is not alone the prerogative of the Pope, but extends to the Bishop as well. It is the supernatural prerogative by which the Church of Christ is, by a special Divine assistance, preserved from liability to error in its definitive dogmatic teaching regarding matters of faith and morals. Father Dowling then is not simply refusing to agree with - though he will obey - his Bishop, he is, in fact, in serious conflict with the Church as an institution. He is concerned for Ronnie and Midge, but he is also deeply concerned with the general problem of infallibility and the obstructions to human love, the impediments to holy life. "Obedience is necessary", he recognized, yet "he knew that in his thoughts he could not obey the Bishop".[46] That unresolved tension culminates in Dowling's final insanity, a state that he offers up as a sacrifice to God. Divine love cannot block the determined actions of the Robisons, the courts and the Bishop. Confronted by their inability to compromise, Dowling goes mad, refusing to give up despite all that works against him. He is left with incompatibles - obedience to the Bishop, and love for the girls - both of which are to him inescapable.

The offence Father Dowling has chosen to commit is to go outside the routes for treating such people sanctioned by the Church and the State. The approved institutional modes are those of rescue, punishment, and, in the last resort, banishment. Their common note is one of detachment from an object, kindly or severe or even ruthless as the circumstances require. However, Father Dowling's vocation by nature and profession is to personal engagement with a subject. By the end of the novel the two attitudes have been completely exposed and opposed in an angry antimony. The resolution is uneventful and muted, a quiet, ordinary close to the agitation. Dowling himself becomes the victim of social, ecclesiastical, and legal punishment. With regard to the outcome of the novel both James and Aaron find themselves reminded of Herman Melville's dictum "that anyone who tries to apply literally the teachings of the New Testament ends up in jail or the psychiatric hospital"[47]. Yet, even if Father Dowling has failed by all temporal standards in his

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45 Ibid., p. 158

46 Ibid., p. 159

47 James, William Closson: The Ambiguities of Love in Moreley Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*.- In: Canadian Literature 138/139 (1993), pp. 41 f.; Aaron, David: Morley Callaghan and the Great Depression.- In: The Callaghan Symposium 7

quest, I agree with Pacey and McPherson when they say that he nevertheless has, in the best sense of Christian faith, triumphed.[48]

He is sent to the psychiatric hospital by the lake, where held "by an absolute stillness within him", he continues to pray in this idyllic setting as he looks at "the new ploughed land" and the "rich brown fertile soil".[49] Unable to do anything more to affect their material condition, Dowling concludes by offering up his sanity as a sacrifice for the souls of the girls. In the novel's concluding lines three stars appear above the water:

> There was a peace within him as he watched the calm, eternal waters swelling darkly against the one faint streak of light, the cold night light on the skyline. High in the sky three stars were out. His love seemed suddenly to be as steadfast as those stars, as wide as the water, and still flowering within him like the cold smooth waves still rolling on the shore.[50]

Callaghan seems to insist, that it is through this kind of transcendent love as "the only response which gives meaning to the inescapable facts of human weakness and pain"[51], that one is able to attain a personal, spiritual God. In some respect what Callaghan does in *Such Is My Beloved* is to move the priest's concern for the salvation of the souls of Midge and Ronnie into an adjacent realm where love becomes the transcendent value to be persevered in a hostile environment. As such Father Dowling comes to resemble the figure of the saint as it is perceived by F. in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* :

> A saint is someone who has achieved a remote human possibility. It is impossible to say what this possibility is. I think it has something to do with the energy of love. Contact with this energy results in the experience of a kind of balance in the chaos of existence. A saint does not dissolve the chaos; if he did the world would have changed long ago. I do not think that a saint dissolves the chaos even for himself, for there is something arrogant and warlike in the notion of a man setting the universe in order. It is a kind of balance that is his glory.[52]

/ ed. by David Staines.- Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1981.- p. 29

48 McPherson, Hugo: The Two Worlds of Morley Callaghan: Man's Earthly Quest.- Queen's Quarterly 64 (1957), p. 364; Pacey, Desmond: Fiction 1920-1940.- In: A Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English / ed. by Carl F. Klinck.- Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.- p. 691

49 Callaghan, Morley: Such is My Beloved.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, [1934] 1994.- p. 171

50 Ibid., p. 173

51 McPherson, Hugo: The Two Worlds of Morley Callaghan: Man's Earthly Quest.- Queen's Quarterly 64 (1957), p. 360

52 Cohen, Leonard: Beautiful Losers.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991 [1966].- p. 101

Even in the brief concluding chapter, after Dowling realizes and accepts his "insanity", he still hopes for periods of clarity in which to go on with his commentary on the Song of Songs.

> He realized that he was mad from worrying about Ronnie and Midge, but his worry and love for them now seemed stronger than ever before. "It must all be to some purpose," he thought. "It must be worth while, even my madness. It has some meaning, some end." [...] he thought with sudden joy that if he would offer up his insanity as a sacrifice to God, maybe God might spare the girls their souls.[53]

His evocation and exercise of a "more comprehensive love" reflects a Christian triumph of self-sacrifice. If *Such Is My Beloved* offers no solutions, economic or political, it at least entertains the dream, though not the possibility, of a society where persons aspire to ever greater social justice. Father Dowling in *Such Is My Beloved* and Abraham in *The Sacrifice* are both consigned to institutions, but it is through the sacrifice of their sanity that they are granted transcendental visions and knowledge and it is their 'divine madness' which elevates them above the wordlings to aspire to some higher goal. In their madness they have found their true God and their peace.

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53 Callaghan, Morley: Such is My Beloved.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994 [1934].- p. 172

6. Madness as Escape

6.1. Madness as a Way of Coping

The protagonist featuring in this chapter does not go mad because he battles against capricious or vindictive gods, or because he is forced to choose between warring absolutes such as love and honour, ambition and justice. Nor is it overwhelming passion that drives him to distraction. Rather, he is just an ordinary man trying to live his life, but this is where he is failing - for whatever reason. The source of these characters' madness is the inability to compromise, to make a reasonable - and hence sane - adjustment to what others call 'the facts of life'. The pathways to sanity chosen by others such as courage, endurance, seeing life as tragic but choosing to live it, are unavailable to them, instead they opt for retreat.

6.1.1 Mavis Gallant's *Green Water Green Sky*

One of the most emotionally provocative narratives which portray madness as a way or tactic of coping is Mavis Gallant's novel *Green Water, Green Sky* [1]. It is the sad and moving portrait of the grieves and losses of Flor Fairlie-Harris and her subsequent descent into madness.

Nowhere in Gallant's fiction is there a more complete or more compelling study of the smothering of an identity, or a more harrowing presentation of madness, both from within the character's consciousness and from surrounding points of view. And nowhere in Gallant's fiction is the power of the family atomised more closely as a necessary prison, a structure which both confers and confines identity. As Flor is among others a victim to the demands made on her as a woman, I might just as well have included this piece of fiction in the chapter dealing with women and madness. However, as this aspect, to my mind, is not the predominant cause for her subsequent retreat, but merely one among a variety of unbearable circumstances, and as it is the

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[1] originally published in The New Yorker in the summer of 1959 as three separate, although closely related stories: "Green Water, Green Sky", "August", and "Travellers Must Be Content".

aspect of the 'escape mechanism' I want to emphasise, I have chosen to discuss it here.[2]

Through a curious manipulation of point of view and of time Gallant leaves the reader to reconstruct Flor's development and deterioration from the fragments of relatively plotless, achronical remembrances. We are presented with the perceptions of several characters, but this multiple consciousness is reported in the words of a dislocated speaking subject or translator. Each shift in point of view indicates that a speaker is at work, "though the multiplicity of voices it projects obscures its own identity"[3]. Gallant thus forces the reader to question the certainty of memory, of narration - of reality.

Made up of four sections, the novel's first part recreates the distant past through memory of Flor's younger cousin George. Flor, an American teenager, and her mother Bonnie are residing in Venice. They have been living a transient and isolated existence in Europe since Bonnie's husband caught her in an affair and divorced her. Bonnie's decision to uproot herself and her daughter, to cut them off from the Fairlie family, constitutes a rupture with the past which shapes Flor's lack of a firm identity and sets in motion the fatally claustrophobic relationship between mother and daughter. Flor has pledged herself to care for her mother, who has been abandoned by the Fairlies, but she never gains the insight into her own motivation which would be necessary for her to establish an identity apart from her mother, as the narrator makes clear in describing Flor's declaration: "It was a solemn promise, a cry of despair, love and resentment so woven together that even Flor couldn't tell them apart."[4] Bonnie on the other hand makes Flor her sole centre of attention leaving her no room to find a centre of her own. The unnatural, destructive bond created between them becomes a force which gathers strength as Flor reaches adolescence, and which all the more clearly and inevitably precipitates Flor's deterioration.

Structurally the first part forms around two related scenes, one near the beginning and one at the conclusion of this opening section. The first scene takes place a few pages from the beginning of the novel. George has been tricked into spending the day with Bonnie and Flor while his parents sneak off for some time alone in Venice. As the three of them are returning from the beach, Flor buys a cheap necklace which breaks as she tries to pull it over her head:

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2 The same point could be made about some of the following pieces as well.

3 Smythe, Karen: *Green Water Green Sky*: Gallant's Discourse of Dislocation.- In: Studies in Canadian Literature 14:1 (1989), p. 74

4 Gallant, Mavis: Green Water, Green Sky.- Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1959.- p. 11

> The necklace breaking, the hotly blowing wind, excited Flor. She unstrung the beads still in her hand and flung them after the others, making a wild upward movement with her palms. [...] Flor did appear rather mad, with her hair flying and her dress blowing [...][5]

The gesture with which she flings its glass beads in the air in several ways signals her later deterioration. The narrative then skips ahead ten years to Flor's unpromising wedding to the wealthy American Jew, Bob Harris in New York. Here, George, who has only seen his cousin a few brief times in the intervening years, attempts to return to Flor one of the glass beads he has kept and cherished as a talisman. She, however, denies having bought the necklace or having broken it on purpose:

> "It's just that I'm not a person who breaks things," Flor said. "Of course, if you say it happened, it's true. I haven't much memory." "I thought you sort of broke it on purpose," he said. "Oh George," said Flor, shaking her head, "now I know it can't be real. That just isn't me. It didn't happen."[6]

Flor's refusal to remember or accept this facet of her past brought forward to her by George already hints at the relativity of memory and Flor's inability to distinguish between imagination and reality. The section closes with Flor refusing the talisman on the following grounds: "It wouldn't help me," said Flor. "We weren't ever in the same place. We don't need luck in the same way. We don't remember the same things."[7]

The second part is set in the more recent past. Flor is now living in Paris together with her husband and her mother. Her dissociation with the world, originating years ago when she and her mother began an endless cycle of wanderings, now takes over completely. Janice Kulyk Keefer suggests that Flor's insanity is directly related to the loss of her father, which precipitates an incurable mourning in her, and the subsequent unstable lifestyle that was afflicted upon her by her mother: "[l]oss of one's native family ground - of the past itself - is tantamount to loss of any convincing sense of self."[8] However, it is not only the abandonment by her father and her gypsy-like existence ever after which cause her to feel lost and confused as we will learn in the third part of the book. It takes us back to the summer when Flor and Bob met and is designed to provide us with more background information on the causes of Flor's complete retreat at the end of section two. This third section follows Wishart, a friend of Bonnie's, as he visits her in Cannes and observes with distaste the courtship of Flor and Bob Harris for, not only does it become evident that Flor is trapped within the

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5 Ibid., p.5
6 Ibid., p. 19
7 Ibid., p. 20
8 Keefer, Janice Kulyk: Reading Mavis Gallant.- Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989.- p. 79

confines of her mother's demands and her deluded aspirations for her, but that she has to cope with the demands placed upon her by Bob as well. Both Bob and Bonnie are projecting personalities on Flor in such a way that it becomes impossible for her to develop a genuine identity of her own.

Bob's original conception of the ideal woman is that of "some minor Germanic princess"[9] from the Biedermeier tradition transplanted into the twentieth century. However, because Flor cannot have children and does not fit this image of domesticity, Bob accommodates the image of Flor and she instead becomes the more radiant sexual object of the Impressionist tradition.[10] That she is indeed no more than an object to him is expressed in the following remark: "He had prized her beauty. It had made her an object as cherished as anything he might buy."[11]

Whereas Bob tries to mould Flor according to his concept of the ideal woman and wants to fit her into his neatly structured world, for Bonnie she becomes a projection of her desire to be *une belle dame sans merci*, a sensual yet spiritual Venus.[12] Neither of them sees her as a personality in her own right. Florence has thus so many images projected upon her that she is denied the opportunity to develop any authentic image of self. As she loses her grasp on reality, Flor tells Doris, "I'm a Victorian heroine";[13] she is not, however, the Victorian heroine of the Biedermeier, or Impressionist, or Pre-Raphaelite traditions. The "sick redhead, the dying, quivering fox"[14] as she sees herself she resembles more the image of the Victorian madwoman who is usually presented as absent-minded, singing with her hair let down and childlike mannerisms. Clement quite fittingly detects in her a close resemblance to "Munch's *The Sick Child* (1885), with her orange-red hair loose on the pillow".[15] It is a rather suitable comparison in that she is in some way a child that never really grew up to become a woman. Not to mention the fact that she is indeed "sick". This is a point which is also made by Bonnie when she says: "she's never been a woman. How can she feel what I feel? She's never even had her periods. [...] I'm fifty and I'm still a woman, and she's twenty-four and a piece of ice."[16] She is, however, too blind to see or unwilling to admit to herself that this is partly her fault. Wishart further suggests

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9 Gallant, Mavis: Green Water, Green Sky.- Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1959.- p. 105

10 Ibid., p. 37

11 Ibid., p. 37

12 Ibid., p. 105

13 Ibid., p. 72

14 Ibid., p. 67

15 Clement, Lesley D.: Artistry in Mavis Gallant's *Green Water, Green Sky*: The Composition of Structure, Pattern, and Gyre.- In: Canadian Literature (129) 1991.- p. 65

16 Ibid., p. 114

that Flor's "cheeky outbursts, fit for a child of twelve, were innocent attempts to converse. Because of the way her mother had dragged her around, because she had never been part of a fixed society, she didn't know how people talked"[17]. This moreover leaves her incapable of articulating herself: "Sometimes when I want to speak [...] something comes between my thoughts and my words."[18] Unable to translate her state of mind and confusion into words that will communicate her experience to others she is incapable of seeking consolation in self-expression. This silent cry also hints at the fatal overall absence of effective communication within the novel which is, among other things, indicated by the fact that Flor leaves the letters from her husband unopened on the grounds that "he was not saying anything to her"[19]. "Nothing was said, nothing was said about anything"[20], which basically makes it a novel about things that are not said. Dizzily wandering through the streets, talking to herself, Flor tells "an imagined Bonnie, "It was always your fault. I might have been a person, but you made me a foreigner. It was always the same, even back home.""[21] Significantly, she directs this blame to an "imagined Bonnie" instead of confronting her mother directly.

All these factors indeed affect Flor to the point where, seemingly, there is no order left in life on any level. Completely exiled in every respect,[22] her psyche achieves a rootlessness which is expressed in the following lines: "She was in a watery world of perceptions, where impulses, doubts, intentions, detached from their roots, rise to the surface and expand."[23] Flor's image of the world is like Bob's modern painting, in which Flor sees no structure, no pattern, only exploding, floating forms, "absolute proof that the universe was disintegrating and that it was vain and foolish to cry for help".[24] In her psychic dislocation she thus tries to find consolation in imaginary realms. With no sense of self, she cannot gain any perspective and more and more comes to seek relief in the world of dreams. Only "dreams experienced in the grey terrain between oblivion and life"[25] can provide her with the calm she now seeks. "Her desire for sleep and dreams took the shape of a boat. Every day it pulled away

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17 Ibid., p. 103

18 Ibid., p.67

19 Ibid., p. 78

20 Ibid., p.64

21 Ibid., p. 29

22 To Moss she is "the ultimate expatriate and, in many ways, the personification of post-war society". See: Moss, John: Moss, John: A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel.- Toronto: McClelland & Steward,1987.- p. 126

23 Gallant, Mavis: Green Water, Green Sky.- Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1959.- p. 111

24 Ibid., p. 43

25 Ibid., p. 30

from the shore but was forced to return."[26] No longer wanting to return she increasingly dislocates herself from her surroundings. She even withdraws from her therapy as she feels that Dr. Linetti can be of no help to her.[27] With the "lethal pen", the "instrument of separation",[28] she writes a letter to her analyst in which she informs her about her intention of ending the interviews. She closes the letter by remarking:

> "What help can you give me? [...] Are you anything to me? When you go home to your husband and children do you wonder about me? Are we friends? Then why bother about me at all?"[29]

That she is drawing closer to the verge of complete breakdown is implicated in the scene where she becomes became brisk and busy and decides to make one dress of two, fastening the bodice of one to the skirt of the other. "For two days she sewed this dress and in one took it apart. She unpicked it stitch by stitch and left the pieces on the floor."[30] The dress as a metaphor of her soul and its fragmentation is indicative of her inability to establish or piece together a coherent identity for herself. She is not even able to recognise the image on the mirror as an image of herself, thinking instead that her reflection is some other person watching and witnessing her.[31]

Noticing Flor's increasing psychological deterioration, Bonnie is reluctant to leave her alone for August, when Bob will be away on business and she is to visit friends. She writes to her sister-in-law:

> "Flor is getting so queer, I don't know her any more. I'm afraid to leave her alone in August, but she pulls such tantrums if I say I'll stay that I'm giving in."[32]

Flor, finally left alone, sinks into a torpor, wandering through the apartment, hoping to "achieve the dreams she desired".[33] However, her dreams elude her, as does any sane entrance into her own interior life. And finally, driven out of the apartment into

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26 Ibid., p. 74

27 Indeed, psychoanalysis as such and Freudian doctrine in particular, is treated quite ironically in the novel, as implicated by the following cutting description of Doris Fischer, a young American woman in Paris who fastens onto Flor for a time:
"Doris was proud of her education - a bundle of notions she trundled before her like a pram containing twins. She could not have told you that the shortest distance between two points was a straight line, but she did know that "hostility" was the key word in human relations and that a man with an abscessed tooth was only punishing himself." (58)

28 Gallant, Mavis: Green Water, Green Sky.- Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1959.- p.33

29 Ibid., p.p. 32 f.

30 Ibid., p. 78

31 Ibid., p.77

32 Ibid., p. 27

33 Ibid., p. 81

the city to try and fill a prescription for sleeping pills, she comes upon a staged scene in reality that reawakens her to her lifelong terrors, which have now begun to overwhelm her. In a café, she witnesses a laughing couple pretending to give their child away to a policeman:

> The policeman played his role well, swinging his cape, pretending to be fierce. 'She is very naughty,' said the mother, when she could stop laughing enough to speak, 'and I think prison is the best solution.' All the people in the cafe laughed, except for Flor.[34]

The child is terrified, but no one notices until the child "suddenly went white and stiff in the policeman's grasp"[35] Flor, talking to herself, says that "It's because of things like that [...] I'm not afraid of bombs".[36] The real-life staging of the threat of abandonment, which perhaps recalls to Flor her lost father, drives her back to the apartment, where she reads a long and incoherent letter from Doris, whom Flor has locked out of the apartment. All of the characters surrounding Flor have their own deeply flawed perception of themselves, and Doris is among the most pathetic in her fumbling insecurity and struggles to understand her own failing marriage; but it is Doris' letter that makes a central point about children's treatment to their parents:

> Florence, another thing. Everybody makes someone else pay for something. I don't know why. If you are as awful to your mother as she says you are, you are making her pay, but then Florence, your mother could turn around and say, "Yes, but look at my parents," and they could have done the same thing, so you see how pointless it is to fix any blame [...] We all pay and pay for someone else's troubles. All children eventually make their parents pay, and pay, and pay.[37]

In the dream that marks Flor's final slipping into insanity, the red fox departs into the green sea. Riding through a tunnel of green trees, she attains the perfection that Bob and Bonnie demanded. In her dream, however it is neither Bob nor Bonnie who greets her, but her father, a figure beyond the vanishing point formed by the parallel lines in the world of here and now.[38] This is the "image of torment, nostalgia, and unbearable pain" that she has kept enclosed, suppressed, for many years.[39]

While Gallant is clearly not advocating madness as a solution to grief, Flor's construction of a consoling scene wherein she "emerged in triumph [...] and into her

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34 Ibid., p. 81
35 Ibid., p. 82
36 Ibid., p. 82
37 Ibid., p. 84
38 Ibid., p. 84f.
39 Ibid., p. 55

father's arms"[40], a result of a psychic introjection, is a pathological example of using memory and the imagination to achieve a tenuous continuity with the past. Flor's flight above all is liberating. In her madness she has finally found a way to free herself from the social restraints imposed upon her by others and their relationships to her. In a later conversation with Bonnie it becomes clear that George seems to have arrived at the same conclusion:

> "Flor at eighteen was like a little baby. She was never finished with me."
> George thought, She is now.[41]

In the last section, which follows the second temporally, Flor has been institutionalised, and George is in Paris for a brief visit to Bonnie and Bob. Indeed, Flor has left the text itself by then, which is to say that her point of view is no longer voiced through the speaking subject after she has departed from ordered reality. Flor finally exists only through the other characters' voices and their reflections on her. In their helplessness to come to terms with what happened, Flor's mother and husband are themselves escaping from reality by transforming their memories and "creating an unmarred Florence"[42], as George points out. As the three of them wander through Paris, we see Flor's madness refracted through their memories as they manufacture a past they can live with. The final paragraph leaves us with George's failure, with everyone's failure, to connect with Flor, and presents us with a final image of Flor's indeterminate identity:

> He saw Aunt Bonnie and Flor and the girl on the Quai Anatole France as one person. She was a changeable figure, now menacing, now dear; a minute later behaving like a queen in exile, plaintive and haughty, eccentric by birth, unaware, or not caring, that the others were laughing behind their hands.[43]

Green Water, Green Sky thus depicts the tragedy of a young woman's retreat from the world around her since the only route to what she perceives as her true "self" is the essentially private, interiorized mythology of her own madness.

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40 Ibid., p.85
41 Ibid., p. 147
42 Ibid., p. 147
43 Ibid., p. 154

6.1.2 Margaret Laurence's "Horses of the Night"

Another strong story of alienation is Margaret Laurence's "Horses of the Night", one of the eight Vanessa MacLeod stories of the collection *A Bird in the House*,. Vanessa's childhood and adolescence in the invented Manitoba town of Manawaka in the 1930s constitute the overt subject of the book, though each story can make a statement on its own. The narrative perspective is that of Vanessa some twenty years later who, through these stories, is trying to make sense of her life and the person she has become.

Rural poverty in scattered northern settlements, widespread hardship in the 1930s, and World War II, the ironic end to the decade's unemployment form the background to "Horses of the Night". Although the story certainly criticises what Depression and War did to people, the central issue is neither moral or judgmental nor primarily social and critical. Instead it concerns itself mainly with the emotional tension between reality dreamed and reality reached which in this story split hopelessly apart. In the process of this story, which at narrative level reports the life of her cousin Chris, Vanessa learns of the terrible gaps between human aspirations and the nature of things.

Vanessa first meets her distant cousin when she is six and he is fifteen. Learning of his existence, when told he is coming from the north to live at her grandfather's house and attend high school, Vanessa responds imaginatively by placing him in a "legendary winter country".[44] Determined to dislike him because he is so much older and "could be expected to feel only scorn towards [her]"[45], when he arrives she nevertheless finds herself drawn to defend him when he is belittled and criticized by their grandfather in his hearing.

> I felt the old rage of helplessness. But as for Chris - he gave no sign of feeling anything. [...] He began to talk to me, quite easily, just as though he had not heard a word my grandfather was saying. This method proved to be the one Chris always used in any dealings with my grandfather. When the bludgeoning words came, which was often, Chris never seemed, like myself, to be holding back with a terrible strained force for fear of letting go and speaking out and having the known world unimaginably fall to pieces. He would not argue or defend himself [...] He simply seemed to be absent, elsewhere.[46]

The absent-mindedness with which he ignores his grandfather's insults is in no way an easy thoughtlessness as Vanessa might assume. It is in fact a forceful denial that

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[44] Laurence, Margaret: A Bird in the House.- Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1963].- p. 121
[45] Ibid., p. 121
[46] Ibid., p. 125

banishes painful reality through an act of will. It only appears effortless. The strain and fear are all within Chris, where they gain in intensity as they find no release.

The closeness Vanessa starts to experience towards him lies not only in his identification as a fellow-victim to her grandfather's abusive words, it is reinforced by his always treating her as an equal. Just as she finds herself enchanted by his speech, by his stories and by the indirect glimpses he gives her of his dreams, the dreams and stories constantly overlay reality with romance and the romance is partly in the telling, partly in the understanding. Being with Chris stirs Vanessa's own imagination so that when he comes to baby-sit her now and again they are creating a collaborative fantasy of his home in Shallow Creek. A cabin made of living trees and two riding horses - Duchess and Firefly - typify the benevolent, dinosaur tracks and bones from the mud of an ancient lake, the sinister. Chris is sensitive, gentle and poetic. However, as Morley suggests, it is exactly this sensitivity which in a Canada of the 1930s and 40s is bound to destroy him.[47] He had hoped to become a civil engineer and build bridges. Yet having finished high school, he is forced to return to Shallow Creek because during the Depression nobody can afford his university tuition. Instead of going back, however, he tries his luck as a travelling salesman for all sorts of things, always hopeful the new merchandise will sell. Even as his efforts fail, he is sustained by will and powerful imagination.

> "I got this theory, see, that anybody can do anything at all, anything, if they really set their mind to it. "[48]

Despite his best efforts Chris is progressively alienated, that is, divorced from the world that he dreams of conquering. Unfortunately he has to discover that reality does not shape itself in obedience to his desires. Double-crossed by life all his efforts turn against him. In the end he is forced to return to his squalid, overcrowded family farm, as much as he hates it. Vanessa comes to visit him there after her father dies. A little shocked by the shabbiness of the place and the circumstances under which Chris lives she remarks:

> He did not mention [...] Duchess and Firefly, and neither did I [...] I guess I had known for some years now, without realizing it, that the pair had only ever existed in some other dimension.[49]

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47 Morley, Patricia: Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home.- Montreal: McGill-Quenn's University Press, 1991.- p. 118

48 Laurence, Margaret: A Bird in the House.- Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1963].- p. 131

49 Ibid., p. 136

He is ignoring his shrieking sisters as though nothing was going on around him. Instead he is closing "himself off from the squabbling voices just as he used to do with Grandfather Connor's spearing words"[50]. Camping out with him, Vanessa for the first time gets a glimpse of his true inner emotional turmoil and frustration as she hears his judgement on the starry heavens:

> People usually say there must be a God," Chris went on, "because otherwise how did the universe get there? But that's ridiculous. If the stars and planet go on to infinity, they could have existed forever, for no reason at all. Maybe they weren't ever created. Look - what's the alternative? To believe in a God who is brutal. What else could He be? You've only got to look around you.[51]

Chris's words are instinctively apprehended by Vanessa. Like Chris, she rejects drab reality in favour of fantasy. Bare reality to her is represented by the lake they are sitting at: "I looked at the grey reaches of it and felt threatened. It was like the view of God which I had held since the my father's death. Distant, indestructible, totally indifferent."[52] Yet, not wanting to sound foolish, feeling unable to reply to his apparent sorrow as comprehendingly as she wishes she could, she takes refuge in pretending to be asleep. She later on recognizes the dimension of his need to talk that night and that while he must have known how impossible it was to make a thirteen-year-old understand, he still had no choice for there was no one else to talk to.

Unable to stand life at Shallow Creek any longer, he joins the army when the war breaks out. However, World War II becomes Chris's worst nightmare come true which he blots out through a last, desperate act of will. He responds to the barbarities of war by absenting himself from reality once and for all. In his final letter to Vanessa he tells her that "they could force his body to march and even to kill, but what they didn't know was that he'd fooled them. He didn't live inside it any more". To her this letter "seemed only the final heartbreaking extension of that way he'd always had of distracting himself from the absolute unbearableness of battle"[53]. Seeking final refuge in madness, he is dismissed and sent home after a mental breakdown and spends the rest of his time in a mental hospital totally withdrawn and passive. He lives solely in his mind now, and so has, in a sense, made his fantasies real.

Talking about him to her mother, who is baffled by his retreat into madness since he always seemed so hopeful even when there was nothing to be hopeful about, Vanessa

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50 Ibid., p. 137
51 Ibid., p. 140
52 Ibid., p. 138
53 Ibid., p. 143

arrives at the conclusion that "all the schemes he'd had, the ones that couldn't have possibly worked, the unreal solutions to which he had clung because there were no others" were merely "the brave and useless strokes of fantasy against a depression that was both the world's and his own"[54] and that things were always more difficult for him than he let on. If one looks for causes for his final escape from reality, they are numerous: the death of his father while he was young, childhood poverty, disappointed ambition, depression, war. All are necessary, but neither individually nor collectively are they sufficient to explain. Instead of explanation we are given a poetic image, for imagination can comprehend what reason cannot understand. Vanessa notes:

> some words came into my head, a single line from a poem I had once heard. I knew it referred to a lover who did not want the morning to come, but to me it had another meaning, a different relevance. Slowly, slowly, horses of the night -
> The night must move like this for him, slowly, all through the days and nights. I could not know whether the land he journeyed through was inhabited by terrors, the old monster-kings of the lake, or whether he had discovered at last a way for himself to make the necessary dream perpetual. [55]

He begins in hope and talent, and he ends in breakdown, silence and retreat. Whether his retreat is one of victory or defeat is left undecided.

6.2 The Aesthetics of Exclusion

The texts to be discussed in the following not only interpret madness as the culmination of extreme emotional distress and as a form of escapism or protective metamorphosis, necessary in order to retreat from a source of terror, but also present a more ambiguous point of view on the value both of sanity and insanity, the relationship of these states (which are usually understood as diametrically opposed), the credibility of the label dementia itself, and on individual versus social responsibility for the insane condition. In short, they exhibit a more complete expression of a dual perspective on madness, an awareness of what is gained and what is lost, for the madman can be used as a reminder of the necessity to think again, to admit - at least intellectually - another way of seeing. A popular technique for achieving this effect is through the device of the mad narrator as the reader is drawn into the narrator's subjective vision and his ideas as to what constitutes 'reality', 'fiction', 'sanity', 'illusion' are challenged.

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[54] Ibid., p. 143
[55] Ibid., p. 144

The protagonist as he is presented to us in the following texts is already alienated from his environment, isolated from others and if not already in an asylum, he will be soon after we leave him. An alien or outsider, he is conscious of the terrible price he is paying for his extreme deviation from the norm. He may be a naïf who retreats and escapes into a fantasy world which he believes is superior to the world he has been ejected from or willingly left behind. However, his answer may not be a viable alternative, may not be a desirable or an attainable possibility. Even so, his position colours, usually by contrast, our response to the world view of those that surround him. The reader is left with a kind of sadness that our complicated, well-rationalised world does not permit his type of simplicity to exist in its midst. One becomes alert to the dynamics of exclusion - the character of those who would alienate and the result for the object of that estrangement:

> [A]lienation is withdrawal from something - becoming strange or foreign to it, being put out or taking One's self out and thereby becoming a stranger - separated. Since humans feel vulnerable when they are strangers, the emotional essence of alienation is fear and hostility [...].[56]

Consequently, the madman experiences the external world not merely as a threat to his personality structure, but as a threat to his very existence. And not without cause, for it is true that the deviant's desire to withdraw is encouraged by his society's desire to isolate him, lock him up, put him away. In defence against this hostile world, the madman's reaction is to create his own protective armour - a mask, a persona or a fantasy which locks him in and locks them out.

> The madman who has deserted life surveys it: sitting on the edge of his asylum cot, mopping a snake pit floor, swallowing his 'medication', [...] making innumerable plaster casts of Santa Claus in 'occupational therapy', his eye is cocked at the world, which daily confirms to him the perils and ambiguity of return. He who has been driven out of life looks at the world with longing; he who has withdrawn from life regards it with fear.[57]

6.2.1 Margaret Atwood's "Polarities"

The first piece I would like to take a look at in this context is from Margaret Atwood's short story collection *Dancing Girls*. While all of the stories contained in this volume are, for the most part, stories of the self, involving crises of perception and identity, the most disturbing one, and probably the one most anthologised, is "Polarities", which introduces an emotionally agitated character whose 'insanity' is so appealing that the

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56 Henry, Jules: Pathways to Madness.- New York: Vintage, 1973.- p. 105
57 Henry, Jules: Pathways to Madness.- New York: Vintage, 1973.- p. 111

reader cannot help but side and identify with the mad figure. In this story, which - as the title suggests - deals with dualities such as wholeness and partiality, exposure and retreat, the mind-body split, interchangeable madness and sanity, chosen and involuntary isolation, inclusion and exclusion, we meet with two academics, Louise and Morrison, who are working together in an unnamed city in the north-west. Both ended up there because they could not find a job anywhere else. Made up basically of high-rises or cheap barrack-shaped multiple-housing units and "featureless two-storey boxes thrown up by the streetful"[58] after the war it is a city with no visible past - grey and spiritually depleting. Morrison experiences the same psychic effect of eternal dullness when confronted with the surrounding northern landscape. To him it seems that in its "repetitive, non-committal drabness"[59] the land is "keeping itself apart from him, not letting him in"[60]. While shambling, slothful Morrison thus sometimes finds it difficult to emotionally survive in a place like this, no-nonsense, brisk Louise asserts: "Living here isn't so bad [...] You just have to have inner resources."[61] However, the initially presented contrast between the two is slowly being reversed as Louise, obviously lacking the resources she was so sure of having, starts behaving in a strange way. Constantly talking about polarities, circles and currents she draws up elaborate schemes and works out her own private systems:

> "The city is polarized north and south; the river splits it in two; the poles are the gas plant and the power plant. Haven't you ever noticed the bridge joins them together? That's how the current gets across. We have to keep the poles in our head lined up with the poles of the city, that's what Blake's poetry is all about. You can't break the current."[62]

Soon after she even refuses to walk through certain doors which are "facing the wrong way" or to use cars or telephones since "they had no fixed directions"[63]. Louise's progression into complete madness is handled in sly paradoxical fashion, for her vision of Blakean wholeness looks remarkably reasonable in comparison with those 'sane' friends. Like the aphorisms and short poems in her notebooks, "Which were thoroughly sane in themselves but which taken together were not",[64] Louise's understanding is frequently perfect even when her total picture is askew.[65] Morrison,

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58 Atwood, Margaret: Dancing Girls and Other Stories.- Toronto: Virago Press, 1990 [1977].- p. 53

59 Ibid., p. 55

60 Ibid., p. 55

61 Ibid., p. 65

62 Ibid., p. 64

63 Ibid., p. 65

64 Ibid., p. 69

65 Luc Ciompi in trying to explain the nature of psychosis has drawn an interesting analogy. In psychosis, he holds, the global system of feelings, thinking, and behaving is thrown off balance, or rather is thrown into a new but skewed balance. As such it can be compared to the mobiles of the Artist Alexander Calder. His three-dimensional constructions

rather impressive in his awareness and swift comprehension, interprets Louise correctly when he contemplates: "she's taken as real what the rest of us pretend is only metaphorical."[66] Completely frustrated because she seems unable to communicate her findings to others or convince them of her hypotheses she tells Morrison:

> "I wanted to work out my own system," she said plaintively, " but they wouldn't let me." A tear slid down her cheek.
> "Maybe you need to talk to someone," Morrison said, overcasually.
> She raised her head. "But I'm talking to you. Oh," she said, reverting to her office voice, "you mean a shrink. I saw one earlier. He said I was very sane and a genius. He took a reading of my head: he said the patterns in my brain are the same as Julius Caesar's, only his were military and mine are creative."[67]

While he at first thinks that she might just be overtired, working too hard, or on some kind of drug he soon has to realize that this was just an attempt on his side to suppress the undesired knowledge that Louise was disturbed. Paul, another colleague, articulates what Morrison had refused to acknowledge to himself all along:

> "She's as crazy as a coot. We've got to get her to the loony bin. We'll pretend to go along with her, this circle business, and when we get her downstairs we'll grab her and stuff her into my car."[68]

Even though Morrison utterly dislikes Paul's phrasing and feels like a traitor he nevertheless joins them in admitting her to the mental hospital which is significantly located outside of the city - outside of the bounds of society. When they get there Louise, standing there quietly, listening with an amused, tolerant smile while Paul talked to the receptionist, is almost able to convince the doctor that this is all a mistake, but as soon as she he saw she was winning she lost her grip.

> Giving Paul a playful shove on the chest, she said, "We don't need *your* kind here. You won't get into the circle." She turned to the intern and said gravely, "Now I have to go. My work is very important, you know. I'm preventing the civil war."[69]

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consist of thin metal arms and coloured shapes of different sizes and weights; suspended form a fixed point above, which we may think of as another system of higher order, they balance in midair, offering a nice instance of a dynamically equilibrated set of relations among elements of a system. "If we now imagine that one of the elements is pulled out of its normal position or given an extra weight, we see that all parts are still present, and still exist in relation to one another, but that the whole has been twisted and distorted."
(Ciompi, Luc: The Psyche and Schizophrenia: The Bond between Affect and Logic.- Transl. by Deborah Lucas Schneider.- Cambridge, MA: Harward University Press, 1988.- p. 207)

66 Atwood, Margaret: Dancing Girls and Other Stories.- Toronto: Virago Press, 1990 [1977].- p. 69

67 Ibid., p. 61

68 Ibid., p. 66

Once she has been admitted, apart from letting herself go physically, her creative intelligence starts to deteriorate as well. Drugged beyond comprehension she has lost interest in the circle and her elaborate system and does not seem to want to talk much. What she has observed in others, that most of those inside "were getting worse rather than better"[70], applies to her just the same. As bizarre as she might have appeared to others, it seems that before her privacy was violated and she was eagerly tucked away in the loony bin by her colleagues, she was still able to cope in her own peculiar way. It had been her way of trying to make sense of what she saw herself confronted with, her way of dealing with life and her surroundings[71] - a fact which Morrison, too, comes to acknowledge in the end:

> Poor Louise, he saw now what she had been trying desperately to do: the point of the circle, closed and self-sufficient, was not what it included but what it shut out. His own efforts to remain human, futile work and sterile love, what happened when it was all used up, what would he be left with?[72]

6.2.2 Margaret Gibson's *The Butterfly Ward*

Another author who masterfully portrays the feelings of people whose sensitivity and fragility leaves them constantly vulnerable and rejected by society because their way of coping is outside the margins of conventional conduct is Margaret Gibson. In basically all of her stories collected in *The Butterfly Ward* she commit herself to the world of madness and the fine lines separating sanity and insanity, reality and fantasy, the normal and the abnormal. She explores this world with a sensitivity and compassion that only someone who has travelled through it himself is able to accomplish. Hospitalised for the first time at the age of fifteen, Gibson's knowledge of the treatment of those designated as mentally ill, mad or crazy is first-hand. Diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, Gibson has spent various periods of her adult life in hospitals and mental institutions. As she herself explained in a interview:

> "All my life I was considered a nuisance, the black sheep of the family. Not that I did anything wild. But simply because I didn't amount to anything. I was thought of, angrily or pathetically, as "poor Margaret", shunted back and forth from hospitals. I was a violation of

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69 Ibid., p. 68

70 Ibid., p. 72

71 Whether these dismal surroundings which form the background to this story were designed to mirror the interior or were itself a cause for disintegration is left undecided, though taking into account Atwood's preoccupation with identity construction in Canada and what it means to live in a place like this, trying to solve the riddles of "Who am I" and "Where is here" which has dominated Canada's literary discourse for so long, the latter aspect should not be neglected.

72 Atwood, Margaret: Dancing Girls and Other Stories.- Toronto: Virago Press, 1990 [1977].- p. 74

> all that my family believes in. When Margaret Laurence called and asked me to come and spend a day with her, I nearly cried."[73]

With regard to her writing she says that it was her "one contact with the outside world, the one thread that didn't snap."[74] However, to see her work solely as autobiographical fiction is a mistake. While it may be true that personal experience stands at the source of her writing, it is transformed by the fictive imagination in her stories. Yet her own experience provides her with an ability to render the world of those labelled mad or sick without patronising or extolling its inhabitants. Instead she describes and redefines a particular world that is often misperceived. Threatened both by their own inner fears and by the real terrors of the outside "normal world" most of her characters are too frail to withstand the blows inflicted upon them by life. In their inability or refusal to meet the demands and expectations of the world around they feel that the only escape from a reality which brings only anguish and pain is in fantasy, in the realm of pretence and disguise. It is important to recognise at the outset that Gibson's primary concern in relation to the theme of madness is with the responses to mental illness, rather than with its causes or manifestations. While she clearly does not neglect the latter issues, her writing often focuses upon the ways in which those categorised as mentally ill and those assigning the label respond to the condition.

6.2.2.1 "Ada"

Her story "Ada" is thus just as much about people who have been labelled mentally ill as it is about the treatment of these people by a medical establishment that has reduced them, and Ada in particular, to the state of a human vegetable. Set in a mental hospital, it focuses upon a group of women residing there. Jenny, the main character and narrator of the story, is a young woman who has been there for seven years. During those years she has been trying as best as she can to cope with the live she's been sentenced to:

> I [...] refused to take pills because I wanted a clear head to plan my escape but that was in the beginning and after they gave me 30 shock treatments something went ping in my head and I didn't mind taking the pills so much and I became quieter and so everyone on the staff leaves me alone now.[75]

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73 Quoted in Hofsess, John: One Flew Over the Butterfly's Nest.- In Canadian, August 13, 1977.- p. 17
74 Ibid., p. 16
75 Gibson, Margaret: The Butterfly Ward.- Toronto: Totem, 1976.- p. 6

As the story unfolds, the reader learns more about Jenny, Ada, and the other inhabitants of the women's ward and the chains which link these woman to one another and those that keep them locked in the institution. That the inmates are not treated as human beings but mere "cases" soon becomes evident in a conversation between Jenny and another fellow sufferer: "My dreams must bore you, they bore Dr. Gordon." "How do you know that?" "He no longer takes down notes, he only pretends to," she said softly. "Mine too."[76] Throughout the entire story the institution is described by Jenny as a prison and a chamber of horrors more than anything else. Once hospitalised ,the insane have forfeited their rights to govern themselves, to exercise a voice or veto in their own detention or therapy. We learn that they lose their privileges if they do not behave or speak up. Denied any form of privacy or self-determination they are slaves to the daily routine imposed on them. This disturbing aspect of asylum life is brought forward as Jenny, almost shouting, tells her mother

> "You know what I would like to do Mother, more than anything. I'd like to stay in bed till noon. Past noon, till one, till two even!"[77]

Her mother, however, completely missing the point, simply replies with a nervous smile: "Wouldn't we all dear." Obviously unable to connect to her daughter, she deliberately seems to avoid any true confrontation. Throughout most of the visits the two of them restrict themselves to polite and superficial conversations, never daring to say what they are really thinking or feeling. It thus comes as no surprise that Jenny does not want to face her, or any member of her family, and dreads her visits. Not feeling understood by either family or the hospital staff, most of the inmates suffer from an acute sense of isolation. Jenny's isolation is from her feelings for others, even from emotion itself. Each time Jenny approaches expression of her true feelings, a "winged darkness"[78] overcomes her, causing her to lose contact with the world around her. Another patient, known as the Virgin, effectively separated herself from her body, her sexuality, refusing now to let anyone touch her. Ada's isolation is from adult intelligence. Throughout the story the title character is presented as a child inhabiting an adult body. Her daily pleasures consist of painting little stick figures, singing nursery rhymes to herself, and circling the days on her calendar. She has not always been that way, however. When Jenny first arrived in the institution, she was running "in mad, fast circles round and round in the hallway shouting poetry from the top of her lungs"[79]. And Jenny remembering "Ada when she was [still] Ada"[80]

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76 Ibid., p. 9
77 Ibid., p. 16
78 Ibid., p. 17
79 Ibid., p. 5

states that she "had never known anyone who knew so many poems"[81]. However, soon after, causing too much trouble, Ada was given a lobotomy, and since then has shown no signs of her intelligence or her "majestic" and "incandescent" frenzy.[82] Feeling only contempt for those who have reduced Ada to this vegetable, Jenny sometimes nostalgically and painfully remembers the old days "when she and I used to sit smoking in the hallway discussing the possibilities of madness in *The Great Gatsby* and exchanging plays by Chekov"[83].

Into the midst of these isolated cases comes Alice, a young woman whom the others see as an outsider, someone whose madness is manufactured and feigned. Alice has been hospitalised because she "took some drug on the Outside that made her go crazy"[84], but she does not seem crazy to the rest of the inmates. Unlike Jenny, Ada and the others, she seems able to manipulate and control the world around her. She is cruel and abusive to Ada. When she tells her dreams in group therapy, dreams she obviously made up to get attention, a young doctor offers an analysis to which another patient remarks:

> "Crap!" shouted Leslie. […] Alice is full of it. She didn't even dream that, she made it up for you for God's sake." […] "Leslie, I think you are overreacting […] As I recall Laing said - " "Bullshit!" Leslie screamed. […] Alice is full of crap and you needn't quote Laing to me about having to go insane to become sane."[85]

In this passage Gibson brilliantly ridicules psychoanalytic professionalism by first of all letting the inmates of the hospital appear more perceptive and intelligent than the doctors in their ability to distinguish between "true madness" and a fabricated one thereby making them look like incompetent "idiots". Secondly Gibson, much like Gallant, quite obviously scoffs the fashionable psychoanalytic trend, only here it is Laingian theory which is mocked. What she is driving at is that for those who know madness at first hand it has very little romance. It is ugly, painful and frightening.

Hearing Alice call Ada an idiot, a half-wit and joke, Jenny is finally forced out of her isolation. In defending Ada against Alice, Jenny acts upon her compassion and concern for another instead of retreating into herself. Her action prompts the Virgin, in a terrifying scene, towards an acknowledgement of her sexuality. However, more

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80 Ibid., p. 7
81 Ibid., p. 5
82 Ibid., pp. 6, 7
83 Ibid., p. 18
84 Ibid., p. 19
85 Ibid., p. 22

importantly, Jenny's release from her isolation allows Ada to make a return to her self. The story ends with the murder of Alice by Ada, but it is not this action alone that reveals the authentic Ada. As Jenny awakens on the night of Alice's death, it is Ada's voice she hears quoting lines of poetry as she did long ago.

> I was nearly asleep myself when I heard it, at first I thought I was dreaming, a dream of long ago - it was like a chant, an endless chant as if in a ritual - *Slow bleak awakening from the morning dream, I am alive - this I.* [...] I saw her crouched at the farthest and darkest end of the dorm, crouched over Alice's bed [...] moving her body back and forth to her chant, beside Ada was the lifeless body of Alice. [...] *I am alive - this I* [...] I knew that someone would have to be told soon but for the moment, for the moment I just wanted to listen to the Ada of long ago.[86]

Ada has not forgotten what she once knew, but instead has chosen not to let anyone know she remembers. For Ada, near-silence is a strategy of deception designed for self-protection. Having made the experience that open expression of thoughts and emotions only bring disaster, Ada creates pictures and quotes nursery rhymes instead. Jenny's promise that she will not tell anyone that Ada still possesses the ability to think and speak as an adult suggests that silence and deceptions are necessary strategies for survival in an inhuman social order.

6.2.2.2 "Making It"

A similar awareness of the dangers inherent in open expression already thematized in "Ada" marks Gibson's story "Making It" which is an account of how two outcasts - a female schizophrenic and a male homosexual female impersonator - attempt to make it in the 'straight' world.

The story itself is told in a series of letters between Liza and Robin. Through Liza's first letter Gibson establishes the recent situations of Liza and Robin, as well as presenting some of their past history. Both have lived, and continue to live, solitary lives under the scrutiny of others who regard them as abnormal, sick, potentially crazy. For a while they had shared their isolated existences by living together, platonically, until he left for California, where he hoped to become famous and where he now focuses his attention upon "making it", becoming "the best female impersonator ever"[87], to defend himself against a society that rejects his homosexuality.

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86 Ibid., p. 27
87 Ibid., p. 99

> I don't want to die an old fag alone [...] without a certain amount of respect, I want to say - I made it once, me. I made it. Don't you want to make it, Liza? I am tired of being less than good in the world's eyes.[88]

Conventional medical diagnosis would label Robin a sexual deviant, an invert. Homosexuality, according to those who adhere to the "disease concept of all so-called mental illnesses" is, by definition, madness.[89] As Szasz has pointed out

> The homosexual makes a choice - a deviant one - and society retaliates by declaring that he is 'mentally sick' and hence incapable of making a 'real choice'! Were he able to choose 'freely' - 'normally' - he would choose like everyone else, to be heterosexual. This is the logic behind much of psychiatric rhetoric. The patient's behaviour is the product of irresistible compulsions and impulses; the psychiatrist's of free decisions. The cognitive structure of this explanation conceals the fact that this imagery only serves to degrade the patient as insane, and to exalt the psychiatrist as sane .[90]

Unfortunately both protagonists accepts this categorisation and have interiorised their culture's value system to their own detriment. Osinski has argued along similar lines:

> Wer [...] gesellschaftlichen Normen und Werten nicht entspricht, fällt ihnen zum Opfer: Er hat keine Chance, in seinem eigenen Erleben akzeptiert zu werden, sondern wird stigmatisiert und sozial ausgegrenzt. [...] Generell angeklagt und beschrieben wird die Borniertheit von Normalen und Gesunden, die Anderes und Fremdes nicht ertragen können. Familien und Einzelpersonen erscheinen dabei nicht als Täter, sondern auch selbst als Opfer: Sie haben als Individuum verinnerlicht, was gesellschaftlichen Ordnungsinteressen entspricht.[91]

Liza and Robin are outcasts who also see themselves as outcasts. Afraid of going mad, they will eventually drive themselves to it.

Liza also desperately wants to "make it", but in a different way. Pregnant after a short and irrelevant encounter with a cabdriver, she comes to regard the baby as the solution to her problems. The fate she is trying to avoid is madness. By becoming a mother her mental disturbances will be kept at bay. Motherhood, therefore, becomes crucial for Liza if she is to achieve the normality she identifies as sanity. In answer to Robin's letter about making it, Liza explains her concept of the "Great Divider" and the way he can be defeated:

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88 Ibid., p. 111

89 Szasz, Thomas: The Manufacture of Madness.- New York: Dell, 1970.- p. 168.-

90 Szasz, Thomas: The Manufacture of Madness.- New York: Dell, 1970.- p. 244.-

91 Osinski, Jutta: Über vernunft und Wahnsinn: Studien zur literarischen Aufklärung in der Gegenwart und im 18. Jahrhundert.- Bonn: Bouvier, 1983.- p. 13

> The Great Divider is what made you and me. He is bone splitting. He is what keeps us away and apart from other people. You could not divide the he-she in your being and I - I could not stop the bone splitting, dividing into nightmares and hallucinations and breathing floors. Somewhere in the void you and I met, walking and wounded and collapsed in each others arms, but we cannot give in to him now [...] he would be the winner if we gave in [...] The baby will have me a few steps removed from the Great Divider and so will your career [...] Don't you see, the Great Divider is Defeat, the Defeat we were born with and now we have a chance to out-distance him and we must. You're right, making it is what it's all about.[92]

Success for him and motherhood for her, will erase the boundaries that separate these two rejects from the "real" world. Yet, in the fight against the damage "sane" society could cause them, Liza and Robin must remain constantly on guard. During the visits of the public health nurse, Liza concentrates upon functioning, making sure that the apartment is clean and tidy, so that the nurse's reports cannot be used against her.

> They say it's because I am alone and have a history of mental illness [...]. They say that's why they come and check on me but it is really to see if I am acting crazy and then they could take the baby away from me but I will not let it happen. As long as I *function* they are powerless.[93]

As in "Ada", adulthood and its demands are perceived as destructive, as life-denying. As Liza writes, "I never wanted to grow up and know all the terrible things that I know"[94]. This may also be the reason why she feels herself drawn to Marvin, the only individual Liza has regular contact with, besides her nurse. Marvin, of whom Liza says that he is "pure, like a child, but no-one can see that but me"[95], lives in a fantasy realm that effectively separates him from the world. He receives messages from Mao, who has told him that he will be Superman of the world, keeps notebooks in his own secret language and possesses a protective shield through which no one can hear, although Liza tells Robin:

> People on the bus were looking at us. [...] I don't believe that the protective shield does a proper job. I do not deny its existence. If Marvin believes it exists then it exists. A is not really absolute.[96]

Apart from the fact that this remark is rather witty it also stresses a tolerance towards those perceived as different, which can obviously only grow out of the experience of

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92 Gibson, Margaret: Butterfly Ward.- Toronto: Totem, 1976.- p. 115f.
93 Ibid., p. 97
94 Ibid., p. 108
95 Ibid., p. 103
96 Ibid., p. 101f.

being an outsider oneself. An aspect constantly brought to the surface in all of Gibson's stories is the solidarity and companionship among the various outsiders. They are the only ones who truly understand or at least try to make a real effort, which is also expressed in the following passage:

> No-one else would lie on the bed with me and help me push back the bone-crushers with the palms of their hands using all their strength as you did for me that one night. I know you couldn't see Them but you knew that They were crushing me and so you helped push Them away. I think They must have been afraid of you.[97]

In its own way "Making It" is a love story, but it is a love story with a difference as it clearly shows how romantic myths function in this world we inhabit. Like many of the female protagonists in Gibson's stories, Liza has a fantasy about love, marriage and motherhood - all must conduce to happiness ever after. She represses the sordid details of the conception and fantasises that Robin is the real father of the child she will bear. By the end of the story, Robin too has begun to participate in the fantasy. With the birth of the child imminent, Liza makes plans to move to Los Angeles, accepting Robin's invitation to live with him. For both of them, it is a fantasy of normality. He will be a father, she will be a mother, they will have a child and society will approve. As a simple nuclear "family" they can defeat or rather cheat the Great Divider. Happily preparing for the future, Robin searches for an appropriate apartment for the three of them. On one of these occasions he meets "the most beautiful man [...] and he offered to buy me a drink, but I said no - there is no time for that now"[98]. The father fantasy briefly dispels Robin's "normal" sexual desires. He is caught up in being a provider, the head of a household. However, despite all their efforts to escape their isolation and past pain, and to achieve a measure of acceptability in society, Liza and Robin seem at the mercy of a malevolent destiny. When a stripper mentions that they also will need a layette, he writes Liza asking her what a layette is. Liza's answer, her last letter, is a conclusive tribute to the Great Divider:

> A layette is clothing for the baby like a white gown and booties. Vanessa was born dead.[99]

The juxtaposition of these two sentences, as well as the brevity of the statement penetratingly and cruelly imply her abrupt return to her own mental world. Robin's response to this shocking announcement is only the beginning of a letter, "Dear Liza". No words could more sufficiently express his inconsolable grief, and hers, as this blank

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97 Ibid., p. 113
98 Ibid., p. 117
99 Ibid., p. 118

page. It brilliantly marks the dashed hopes of two people thrust back into the non-identities they pretend to, but never really could, escape. Their dreams shattered Liza and Robin opt for the same defence against normal society which Marvin has chosen: withdrawal. However, more is at issue than just the insubstantiality of the protagonists' dreams. The ambitions of Robin and Liza, the demand for normality and social acceptance, prompt us to question normal values. Can marriage or a child solve all or any problems at all? We, the *sane* readers, know that a child and the semblance of a monogamous marriage - bright nursery, well-equipped kitchen - cannot resolve the difficulties in these characters' lives. However, Gibson seems to imply that in the sane world these are exactly the tokens of happiness which we do accept as the real thing. As "father" and "mother", Robin and Liza would have (might have) become part of the world they desperately want to belong to. If success and normality are as restrictive as this, is making it really worth it? Is the sane world truly sane? What both Liza and Robin fail to recognise is that their heterosexual but asexual friendship - their deep love, trust, and caring for one another - is a rarity in any world, even - maybe especially - in the so-called normal world.

Taking these first stories together, the reader can identify a number of common concerns and elements. Both focus upon individuals who have become objects of scrutiny to others. These others, whether they be doctors, social workers, or audiences, exercise a great deal of power over those who have failed to adapt to the expectations and demands of normal society. This power takes many different forms, and Gibson is particularly effective in her dissection of the strategies of control practised upon those without power. First and foremost among those strategies is simple observation. Jenny, Ada, and all the inhabitants of the mental institution are under almost constant surveillance by nurses, doctors, even family members. Similarly, Liza always seems aware of the watchful eyes of those who possess the power to deny her her child. Whether an individual is labelled paranoid or simply maladjusted, the effect is similar. The individual ends up excluded from normal existence and confined within another territory. The responses of those thus observed, excluded, isolated and confined are various, but all, in some way, reveal attempts to escape this condition.

6.2.2.3 "**Considering Her Condition**"

For some of the protagonists who perceive themselves as constantly assailed by the wilful demands of others, and thus refuse contact, death seems to be the only viable escape from their sufferings, as in the case of Clare in "Considering Her Condition". In this story, which again defines the regions of the haunted mind both in its own right and in relationship to the reality of the "sane" world, we are told about a man's behaviour towards his wife who does not want the baby she is about to receive and

who commits suicide shortly after it is born. The question which seems to be asked here is how insane a man can become without being deemed abnormal.

Although Clare's revulsion for her body, for sex, and for pregnancy has roots deep in her past, it is her husband, Stephen, who bears much of the responsibility for her death. She never wanted to marry or bear children, but Stephen persuaded her that he would not want sex or children from her, that he loved her as she was. Stephen, however, is essentially incapable of loving her or anyone else. "A part-time writer and full-time unit manager of a large and rather prestigious television station"[100] he hides himself behind his camera, watching life as if it were a movie he is directing. His wife, whose own emotional disturbances have been rigorously analysed and officially diagnosed, becomes his primary "subject", in all the ways suggested by the term: he rules over her, he experiments with her, he writes about her in his journals instead of trying to connect to her.

> She was getting out of touch with reality again. Every time that happened she thought in poem-stories and was quite incapable of a truly rational conversation. He must [...] give her her sleeping pill and get her quieted down for the night. If he wasn't careful she would be crying any minute now saying senseless things.[101]

It bothers him that she does not worship him, just as he is annoyed by her behaviour and her remoteness "but then there were so many things about her that were unreachable and strange that he had resigned himself to it"[102]. In a way he even encourages her insecurities and her psychoses. During her pregnancy, however, he tries very hard to keep Clare's head "intact": "he was not about to allow any little slip-ups now, not so late in the game. His first consideration was the baby - and Clare of course."[103] His need for the child and his almost insane obsession with it has little to do with Clare, who only seems to be the means of providing it. Nor does it have anything to do with love, but with the emptiness inside him. Half-way through the story we learn that he has another child with whom he has no contact any more except for providing a monthly cheque. It is the loss of this child that makes him refuse to allow Clare an abortion, despite her desires and the advice of her doctors - "That is why I have Clare, that is why this baby must come and be perfect, as perfect as you were,

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100 Ibid., p. 51
101 Ibid., p. 55
102 Ibid., p. 52
103 Ibid., p. 53

Debby [...]"[104]. That Clare is the one who has to suffer for the fulfilment of his wish is of little interest to him.

> "I had a dream last night," she said.
> "Oh," he was not really interested in her dream. He wanted to go on talking about the house and the baby but she had been patient and [...] so he decided he would put up a show of some interest. "What was it about?"
> "About the baby," she said. [...] "It was pink and fleshy, folded in half like a crêpe [...] I was walking up and down a long, hot white stretch of beach with this horrible fleshy thing in my arms, wrapped in a yellow blanket -"
> "Clare!" he said
> She looked at him with vacant eyes and continued. "It had no bones you see. And then gradually this pink fleshy thing -"
> "Clare, stop!" [...]
> "How can you?" he shouted. "How can you live with such horror inside your head [...] You will have this baby! Do you hear me? You will have it no matter how many terrible horrors or nightmares besiege you!" [...]
> "You are going to have that baby or God damn you!"
> "He already has," she said.[105]

Their unhealthy relationship is another mirror of conventional marriage and conventional gender-designations within marriage and calls attention to Gibson's bleak vision of relations between men and women. Clare, like so many of Gibson's female characters, is incapable of acting herself, except in the moment of her death, and her essential helplessness and passivity makes her seem a child. In her portrait of Clare, Gibson provides a powerful critique of a society which denies women the opportunity and the self-esteem necessary to shape their lives according to their own needs and desires. Clare exists for her husband and for motherhood only. Even her suicide, after the birth of his son, makes little difference. In fact, his final statements regarding his deceased wife indicate that he is hardly disturbed by her death at all: "She seemed more tangible now in death than she ever had in life. And, I never wanted to have any children with anyone but her, as strange as that may sound, considering her condition".[106] However, with this last phrase Gibson especially requires us to consider his condition.

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104 Ibid., p. 62
105 Ibid., p. 65
106 Ibid., p. 78

6.2.2.4 "The Butterfly Ward"

In the collection's title story, "The Butterfly Ward", Kira, the main character, also seems a victim to the expectations of others. Given a Russian name by her mother who dreamed of visiting the Kremlin one day, Kira is overwhelmed by the visions other people have of her life. Kira herself takes a lot of satisfaction from her work at the Home for Retarded Children:

> I felt no disgust or pity. I did feel compassion but more than that I felt necessary. [...] I was doing it out of selfish reasons [...] It made me feel necessary.[107]

Her mother, however, feels that her slender, pleasant looking daughter who graduated from high school with honours, should not be wasted in a place like this. She continues to dream of their visit to Russia after which her daughter will go to university. Eventually Kira collapses under the tension between her own needs and wishes and those of her mother. As the story opens, Kira is on the neurological ward of a Toronto hospital, undergoing tests to determine the cause of her seizures. It is a place she utterly hates as she is forced to undergo the unbelievably torturous procedures carried out by the almost god-like figure of Dr. Carter who "flies through the wards, white coat flapping, nodding to his charges, a group of new Dr. Carters trailing behind him from bed to bed. He talks about you at your bedside as if you had merged with the pillow."[108]

Kira thinks of these tests as "pinnings" in which she is a butterfly, wings pinned with needles to a board. On the biggest "butterfly board" the patient is not even given anaesthesia for nothing is to interfere with the tests. The horrors of brutal medical procedure finally leave her with no alternative but to retreat:

> The first time I was the butterfly on the giant board [...] it took The Pinners three tries before the giant pins settled properly into my jawbone. [...] I threw up afterwards each time, ten pounds of poisonous liquid down the toilet. [...] It was there, I think, in that tidy, stinking cubicle that I perceived my brain as a nebula and it was then too that I knew what was in it and what they would never find. [...] It was my escape. [...] I crouch in the mists of my nebula where it is beautiful and everything is calm, safer somehow in that beautiful misty space.[109]

Though Kira is aware that what causes her fits cannot be cured by pills, she is afraid of telling anyone as she instinctively knows that then she would be put "in a crazy house

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107 Ibid., p. 127
108 Ibid., p. 125
109 Ibid., p. 129

like Mrs. Watson, who now wanders in a daze on a new drug, sometimes bumping into walls and furniture"[110], which seems to terrify her even more than the dreaded pinnings. In this story, as in so many of Gibson's, silence, fantasy and deception are the only sanctuary available to the frightened and tortured outsider.

As Laurence Ricou has observed, in all of these stories Gibson portrays both the "agony and the lyrical clarity of people going mad".[111] Yet she does not glorify insanity or sentimentalise it. She allows the reader entry into a world seldom seen from the inside:

> Sometimes it can be beautiful inside this space. Most people who can ride on buses and streetcars and eat doughnuts for breakfast if and when they want and don't have to dial 0 on their phones to make a call would think that statement crazy. Maybe it is a bit crazy.[112]

Her ambiguous use of "crazy" in that quotation is typical. She defuses the supposedly denigrating even while she employs it. What her writing is telling us is that we consider the conditions of everyone with compassion and care, and that we discard strategies which exclude non-conforming persons from full and meaningful participation in the world. The Great Divider need not always win, but his defeat will only be possible when the intolerance and discrimination which consign the different to the butterfly ward's isolation and exclusion are overcome.

Although the messages provided by texts discussed in this chapter vary they all convey one central message: for many, life is so painful, so oppressive, or so incomprehensible that their 'sanest' recourse is insanity. The outbreak of the illness, whether temporary or permanent, thus has to be seen as a mechanism for coping with their lives, serving variously as a way to escape, to fill emotional voids or to come to terms with losses. It is a strategy of deception designed for self-protection, "a special strategy [...] [invented] in order to live an unliveable situation"[113].

The question which has often been raised is whether or to what extent the retreat into madness is an act of choice. W. H. Auden's contention that unlike 'self-made' lunacy, "real lunacy overcomes a man against his will"[114], is contrary for instance to the notion of active choice supported by psychologists like Bert Kaplan, the editor of a

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110 Ibid., p. 132

111 Ricou, Laurence: Story and Teller.- In: Canadian Literature 76 (1978), p. 118.-

112 Gibson, Margaret: Butterfly Ward.- Toronto: Totem, 1976.- p. 119

113 Laing, R. D.: The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.- p. 95

114 Auden, W. H. : Satire.- In: Satire: Modern Essays in Criticism / ed. by Ronald Paulson.- Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971.- p. 203

collection of autobiographical accounts of the experience of insanity. In his introduction Kaplan states:

> The 'illness' is something the individual 'wills' to happen. Rather than belonging to a foreign process which has seized him, it belongs to him, and exists squarely within the region of his responsibility. The term action is very well suited for expressing this idea. Action is something the person 'does'. It carries the connotation that a particular course of action is one that the person has 'chosen' and that he supports with his own energy.[115]

The question which still remains, however, is whether madness can really be seen as an authentic choice. Moreover, even if this retreat into fantasy for some of the protagonists may appear extremely liberating and protective, in most cases it does not prove a viable escape mechanism. The protagonists are victims. Their madness may be a choice but one has no sense that it is a calculated one: they suffer too much. They may have the insight or the sensitivity and spontaneity the world around them lacks, but their suffering is often greater than their joy. In these cases madness will not, ultimately, assuage their pain and leaves them even more vulnerable.

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115 Kaplan, Bert: Introduction.- In: The Inner World of Mental Illness / ed. by Bert Kaplan.- New York: Harper and Row, 1964.- p. x

7. Creativity and Insanity

7.1 A Century-Old Debate: The Link between Genius and Madness

Are crazy people more creative than others, or the creative more crazy than others? Many ancient and contemporary thinkers maintain it to be so, just as it has been claimed more than once, that the place of the imagination and the place of madness are one and the same. The connection between madness and creativity involves the century-old debate about the link between genius and insanity, and the discussion has not subsided in the modern age. In fact, psychoanalysis and theories of the unconscious have given added stimulus and have supplied many critics with yet another tool to aid in the exploration.[1]

Ever since antiquity genius and madness have been associated in ambiguous and contested ways. Aristotle is alleged to have been one of the first to have asked,

> Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile?[2]

In much the same vein Seneca declared that "there is no great genius without a touch of madness"[3]. The English scholar Robert Burton is also firmly within this tradition when in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) he describes melancholy men as "of a deep reach, excellent apprehension, judicious, wise and witty". Or by plainly stating: "All poets are mad."[4] As already pointed out by Dryden, who feels that

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1 See for example: Barrett, William: Writers and Madness.- In: Partisan Review (14) 1947, p. 8-16 ; Cardinal, Roger: Outsider Art.- London: Studio Vista, 1972.- ; Glicksberg, Charles: Forms of Madness in Literature.- In: Arizona Quarterly (17:1) 1961, pp. 43-53.-; Kris, E.: Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art.- New York: International Univ. Press, 1952.-; Monk, S.H.: A Grace beyond the Reach of Art.- In: Journal of the History of Ideas (5:2) 1944, pp. 131-150.-; Schneider, D.C.: The Psychoanalyst and the Artist.- New York: International Univ. Press, 1954.-; Sorrell, W.: The Duality of Vision: Genius and Versatility in the Arts.- New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1970.-; Storr, A.: The Dynamics of Creation.- New York: Atheneum, 1972.-; Trilling, Lionel: A Note on Art and Neurosis.- In: Partisan Review (12:1) 1945, pp. 41-48.-

2 quoted in: Robillard, John (ed.): The Book of Quotations / ed. by John Robillard.- New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.- p. 123

3 Ibid.,p. 97

4 Burton, Robert: The Anatomy of Melancholy: Vol. 1.- London: Everyman, 1964 [1932].- p. 112

> Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide[5]

it certainly seems that there has to be some sort of connection and that the line between madman and genius is a thin one. How does one otherwise explain the long list of casualties:

> [T]he madmen, those who broke, Swift, Cowper, William Collins, Christopher Smart, Hölderlin, Ruskin, [Strindberg, Artaud, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Van Gogh, Nijinsky, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, and more]; figures who were not altogether normal, if not altogether mad, like Blake; who, like Coleridge and DeQuincey, had to salvage themselves through drugs [...] or who produced their writing out of a maximum anxiety, their personal rack of torture, like Baudelaire and Eliot[6]

Or to mention a famous someone 'closer to home': The mad poet Émile Nelligan (1879-1941), who was of singular importance to 20th century Quebec culture. Being of Irish and Quebecois descent and spending most of his life in mental institutions where he was treated for schizophrenia, he became the symbol for division in every respect. To him, New writes, literature "was an escape from reality. There was 'too much reality' in contemporary life and the Canadian winters, and therefore it was preferable to live in the world of dream. Unfortunately, the world of reality seemed to follow him there. [...] In Nelligan words were artifice and artifice real."[7]

Of course there are numerous theories and explanations as to why there seems to be such a high instance of 'mad' artists: too intense identification with the object of fantasy, empowering feelings insufficiently bridled to preserve the barrier between self and created object, an insufficient sense of self-preservation, a compulsiveness, an obsessiveness which is, in essence, neurotic. Breakdown comes when the ability and force with which the genius controls his inner upheaval no longer functions. Above that the act of creation is often regarded as involving over-exertion and immoderate mental strain which may in turn lead to slow, but irreversible and progressive deterioration.[8] As such, art becomes "a demon, an exterminating angel; it exacts a terrible toll; it burns you out. To produce great art, the artist is sapped of health, mental or physical."[9] Or as Wordsworth has phrased it in 'Resolution and Independence':

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5 from Absalom and Achitophel pt. 1, l. 165 in: Dryden, John: The Works of John Dryden: Vol. 2: Poems 1681-1684.- Ed. by H. T. Swedenborg, jr.- Berkley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1972.- p. 10

6 Barrett, William: Writers and Madness.- In: Partisan Review (14) 1947, p. 15

7 New, W. H.: A History of Canadian Literature.- London: MacMillan, 1989.- p. 127

8 Becker, G.: The Mad Genius Controversy.- Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978.- p. 197

9 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and

> We poets in our youth begin in gladness;
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.[10]

The experience of this intensity, this vision, has been variously described by those artists who have known it first hand. For some it has been liberating, exhilarating, almost joyous. Andrew Greeley, for instance, in his book *Ecstasy: A Way of Knowing*, documents hundreds of cases, historical and current, of wonderful and mystical visions and the sensation of the harmony of the cosmos the ecstasy of the merging of the self with the ineffable oneness of the universe.[11] If William Barrett is correct when he says that "it is the writer's identification with his fantasy, rather than the aspect of fantasy itself, which has power over us, convinces us"[12], then the mad artist, the one totally engrossed by a subjective reality, might well be the producer of the most passionate, powerful work. And although the source of his insanity is not his art, his madness will affect his work. [13]

Taking all this into consideration one of the central questions concerning the myth linking madness and artistic production or creativity is the following: If the creative are mad, must it not also be true that the mad are creative? Some would argue that psychopathology may be indispensable to certain kinds of achievement, that it may be the *sine qua non* of genius. Jean Cocteau in his foreword to *Though This Be Madness: A Study in Psychotic Art* goes so far as to say that even

> the artists who seem the most balanced - the Rembrandts and Goethes and so on - are governed by a mysterious schizophrenia within them, which haunts their innermost darkness; in the final analysis, they can be nothing more than its servants. In artists like Van Gogh or Isidore Ducasse this schizophrenia shows the cloven hoof. But, make no mistake about it, it is as present in the 'sane' painters as in the other kind; without it, the artist can give us nothing of importance.[14]

Artaud is a spokesman of this position taken to its extremity for he claims that "in every demented soul there is a misunderstood genius who frightens people and who has never found an escape from the stranglings that life has prepared for him, except in delirium"[15]. Sociologists and psychologists who would praise madness usually do not go this far, even though they too may romanticise lunacy as a kind of dark night of

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Nicolson, 1987.- p. 64

10 Wordsworth, William: Poetry & Prose / selected by W. M. Merchant.- London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1967.- p. 524

11 Greeley, Andrew: Ecstasy: A Way of Knowing.- New York: Prentice-Hall, 1974.-

12 Barrett, William: Writers and Madness.- In: Partisan Review (14) 1947, p. 16

13 Ibid., p. 11

14 Bader, Alfred et. al.:Though this be Madness: A Study in Psychotic Art.- London: Thames and Hudson, 1961.- pp. 10f.

15 Artaud, Antonin: Antonin Artaud Anthology / ed. by Jack Hirschman.- San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965.- p. 144

the soul, as an act of courage and psychotic daring.[16] Even though various literary, philosophical and psychological schools, movements or trends have utilised the madman for their purposes, trying to convince us that there is something divine about his derangement, one should not be seduced into the romantic belief that madness per se is a sign of artistic creativity. This point is also emphasised by Cesare Lombroso. In his study *Genius and Madness* he examines 107 mentally ill patients, half of whom spontaneously painted. The authors sees in these paintings proof of his basic tenet that sociopathic and psychopathic acts reflect a throwback to a more primitive stage of human development. It is an atavistic form of representation which he parallels with the art of the 'primitive'. He also sees, however, that his patients' art fulfills no function either in the world of the asylum or in the greater world. Even though the art of the insane may provide greater insight into the nature of their perception of the world, it, nevertheless, seems to be merely the reflection of the madness of the patient and has therefore only overt meaning, without any deeper significance.[17]

Another point to be made is that in many cases collections of drawings, paintings, sculptures and writings by the mentally ill are preselected in a very specific manner, which is to say that only 'interesting' and 'crazy' material is solicited from the various sources. The repetitive, the boring and the ordinary is excluded. The fascinating nature of the material is thus not only the result of the psychopathology of the patients, but also of the preselection by the institutions that supply it. These people are not shamans speaking an unknown tongue, nor are they Romantic artists expressing through their art conscious disapproval of modern society. These 'artists' are ill, and their artistic productions reflect the pain and anguish caused by that illness, a fact which was and is often overlooked by commentators on mental illness and art. The idea therefore cannot be that psychosis or insanity in itself is a talent, but rather that when the state of consciousness called madness is coupled with an ability and will to communicate it can be seen as a gauge of passion and commitment. Or put differently, not every lunatic is an Artaud, a Van Gogh or a Strindberg, but that those few who can couple articulate expression with their madness, can reveal to us truths no sane person has access to. This is madness as liberated consciousness, madness as knowledge of deep psychic truths. The connection to creativity involves the recognition that "the ability to see everyday phenomena in new relationships is the essence of creativity".[18] That way the illness has to be seen as "an essential part of the act of creation rather than a device to enable that act to take place."[19] This is to say, that in many cases, the creative

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16 Stern, Paul J.: In Praise of Madness: Realness Therapy - The Self Reclaimed.- New York: W. W. Norton, 1972.- p. 29

17 Cardinal, Roger: Outsider Art.- London: Studio Vista, 1972.- p. 16

18 Henry, Jules: Pathways to Madness.- New York: Vintage, 1973.- p. 91

19 Pickering, George: Creative Malady.- New York: Delta, 1976.- p. 19

work and illness have a common source in mental torment. Psychological illness may promote scientific and artistic creativity by encouraging adaptive and integrative solutions to inner conflict. There are many reasons to write about mental breakdown, including the desire to exorcise old demons and ward off new ones. This, of course, does not imply that writing about breakdown guarantees any form of protection against future illness. Even though Virginia Woolf, in a letter to Ethel Smyth[20], wrote about her own bouts of insanity that madness, as an experience, is "terrific" and "and not to be sniffed at" and that she finds in "its lava" most of the things she writes about, that it "shoots out of one", "final not in mere driblets, as sanity does"[21], her breakdown was not the useful artistic sort, no epiphanies, but "an insanity characterised by incoherent howling and by violence. She clawed her attendants and had to be restrained; she would not touch her food; she was suicidal. [...] not that she longed for death, as poets and writers sometimes do for melancholy's sake, but [...] she wanted, with the immediacy of a method, to be dead"[22] - which in the end lead to her final irrational act of drowning herself. Sylvia Plath for whom "dying is an art"[23] - is another writer whose art could not prevent her from prematurely dying.

Many great artists and performers were trapped in a collective mythology, partly of their own creation, the idea that madness and genius were doubles, soulmates. They were particularly the victims of that mythology, in that their final confinement in a mental hospital did not provide them with an *asylum* which would allow their genius to play freely. Rather it spelt silence and paralysis. As Friedrich concludes, that despite "the popularity of the romantic theory [...] it has little relation to reality. Schumann wrote no music in the asylum at Endenich, and Hemingway wrote no novels at the Mayo clinic."[24] Alfred Bader comes to the same resolution when he states that today "it can be stated quite dogmatically that mental disease as such, far from containing the seeds of genuine creative ability, often tends if anything to exert a destructive influence upon the artistic gifts the individual may possess. The setting up of a *systeme delirant* belongs to quite another category, and can hardly be compared with the creation of a work of art."[25]

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20 the composer, author and feminist (1858-1944) who became an intimate friend of Virginia Woolf in the 1930s.

21 Woolf, Virginia: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1929-1931 / ed. by Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautmann.- New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.-p. 180

22 Ozick, Cynthia: Mrs. Virginia Woolf.- In: Commentary (56:2), 1973, p. 34

23 From the poem Lady Lazerus in: Plath, Sylvia: Collected Poems.- London; Boston: Faber & Faber, 1981.- p. 245

24 Friedrich, Otto: Going Crazy: An Inquiry into Madness in Our Time.- New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976.- p. 350; see also: Ostwald, Peter: Schumann: Music and Madness.- London: Victor Gollancz, 1985.-

25 Bader, Alfred et. al.: Though this be Madness: A Study in Psychotic Art.- London: Thames and Hudson, 1961.- p. 35

Inevitably it also happens that the modern audience anticipates, even demands, that the extremist writer takes greater and greater risk with his own sanity in order to produce work closer to what the audience regards as the psychological and emotional ultimate in human experience. Some of this work is thus produced on what Alfred Alvarez has aptly termed "the friable edge" of existence where the continuance and value of life are repeatedly confronted with chaos, madness and suicide, and art with its negation, silence.[26] The rhetoric of suffering becomes the emblem of sincerity in the work itself and the madness or suicide of the artist provides his work with a note of authenticity.

7.2 The Works of Michael Ondaatje

The one Canadian author who brilliantly dramatises the compulsively destructive nature of the creative impulse is Michael Ondaatje. Like Kroetsch, Ondaatje has always been fascinated with borders, including those between art and reality, sanity and madness and like Wiebe he has repeatedly demonstrated an interest in elusive figures obscured in the margins of history. Here his concern is, above all, with the insane, male protagonists who exhibit a certain kind of aesthetic sensitivity, a kind of madness which is at the same time creative as well as destructive. Ondaatje's early obsession with borders, outcasts and the violent rejection of society is best expressed in his frequently anthologised and often quoted lyric 'White Dwarfs', where the narrator asks:

> Why do I love most
> among my heroes those
> who sail to that perfect edge
> where there is no social fuel[27]

Such heroes remain fascinating to Ondaatje because they "implode into silence"[28], retreat into "the perfect white between the words"[29], a retreat which either leads to death or madness, as in the cases of William Bonney in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) and Buddy Bolden in *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976). Both of these "heroes" act out the romantic myth of the isolated, male artist unable to function within society, in part because of their anarchic sensitivity. Just as the character Pat Garrett affirms that William Bonney has an "imagination which was usually pointless

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26 Alvarez, Alfred: The Savage God.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.- p. 278
27 Ondaatje, Michael: Rat Jelly.- Toronto: Coach House, 1973.- p. 70
28 Ibid., p. 71
29 Ibid., p. 71

and never in control"[30] - an imagination subject to macabre hallucinations,[31] so also does the character Frank Lewis assert that Buddy Bolden "was tormented by order, what was outside of it".[32] It is this order which is vital to them as both of them - due to their sensibility and inner turmoil which is also the source of their creativity - are constantly on the edge of falling and losing their careful balance. At the same time Bonney remains fascinated with "the one altered move that will make them maniac"[33] just as Bolden moves "gradually off the edge of the social world"[34]. One might argue, however, as Scobie has, that "Ondaatje is always attracted to characters whose "equilibrium" is precarious precisely because he knows that their balance will not hold"[35].

7.2.1 *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*

Billy's story is presented to us by Billy himself. And even though his prose fragments and poems are supplemented by ballads, dialogues from comic books, narrative accounts of his friends, invented newspaper items and photographs, at the centre of the book is always Billy's mind and his thoughts which to him seem like "floating barracuda in the brain"[36]. Constantly brooding, caught between recklessness and paranoia, Ondaatje steers Billy's apprehensions into continual existentialist and surrealist shock of recognition. Ondaatje's Billy is "on the edge of the cold dark" as much as he is "on the edge of the sun" which he is afraid will burn him.[37] He is permanently on edge. In every way an outlaw, he tries, at times distends and transgresses, boundaries. More often, he fears to cross the lines, hopes to defend his hard-held borders against all trespassers, as their influences might disturb his attempt at trying to preserve the careful balance that has to be defended against the "one altered move" which threatens to disrupt it. How much he is endangered by the outside is exemplified by his two lovers. Sallie, for instance, acts as a maternal figure who nurses a defenceless Billy back to health, whereas Angie initiates him into a frenzied world where he goes to pieces. They are both at the edge with him, but each of them offers

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30 Ondaatje, Michael: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.- Toronto: Anansi, 1970.- p. 43

31 Ibid., p. 10

32 Ondaatje, Michael: Coming Through Slaughter.- Toronto: Anansi, 1976.- p. 37

33 Ondaatje, Michael: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.- Toronto: Anansi, 1970.- p. 41

34 Ondaatje, Michael: Coming Through Slaughter.- Toronto: Anansi, 1976.- p. 64

35 Scobie, Stephen: Two Authors in Search for a Character: bp Nichol and Michael Ondaatje.- In: Solecki, Sam (ed.): Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.- Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985.- p. 210

36 Ondaatje, Michael: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.- Toronto: Anansi, 1970.- p. 38

37 Ibid., p. 74

different responses to it. Sallie protects Billy's precarious boundaries and maintains his sanity, whereas Angie violates them and brings with her the sun's obliteration.

His uneasiness with the radically disordered nature of his inner world is by necessity accompanied by an obsession with external order, a compelling urge to order things, events and people. Billy, that is, seeks or imposes order in the external world to compensate for a disintegrating inner world, a state which he projects upon the world around him. When he looks up, he apprehends a vast metaphysical or divine injury, seeing "wounds appearing in the sky".[38] Unable to place his faith in the heavens, he cannot cling to ideals of normality in the human sphere either, because what appears to be normal may collapse at any moment. Billy feels compelled to create order where he cannot find it. Clearly Billy desires not mere order, but unchanging, eternal order.

While Nodelman argues that Billy actually "fixes" life in his own emotionally "dead" perceptions, and that he does so out of "disgust" for things that move and change.[39], that he is a person "devoid of emotion"[40] to whom the "only sanity comes with the elimination of a painfully changing thing that smells disturbingly of life"[41], I would argue like Cooley and Scobie that this is a misinterpretation of Billy and the novel as a whole. The same point could be made with regard to Lee's analysis, who claims that the episode of Billy killing Sallie's cat Fern depicts men's, and thereby his, "torment and slaughter" of "creatures of instinct"[42].Quite to the contrary I would argue that is the perfect example of his sensibility. It is a mercy killing as the cat is sick and in pain. Caught underneath the house where no-one can reach it, it is destined to "probably live for a day and then die"[43]. And when Billy asks Sallie whether he should kill it, Sallie, the one character within the book who most clearly stands in opposition to various monstrous killers as she is the one who nurses Billy and other broken creatures back to life[44] "without asking how said yes"[45]. This alone should be proof enough that Lee's interpretation is grossly misleading.

Cooley maintains, that contrary to Nodelman's interpretation, or Lee's for that matter, "Billy is extremely sensitive, that he only tries to fix life but is unsuccessful in his

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38 Ibid., p. 10
39 Nodelman, Perry: The Collected Photographs of billy the Kid.- In: Canadian Literature, 87 (Winter 1980).- p. 76
40 Ibid., p. 69
41 Ibid., p. 74
42 Ondaatje, Michael: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.- Toronto: Anansi, 1970.- pp. 44 f.
43 Ibid., p. 44
44 Ibid., p. 36
45 Ibid., p. 44

attempts, and that he feels terror, not revulsion, at what he confronts"[46]. This is the only *possibly sane* interpretation as any analysis to the contrary would ignore the fact that in this book the word sane does not carry its usual positive connotation, since it is overwhelmingly associated with Pat Garrett. It is Scobie who appropriately points out that all three of these critics "neglect or ignore Pat Garrett. He is made redundant in their schemes, for they have put Billy in his place."[47] Whereas Billy is a neurotic character who fights desperately losing battles to control the chaos and violence within and around him, sheriff Pat Garrett, his opponent, who is supposed to track him down, represents a different kind of control and a distancing from emotions. In his case it is a perversion of the idea of control itself.[48]

> Pat Garrett, ideal assassin. Public figure, the mind of a doctor [...] Ideal assassin for his mind was unwarped. Had the ability to kill someone on the street walk back and finish a joke. One who has decided what was right and forgot all morals.[49]

The passage which is most apt, however, to demonstrate the apparent fluidity and relativity of madness and reason is the often quoted line which tells us that Garrett is "a sane assassin sane assassin sane assassin sane assassin sane assassin sane".[50] When the words "run together in rapid fusion, the ends of the nouns begin to couple with the beginnings of the adjectives merging from sane into insane"[51]. Eminent sanity thus proves to be insanity, just as in the case of Livingstone, another bizarre character, of whom John Chisum says: he "seemed a pretty sane guy to me"[52], but by now we recognise the ambiguities attached to that term and are not surprised when he adds that "Livingstone had been mad apparently".[53] The deliberate awkward placing of that "apparently" underlies the ambivalence attached to sanity throughout the text. Never showing "any sign of madness or quirkiness", it seems to John as if Livingstone "left all his madness, all his perverse logic, behind that fence of is farm".[54] He then goes on to tell us the story of how Livingstone had "decided to breed a race of mad dogs"[55]. As

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46 Cooley, Dennis: I Am Here on the Edge: Modern Hero / Postmodern Poetics in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid.- In: Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje / ed. by Sam Solecki.- Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985.- p. 236

47 Scobie, Stephen: Two Authors in Search for a Character: bp Nichol and Michael Ondaatje.- In: Solecki, Sam (ed.): Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.- Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985.- p. 209

48 Ondaatje is careful, however, to stress the friendship which existed between Billy and Garrett and that pursuer and pursued are in this way doubles of each other.

49 Ondaatje, Michael: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.- Toronto: Anansi, 1970.- p. 28

50 Ibid., p. 29

51 Cooley, Dennis: I Am Here on the Edge: Modern Hero / Postmodern Poetics in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid.- In: Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje / ed. by Sam Solecki.- Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985.- p. 232

52 Ondaatje, Michael: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.- Toronto: Anansi, 1970.- p. 60

53 Ibid., p. 60

54 Ibid.,p. 61

55 Ibid.,p. 60

he breeds a freak strain out of "originally beautiful" spaniels, the poor creatures are turned into monsters, their eyes split or "bulged like marbles"[56], shaped by a mind which, "fearing and loathing unsettled organic processes"[57], quite deliberately and systematically seeks to dominate, even to eradicate life. Though Livingstone cold-bloodedly destroys the dogs, in their final pitch of madness they turn on Livingstone and devour him and then turn on one other. Ultimately, Livingstone was unable to maintain the balance between his surface appearance of sanity and his peculiar madness. His impulse to create something, no matter how grotesque, can only provide an unstable outlet for his latent insanity and his death becomes a metaphor for the Frankenstein complex, in which the male artist, the creator, is destroyed by his art, the thing created.

Billy, on the other hand gets destroyed in the end, because he falls victim to his own inability to exercise precisely this kind of perverse order. The reason, why Billy gets killed, is not that Garrett is more venturesome or any more flexible. On the contrary, Garrett "gets" Billy because he is far more successful than Billy could ever be at denying life. He acts as a right-handed, right-minded man of death, in no way bringing the kind of jangled nerves that the irrational, left-handed Billy does to their world of ruthless violence. A man with no inner existence, without lyric, he knows motion without emotion[58]. As left-handed gun, Billy is also a destroyer, but as left-handed poet, he is a creator. As far as Billy's role as creator is concerned, one could of course argue, as Owens has, that while "Billy takes advantage of his role as the 'author' of these 'works' to rewrite his story in accordance with his desires"[59], his effort proves futile as "the unalterable events of history close in on Billy"[60]. The point is, however, that while one is not able to change the outcome of history, just as Billy has known all along what the result would be as he tells us at the beginning that "Pat Garrett sliced off my head"[61], it is still possible to change the perspective by which it is viewed. It is Billy's side of the story that Ondaatje gives voice to, thus permitting him to present a different and maybe more vulnerable or favourable image of himself. And although this is of course by no means the only side to the story, but one possible version, it still forces us to reconsider and ponder the validity of apparent madness and sanity. As Billy himself points out, what is important is that we find "the beginning, the slight

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56 Ibid.,p. 66

57 Ibid.,p. 77

58 Cooley, Dennis: I Am Here on the Edge: Modern Hero / Postmodern Poetics in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid.- In: Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje / ed. by Sam Solecki.- Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985.- p. 231

59 Owens, Judith: I Send You a Picture: Ondaatje's Portrait of Billy the Kid.- In: Studies in Canadian Literature 8:1 (1983), p. 126

60 Owens, Judith: I Send You a Picture: Ondaatje's Portrait of Billy the Kid.- In: Studies in Canadian Literature 8:1 (1983), p. 137

61 Ondaatje, Michael: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.- Toronto: Anansi, 1970.- p. 6

silver key to unlock it, to dig it out. Here then is a maze to begin, be in."[62] This is exactly what Ondaatje does in his next novel *Coming Through Slaughter*, which is once again based on a real historical figure and where he once again explores the way in which a myth is created out of the given facts.

7.2.2 *Coming Through Slaughter*

The ostensible story of Buddy Bolden is not complex: he was a part-time barber and a successful jazz musician in New Orleans around the turn of the century. In 1907 he inexplicably went mad while playing his cornet in a public parade and subsequently was placed in a home for the insane. Ondaatje complicates his story by introducing Webb, who, as a detective and as a friend, tries to find Buddy after he disappears, and Bellocq, the hydrocephalic photographer of Storyville whores with whom Buddy forms a close and strange acquaintance before disappearing. In addition, Buddy's wife, Nora, and Robin Brewitt, the woman with whom Buddy has an affair while he is gone, play key roles in the reader's understanding of Buddy's approach to his art and his life.

Ondaatje examines Bolden's life between the day that Webb "watched his nervous friend walk jauntily out of the crowd into the path of a parade and begin to play"[63] and the day that he played himself into madness during another parade. He does so, however, in a rather complex way. "To suit the truth of fiction" he admits that he not only used "real names and characters and historical situations" but that he also added "more personal pieces of friends and fathers. There have been some date changes, some characters brought together, and some facts have been expanded or polished".[64] By blending history and fantasy, by intricately mingling fact, fiction and personal reference, he explores the inner life of his subject, much as, in an earlier work, he recorded and invented the inner life of Billy the Kid.[65] Similar to Billy, Bolden is "an open site [...] for filling in psychological and emotional blanks"[66]. Although there is plenty of affect, there is little or no analysis. And when Bolden himself cannot understand his own behaviour and asks "What the hell is wrong with me?",[67] writer and readers feel compelled to invent stories that might provide an answer. The legend

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62 Ibid.,p. 20

63 Ondaatje, Michael: Coming Through Slaughter.- Toronto: Anansi, 1976.- p. 36

64 Ibid.,p. 159

65 In fact, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* also concludes by acknowledging that with the above mentioned sources he has "edited, rephrased and slightly reworked" the original biographic and fictional accounts.

66 Barbour, Douglas: Michael Ondaatje.- New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.- p. 103

67 Ondaatje, Michael: Coming Through Slaughter.- Toronto: Anansi, 1976.- p. 73

of Buddy Bolden is blended even more richly when Ondaatje projects himself into the book by stating:

> When he went mad he was the same age as I am now [...]
> When I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had done that. Stood, and with a razor-blade cut into cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be. [...]
> What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself?[68]

Here the distance between character and author collapses as Bolden comes the mirror image of Ondaatje. The novel is therefore as much about the musician Bolden as it is about the writer Ondaatje in particular and the artist in general. Ondaatje himself notes that Bolden "became the metaphor for any kind of artist: painter, writer, or jazz musician"[69] and he thus has to be interpreted as a representative figure through whom Ondaatje is examining critically both the complex nature of his own creativity and the relationship between self-destructiveness and creativity.

However, even though Ondaatje seems to be examining some of his own central assumptions about art here, his identification, implicit or explicit, with Bolden should not prevent us from realising the radical difference between the two. As Solecki has noted, Ondaatje is using Bolden to enact and to probe issues which "when lived existentially - as in Bolden's life - could destroy an artist".[70] The issues are raised, however, within a text whose language and form are controlled by a cool sensibility that can imagine and recreate convincingly Bolden's anguish without ever making a complete assimilation with that mode of being. In writing about Bolden Ondaatje seems to have put to rest an urgent idea or impulse that, if acted upon, could have meant the end of his own art.

Bolden's own art - and his life, which is an image of his art - is less orderly. Like Billy the Kid, Buddy Bolden perceives more than most people, able to "see the air, [to] tell where it was freshest in a room by the colour"[71] The other side of this increased perception is a madness he cannot escape, it is part and parcel of his creativity. His music is spontaneous, violent, erratic, charged with an emotion it can hardly control. He explores chaos without reducing it to manageable forms. He "did nothing but leap

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68 Ondaatje, Michael: Coming Through Slaughter.- Concord: Anansi, 1976.- pp. 133 f.

69 Mark Witten: Billy, Buddy and Michael.- An Interview with Michael Ondaatje.- In: Books in Canada VI (June-July 1985), p. 10

70 Solecki, Sam: Making and Destroying: *Coming Through Slaughter* and Extremist Art.- In: Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje / ed. by Sam Solecki.- Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985.- p. 264

71 Ibid.,p. 97

into the mass of changes and explore them [...] Every note new and raw and chance. Never repeated."[72] He combines the Lord's hymns and the Devil's blues in the same piece. According to his friend Frank Lewis, Bolden

> was tormented by order, what was outside it. He tore apart the plot - see his music was immediately on top of his own life. Echoing [...] You were both changing direction with every sentence, sometimes in the middle, using each other as a springboard through the dark. You were moving so fast it was unimportant to finish and clear everything. He would be describing something in 27 ways.[73]

To surrender himself to this kind of creativity means extinguishing any possibility of achieving and possessing a stable, private self. To continue as a successful cornetist he cannot alter his mode of being, to do so would mean an end to the kind of music that is uniquely his. Predictability would be inimical to his kind of creativity, which is why

> eventually he was almost completely governed by fears of certainty. He distrusted it in anyone but Nora for there it went to the spine, and yet he attacked it again and again in her, cruelly, hating it, the sure lanes of the probable. Breaking chairs and windows and glass doors in fury at her certain answers.[74]

This scene, which is repeated in slightly different form with Robin, indicates the extent to which certainty and anarchy, love and violence co-exist in Bolden's world, the thin line at all times between them. He fears certainty in which everything is "complete and exact and final"[75], as it is a condition he associates with death, which, in turn, fascinates, repels, and torments him. To escape this certainty he moves outside of order in both music and life. He embraces the vitality of chaos and the quick of life, but he lives so fast and hard that it is bound to destroy him. He is a wild drinker and lover, he plays the loudest cornet in jazz, he is subject to destructive fits of rage, he dreams continually of pain and mutilation, he is suicidal. He finds that to live passionately is to prepare one's death, that art feeds on madness until it is destroyed by it, that the energy of creation is also destructive: "The making and destroying come from the same source, same lust, same surgery his brain was capable of."[76]

Bolden's art and madness are set in perspective by two contrasting figures. Webb resembles Pat Garett in Billy the Kid. He is a detective who patiently tracks down

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72 Ibid.,pp. 15 f.
73 Ibid.,p. 37
74 Ibid.,pp. 15 f.
75 Ibid.,p. 76
76 Ibid.,p. 55

Bolden after he has run off in panic. He is calculating cool and rational, while Bolden, the man of instinct, feeling, and anger is associated with the body, especially the hands and fingers. Being a cornetist his ultimate nightmare is having his hands cut off at the wrist: "suicide of the hands"[77]. Also set in contrast to Bolden and the compulsive and instinctive art which seems to dominate him, is the artist who creates by conscious choice and is in control of what he is doing, like John Robichaux, another jazz musician whom Bolden scorns for playing waltzes which "put motions into patterns"[78] that never vary and so give only a "mechanic pleasure"[79].

Unlike his friend Webb, who entices Bolden to return to a well-ordered life he cannot stand, Bellocq, the crippled photographer and artist in his own field, seduces Bolden to disorder. He too is a man of the body, living in the pain of his deformity. He too is suicidal. He tempts Bolden away from music and fame to a silent "mystic privacy". Clearly aware of the inherent danger of this friendship but unable to resist it Bolden muses:

> Him watching me waste myself and wanting me to step back into my body as if into a black room and stumble against whatever was there. Unable then to be watched by others. More and more I said he was wrong and more and more I spent whole evenings with him.[80]

In their conversations Buddy and Bellocq are "moving gradually off the edge of the social world". But whereas Bellocq "lived at the edge in any case" and was "at ease there", Buddy did not. He was like "a naive explorer looking for footholds".[81]

> The connection between Bellocq and Buddy was strange. Buddy was a social dog, talked always to three or four people at once, a racer. He had no deceit but he roamed through conversations as if they were the countryside not listening carefully just picking up moments. And what was strong in Bellocq was the slow convolution of that brain. He was self-sufficient, complete as a perpetual motion machine. What could Buddy have to do with him?[82]

During their friendship he had "pushed his imagination into Buddy's brain"[83] and Bolden becomes self-conscious and introspective in a way he has never been before. The extent to which Bellocq's mode of introspection has become Bolden's becomes

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77 Ibid.,p. 38
78 Ibid.,p. 53
79 Ibid.,p. 70
80 Ibid.,p. 64
81 Ibid.,p. 64
82 Ibid.,p. 56
83 Ibid.,p. 64

apparent by his increased reference to the brain: "my brain has walked away and is watching me"[84] or "my brain suicided"[85]. Bolden's ability to continue as an extremist musician depends, however, on his ability to function and respond instinctively without recourse to a "crippling" kind of self-consciousness. How dangerous or inhibiting any form of introspection is indeed to his form of art is expressed by Antonin Artaud, who, both as artist and as man, had a powerful influence on the imagination of the anti-rationalist avant-garde movements in the twentieth century, in which madness as a literary motif was above all utilised to criticise the prevailing bourgeois virtues of self-discipline, order, sense of duty and control of emotions and where the schizophrenic was celebrated as the "true hero of desire" or as "an emblem of creative insurrection against rationalist repression linked to social power".[86] The prevailing image has been Nietzsche's vision of a "Dionysian madness" of "self-abnegation" and "self-forgetfulness". Indeed, Artaud has been held up as perhaps the supreme example of a Dionysian madness - described by Sylvère Lotringer and Martin Esslin as a sort of Wild Man whose literary productions supposedly display the "uncontrollable, polymorphous movement of desire" or show that "emotion released from all restrained logic [...] can result in a glorious rhetoric of unbridled passion".[87] But Artaud's writings suggest the superficiality or, at least, the radical incompleteness of this common portrayal. The most constant theme of Artaud's writings is, in fact, what he describes as "an absence of mental fire, a failure of the circulation of life" or "a disembodiment of reality".[88] One might say that his persistent misery, and the most powerful motivation for the extreme antimentalism of his aesthetics, lay in the fact that the loss of self he actually experienced - he called it a "constant leakage of the normal level of reality"[89] - was more intellectual in character, closer, in fact, to the "mise en abîme" of self-alienating introspection.

> We are of the inside of the mind, of the interior of the head [...] I suffer because the Mind is not in life and life is not the Mind; I suffer from the Mind as organ, the Mind as interpreter, the Mind as intimidator of things to force them to enter the Mind.[90]

"I am the witness, I am the only witness of myself"[91], he wrote the same year when describing the "pitfalls" and "furtive abductions"[92] of his thought processes. This

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84 Ibid.,p. 100

85 Ibid.,p. 119

86 Jean Broustra, quoted in Matthews, J.H.: Surrealism, Insanity and Poetry.- Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982.- pp. 4 f.

87 Lotringer, Sylvère: Libido Unbound: The Politics of 'Schizophrenia'.- In: Semiotexte (2:3) 1977, p. 8-10; Esslin, Martin: Antonin Artaud.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976.- p. 122 f.

88 Artaud, Antonin: Selected Writings.- Ed. by Susan Sontag.- New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976.- p. 59

89 Ibid., p. 75

90 Ibid., p. 103

vitiation of the sense of controlled mental activity and of bodily self-presence seems throughout his life to have been accompanied by a disturbing self-consciousness. A dozen years later he speaks of "this dislocated assemblage [...] this ill-assembled heap of organs which I was and which I had the impression of witnessing like a vast landscape on the point of breaking up". [93] Awareness of self-as-representing-consciousness is exaggerated. What occurs here is then hardly a lowering of the psychic level to some stuporous or unreflexive condition, rather, it seems to involve a too acute awareness of the process of experiencing. While he was yearning for an eclipse of the mind in favour of ecstasy, it was nonetheless that his introspection made it impossible for him to reach that stage.

This is exactly what Bolden is in danger of. Where he had previously been unconsciously spontaneous, on his return he self-consciously and relentlessly urges himself into playing an anarchic and elemental music until he breaks. But he is not the only one who pushes himself to the limit. While one cause of Bolden's madness is surely the peculiar nature of his particular kind of genius in which creativity depends to a great extent upon the artist's ability to give expression to the chaos within himself, another factor which made him urge himself as he did was the audience, who - once his very unpredictability had become a label - demanded and expected a certain kind of music and behaviour from him. Furthermore, by celebrating him the crowd becomes a constitutive part of the motive for returning to his dangerous and self-destructive performance. But celebrity has its price as Ondaatje comes to acknowledge in his poem Heron Rex:

> There are ways of going
> physically mad, physically
> mad when you perfect the mind
> where you sacrifice yourself for the race
> when you are the representative when you allow
> yourself to be paraded in the cages
> celebrity a razor in the body.[94]

The only possible lasting release for Bolden from art and audience lies in madness or suicide, which in a way become synonymous within the text. With or without Bellocq's influence Bolden would have destroyed himself. Bellocq simply hastened the

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91 Ibid., p. 195
92 Ibid., p. 60, p. 62
93 Ibid., p. 294
94 Ondaatje, Michael: Rat Jelly.- Toronto: Coach House, 1973.- p. 52

process by making Bolden conscious of the inherent contradiction in his situation: he must go on playing yet his playing will eventually destroy him. The release comes in the novel's stunning climactic scene, a parade in which Bolden makes his first public appearance after his two year absence. The audience urging him on is embodied by the young dancer who, beginning by moving in time to Bolden's squawks, ends by controlling him and compelling him to play faster and more violently to keep up with her movements:

> Half dead, can't take more, hardly hit the squawks anymore but when I do my body flicks at them as if I'm the dancer till the music is out there [...] this is what I wanted, always, loss of privacy in the playing, leaving the stage, the rectangle of band on the street, this hearer who can throw me in the direction and the speed she wishes like an angry shadow. [...] All my body moves to my throat and I speed again [...] god can't stop god can't stop it can't stop [95]

A friend catches him as he falls, his shirt torn and blood spilling from his mouth. His last thought, as he collapses - "What I wanted."[96] - perfectly sums up his situation. Not only has he played an ultimate music in which the self is totally negated and release. The tensions generated by the contradictory desires for privacy and fame, certainty and uncertainty, order and anarchy have been finally resolved by the silence of "Dementia Praecox. Paranoid Type".[97] In madness he has found wholeness of being, the equanimity and the peace he could possess when sane. In this respect he can once again be compared to Artaud who asserted that he chose or would choose madness and suicide "not to destroy myself but to put myself back together again. Suicide will be for me the only one means of violently reconquering myself [...] By suicide, I reintroduce my design in nature, I shall for the first time give things the shape of my will."[98] For Artaud as for Bolden, suicide or madness is the only way to reconstitute the self independently of outside influences. Silence, in both cases is simply a release from the compulsion to create, from a too demanding art.

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95 Ondaatje, Michael: Coming Through Slaughter.- Toronto: Anansi, 1976.- p. 130
96 Ibid.,p. 130
97 Ibid.,p. 132
98 Artaud, Antonin: Selected Writings.- Ed. by Susan Sontag.- New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976.- p. 82

8. Women and Madness

8.1 Female Madness Now and Then: A Critical Overview

That the theme of madness has always been present in Western literature has aptly been demonstrated by Lilian Feder in her book *Madness in Literature*. A fact that cannot be denied, however, is that the tradition of madness in literature, like most literary conventions of the past, was predominantly male-authored and male-centred. Women's relation to and experience of madness, as recorded by women themselves, was simply not considered very important, despite the fact that by the nineteenth century a few exceptional women had already begun to break the male monopoly on literary madness including no lesser figures than Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, George Eliot and Emily Dickinson. It was not until our own century that works on madness written by women began to rival, both in quality and quantity, those written by men.

This flourishing body of literature provides an opportunity for today's theoreticians to explore pathology from the perspective of the 'other half'. It offers a fresh avenue of approach into the underworld of mental disorder and a vista on basic anxieties that may be common to all Western women. Twentieth century women writers have appropriated literary insanity for their own ends and have endowed it with specifically female parameters. The best of these works possess a symbolic structure beyond the narrative line, with levels of meaning that elucidate the female situation in particular and the human condition in general. In an effort to exorcise the fear of madness that haunts them, feminist writers have brought it out into the open and made it a major theme.

Increasingly since the turn of the century, women writers have left us either frankly autobiographical accounts of mental breakdown or provided us with the most diverse fictional accounts of psychic derangement. Whereas some of these works pay special attention to the process of psycho-therapy through which the protagonist is or is not brought back to sanity, others refrain from psychiatric professionalism and create their own versions of autotherapy within complex systems of psychic disintegration and reintegration. Most of them call to attention the fact that women, apart from the

general human condition they are subject to, also have to deal with the particularity of the feminine space they inhabit.

Women's literary appropriations of the discourse on women and madness were joined in the seventies and, at an accelerated rate, in the eighties by an impressive body of historical and cultural studies of women in psychiatry, of psychological and psychoanalytical theories of mentally ill women, of femininity as illness and of the feminization of suicide[1]. Most of these accounts conceptualize madness in terms of sexual politics and focus largely on culture and society as casual agents in women's mental disease.

While Lilian Feder's treatment of madness in her book *Madness in Literature* suggests that it would be "difficult to find literature without at least some sort of thematization of madness" and regards madness as one of the continuos and ontological themes in Western literature, this implicit assumption of "universality" has been challenged, among others, by Kaja Silverman[2] and Elaine Showalter[3] who point out the existence of a fundamental alliance between "woman" and "madness". Showalter not only claims that women are more prone to going insane due to their marginalized and oppressed position in society, she also insists that within our dualistic systems of language and representation where women

> are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind, [...] madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady.[4]

While there is surely a point to this statement, it nonetheless has to be slightly relativized. As Porter points out,

> for long the chief stereotypes of madness were quintessentially masculine [...] Mania was thought of a masculine disorder, personified in the ferocity of a brute. [...] the same was

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1 See the following studies: Chesler, Phyllis: Women and Madness.- New York: Avon, 1983 [1972].-; Smith-Rosenberg, Caroll: The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th Century America.- In: Social Research 39, 4 (Winter 1972), pp. 652-678.-; Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll: Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America.- New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.-; Higonnet, Margaret: Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century.- In: Poetics Today 6 (1985), pp. 103-118.-; Higonnet, Margaret: Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide.- In: The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives / ed. by Susan Suleiman.- Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1986.- pp. 68-83; Showalter, Elaine: Victorian Women and Insanity.- In: Victorian Studies 23 (1979/80), pp. 157-181.; Showalter, Elaine: The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980.- London: Virago, 1987.-; Shaps, Regina: Hysterie und Weiblichkeit: Wissenschaftsmythen über die Frau.- Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1982.-

2 Silverman, Kaja: The Subject of Semiotics.- New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.-

3 Showalter, Elaine: The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980.- London: Virago, 1987.-

4 Ibid., pp. 3 f.

> essentially true for traditional Melancholy as well. [...] Only with the coming of the age of sensibility from the mid-eighteenth century was disorder effectively "feminized".[5]

This has to be attributed to the following circumstances or process. The cultural norms of patriarchal society created an ideology of 'femininity', which "degraded" women to 'privileged inferiors'. Since they were idealized and placed on a protective pedestal as more delicate, more refined, more sensitive than men, they also had to be 'protected' from the dangers, distractions and dissipations of the wider world - "from public life and from intellectual over-exertion" - in short, "from the patriarchal public order for which men only were destined"[6] Male medical opinion furthermore warned "sternly and ceaselessly, that the woman who trespassed beyond the domestic sphere would suffer psychiatric collapse."[7]

As many feminists have emphasized, however, the "medical belief that the instability of the female nervous and reproductive systems made women more vulnerable to derangement" was above all used "as a reason to keep women out of the professions, to deny them political rights, and to keep them under male control in the family and the state."[8] As many women writers suggested, it was exactly this denial and the lack of meaningful work or companionship that led to depression or breakdown. The cribbed and confined milieu of the 'doll's house' itself became a madhouse of frustrations and thwarted energies.[9]

Theories of biological sexual difference generated by Darwin and his disciples eventually put the full weight of scientific confirmation behind narrow Victorian ideals of femininity. Darwin explained that through natural selection man had become superior to woman in courage, energy, intellect, and inventive genius and thus would inevitably excel in art, science, and philosophy. Furthermore, women were mentally constituted to take care of children as well as physically constituted to give birth. Mental breakdown, then, would come "when women defied their "nature", attempted to compete with men instead of serving them, or sought alternatives or even additions to their maternal functions"[10]. Darwinian psychiatry undoubtedly

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5 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- p. 104

6 Ibid., p. 118

7 Ibid., pp. 118 f.

8 Showalter, Elaine: The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980.- London: Virago, 1987.- pp. 72 f.

9 A bitter fact not only discovered by Ibsen's Nora, but also emphasized by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), where she records the experiences of a woman like herself who has been reduced to utter passivity, or compelled to regress to a baby-like condition, under "the suffocating, cosseting regime of her physician-husband, who overprotected her into being a total invalid and subsequently into insanity". (Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- p. 119)

10 Showalter, Elaine: The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980.- London: Virago, 1987.- p.

intimidated many women with its prophecies of hysterical breakdown for women who transgressed their destined roles. Yet staying within the roles offered women no protection against hysteria either. Quite frequently, female rebellion against domesticity was itself regarded as mental pathology, the consequence being that women who radically challenged the norms of feminine conduct were often committed to lunatic asylums.[11] As Showalter has suggested, however,

> Instead of asking if rebellion was mental pathology, we must ask whether mental pathology was suppressed rebellion. Was the hysterical women a feminist heroine, fighting back against confinement in the bourgeois home? Was hysteria - the "daughter's disease" - a mode of protest for women deprived of other social or intellectual outlets or expressive options?

While feminist historians such as Caroll Smith-Rosenberg have also argued that hysteria was really a psychological response on the part of many middle-class women to the limitations placed on them within the context of nineteenth-century society, she further holds that hysteria was not only an escape for these women but also an assertion of power as "it allowed them to manipulate their families and physicians through a form of passive aggressiveness"[12]. In a similar vein, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *Madwoman in the Attic*, point to the fictional character of the deranged woman who haunts the margins of nineteenth-century women writers' texts as the symbolic representation of the female author's anger against the rigidities of patriarchal tradition. The madwoman is the authors double, the incarnation of her own anxiety and rage. It is through the violence of this double that "the female author enacts her own raging desires to escape male houses and male texts."[13]

In contrast to the hostile portraits of hysterical women produced by most fin de siècle physicians, Freud and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria* presented a sympathetic and even admiring view of these women. They not only maintained that hysterics were neither weak nor mentally deficient and included "people of the clearest intellect, strong will, greatest character and highest critical power"[14], but also concluded that repressed emotions as well as repetitious domestic routines, including needlework, knitting, and sickbed nursing, to which bright women were frequently confined, could cause

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11 Worse still clitoridectomy is the surgical enforcement of an ideology that restricts female sexuality to reproduction. With their sexuality exercised, his patients gave up their independent desires and protests and became docile child-bearers.

12 Smith-Rosenberg, Caroll: The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th Century America.- In: Social Resaerch 39, 4 (Winter 1972).- p. 655.-

13 Gilbert, Sandra; Gubar, Susan: The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.- New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.- p. 85

14 Freud, Sigmund; Breuer, Josef: Studies on Hysteria.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.- p. 48.-

hysteria insofar as these monotonous and uninteresting occupations were a torture, and they had to amuse themselves by fantasizing.

Although the incidence of classic hysteria in women seemed to decline after the war, the new "female malady" of schizophrenia soon arose to take its place.[15] According to most feminist voices, however, this was merely a change in symptom[16] and, as progressive as Freudian theories may have been, not much else could have been expected. This was because the principle situation of women had not changed much; they were still victims to isolation, powerlessness, sexual repression and frustration imposed by a male-dominated society. A further point of criticism variously made was the fact that the source of potential cure, psychiatry, is male-dominated as well. More and more feminists regarded it as their task to expose the misogynist tendencies of Freudianism in particular. While some feminists like Juliet Mitchell, for example, still defended Freud on the grounds that the early years of psychoanalysis offered a considerable advance over the biological determinism and moralism of Darwinian psychiatry and that Freudian theory "is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one"[17], most of them nonetheless claimed that he above all failed his female patients because he was too quick to impose his own (male) language on their mute communications and that his insistence on the sexual origins of hysteria blinded him to the social factors contributing to it. As feminist critics have come to mistrust psychoanalytical theories of woman in the writings of Freud, they have retraced psychoanalysis to its birth at the turn of the century, trying to recover nonconforming truths about the cases of Anna O. and Dora and taking those observations as a point of departure for their own "speculations". This movement has been initiated by works coming out of France, the writings of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and others.[18] It is the French context of poststructuralism that

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15 Contrary to feminist claims most studies, however, seem to show that the incidence is about equal in women and men. (cf. Schumer, Florence: Gender and Schizophrenia.- In: Gender and Disordered Behavior: Sex Differences in Psychopathology / ed. by Edith S. Gomberg and Violet Franks.- New York: Brunner-Mazel, 1979.-pp. 321-53.-; Al-Issa, Ihsan: Gender and Schizophrenia.- In: Gender and Psychopathology / ed. by Ihsan Al-Issa.- New York: Academic Press, 1982.-; Block Lewis, Helen: Psychic War in Men and Women.- New York: New York University Press, 1976.-; Wing, J. W.: Reasoning About Madness.- London: Oxford University Press, 1978.-)

16 As Sander Gilman points out, the shifting definitions of female insanity are nicely chronicled by the changing representations of Ophelia over the centuries, from the erotomania of the Elizabethans and the hysteria of the nineteenth century to the unconscious incestuous conflicts of the Freudians and the schizophrenic double bind of the Langians. Cf. Gilman, Sander L.: Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness.- Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.-

17 Mitchell, Juliet: Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women.- New York: Random House, 1975.- p. xiii.-

18 Important titles to be mentioned here are: Kristeva, Julia: Revolution in Poetic Language.- Transl. by Margaret Waller.- New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.-; Irigaray, Luce: Speculum of the Other Woman.- Transl. by Gillian C. Gill.- Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985 [1974].-; Irigaray, Luce: This Sex Which Is Not One.- Transl. by Cathrine Porter.- Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985 [1977].-; Cixous, Hélène; Clement, Cathérine: The Newly Born Woman.- Transl. by Betsy Wing.- Minneapolis: , 1986.-; further diverse material is to be found in the collection: New French Feminism / ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron.- New York: , 1981.-

has given the feminist project in psychoanalysis its edge as a radical questioning of the status of "knowledge", "truth", and "theory" as such.

In America, it was above all the psychologist Phyllis Chesler who invited the critic to define a new genre, that of feminist psycho-socio-historico-literary criticism. Her important study *Women and Madness* includes a study of women in the mental health care system, a critique of sexism in modern psychology and psychoanalytic theory, an analysis of the mythical and religious origins of sexual oppression, an historical review of misogyny in patriarchal societies, reflections on the work of women writers, interviews with women who had been treated for mental illness and meditations on the psychology of women. Chesler suggests that women are labeled mad or escape into madness because they are at odds with their female roles in a patriarchal society that offers them the roles of wives, mothers, or social losers. She further maintains that the women confined to American mental institutions are failed but heroic rebels against the constraints of a narrow femininity, pilgrims "on a doomed search for potency", whose insanity is a label applied to gender norms and violations, a penalty for "*being*" 'female' as well as for "desiring or daring *not* to be"[19]. French feminist theory carries this identification with the madwoman to its furthest extremes. For writers such as Hélène Cixous, madness has been the historical label applied to female protest and revolution. In her celebration of hysteria or, more precisely, her revision of Freud's patient Dora, she came to see the force of hysteria as precisely the force of undomestication and excess. "It is you, Dora, you, who cannot be tamed, the poetic body, the true "mistress" of the Signifier."[20]

Whilst these attempts can be praised for their attempt to redefine female madness, I would argue that all of the prominent feminist approaches which have celebrated the madwoman as a figure of 'rage' and rebellion against patriarchy are misguided insofar as the symbolic resolution of the madwoman as an alternative to patriarchy ultimately traps the woman in silence. Another characteristic charge levied against the French feminists has been that of essentialism. By positioning woman as "other" to the "phallogocentric" order, they confine woman to another false absolute which simply reproduces patriarchal patterns. The best-known advocate to voice this allegation is Toril Moi in *Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*.[21]

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19 Chesler, Phyllis: Women and Madness.- New York: Avon, 1983 (1972).- p. 31, 16

20 Cixous, Hélène; Clement, Cathérine: The Newly Born Woman.- Transl. by Betsy Wing.- Minneapolis: 1986.- p. 95

21 Moi, Toril: Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory.- London: Methuen, 1985.-

Nina Baym, taking a radically anti-theoretical stance, denounces their approach on the basis of its obvious monologism and androcentrism[22], claiming that this single-mindedness towards aspects of femininity does not do justice to the "pluralism" of female writing.

> My point would not be that there are no differences; but that when you start with a theory of difference, you can't see anything but.[23]

I myself would argue on similar grounds and, unlike some feminist scholars, I do not hold the view that women are driven mad *primarily* by a patriarchal society, though the psychic insults from sexism (as well as by racism and class) can contribute significantly to mental distress. All women suffer some form of discrimination, but not all women suffer psychotic episodes. While it was surely necessary at one point to reject a purely medical model of madness, which treats madness as an illness with a biological or genetic cause, most of the purely sociological theories of psychosis simply do not fit current psychiatric evidence, which argues strongly in favor of some biological basis for many forms of mental disease. Madness, in my view, has to be interpreted as deriving from sources that are bio-psycho-social. I would also argue that instead of assigning madness primarily to one sex or the other, one has to distinguish between pan-human and gender-specific experiences of madness. In other words , I assume that certain existential aspects hold true for every human being regardless of sex. Both men and women may be born with a genetic predisposition towards mental disorders; both may be exposed to parents or primary caretakers whose own problems in life are so severe that they are unable to provide the necessary safety and guidance for their children; both pass through the vicissitudes of difficult developmental tasks. Both men and women are born with the same existential realities that take on meaning, for better or for worse, in a social context. The existential facts of life with which both are confronted include aspects such as aging and death and such philosophical constructs as isolation, freedom and responsibility. Such existential realities often lie dormant within the individual until they are evoked by a boundary experience. The distinguishing feature, however, is that if the experience of madness derives fundamentally from similar sources for the two sexes, the triggering agencies are often different. Whereas both sexes may share boundary experiences such as severe sickness which makes us consciously aware of the existential facts of life, other incidents like war or childbirth are surely more gender-specific. While the psychic consequences of war on men will be discussed in the chapter on Timothy Findley, it is

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22 Baym, Nina: The Madwoman and her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory.- In: Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship / ed. by Shari Benstock.- Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.- p. 45

23 Ibid., p. 51

the extent to which maternity, as an option or experience, serves as a catalyst for mental breakdown which is, among others, of major interest in this chapter. Although most feminists have examined motherhood with regard to its social implications, less attention has been paid to the biological and existential aspects of motherhood, which may, however, contribute just as much to mental unbalance.[24] As Yalom has pointed out

> when we examine the writings of women looking inward to the vortex of their distress - women who "know" madness from experience as opposed to scholars who "know about" madness - it becomes impossible to ignore the biological and existential dimensions of their obsession with maternity, over and above the societal structure in which motherhood is anchored.[25]

This is especially true in the case of Audrey Thomas, who most vividly tells of the blood, the pain, the fear, and the anguish at the loss of a child.

8.2 The Bleeding Body: The Works of Audrey Thomas

Her three novels from the 1970s - *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures* - all record the saga of self-discovery of a single female character, Isobel Cleary[26]. And even while the three novels do not constitute a trilogy in the usual sense, they clearly constitute a continuous semi-autobiographical narrative as they are held together by the repetition and expansion of the same moods and themes, just as the narrating voice obviously belongs to the same person in different phases of experience.

Isobel's wartime childhood and post-war adolescence form the subject matter of the first[27] novel of this trilogy, *Songs My Mother Taught Me*. A family-centred bildungsroman set in and around Utica, New York, in the 1940's and 1950's, it traces Isobel's psychological and emotional development through the formative years from

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24 Although this aspect is not explicitly considered in the novels to be discussed, an important factor which leads to great distress in women of a certain age, is the fact that the fundamental biological difference between males and females is that for a women, the childbearing option is limited to the premenopausal years, whereas men are, in theory, are able to procreate throughout the full adult life cycle. This offers them greater freedom since they may choose to defer parenting to a later stage in their lives. A women simply does not have this possibility. Surely the knowledge that the time period for having babies spans barely two decades adds to the anxiety women experience about the already problematic questions of mating, maternity and motherhood.

25 Yalom, Marilyn: Maternity, Morality and the Literature of Madness.- University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania Sate University Press, 1985.-

26 Though the protagonist of *Mrs. Blood* is called Mrs. Blood / Mrs. Thing, she is clearly the precursor of the Isobel of *Songs My Mother Taught Me* and *Blown Figures.*

27 Although it was not published until 1973, *Songs My Mother Taught Me* was the first novel Audrey Thomas ever wrote.

the age of five to seventeen - years during which she gropes, sometimes fearfully, sometimes desperately, for her valid identity as an intelligent and sexual adult female. The division within her personality which becomes overtly apparent in the later novels is already latent here. What initially appears to be a conventional first person narrative, split only chronologically into the "Songs of Innocence" of childhood and the "Songs of Experience" of adolescence, is in fact a curiously constructed record of two voices, where the narrator refers to herself sometimes as "I" and sometimes as a third person she observes. Significantly, the distancing usually occurs in situations associated with pain and fear. The Isobel/I split is, however, not only manifested in the switches from first to third person narration, but in Isobel's habit of addressing herself in thought and writing as 'another'. As a child, she would address postcards to herself:

> "Dear Isobel.
> Having a swell time.
> Your friend.
> I."[28]

Furthermore, working in a mental institution as a teenager, she soon realizes that there is as much madness outside it as inside. The epilogue of *Songs My Mother Taught Me* - the passage from *Alice in Wonderland* where Alice meets the Cheshire Cat - not only appropriately comments on Isobel's work at the mental hospital, but also hints at her own confusion:

> "But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.
> "Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."
> "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
> "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."[29]

In *Mrs. Blood*, which opens with the same quotation, Thomas jumps ahead perhaps a decade and a half in Isobel's life, leaving clues of memory, disappointment and bitterness to link the anguished, unnamed central woman of this novel to the Isobel of her early years. Recently uprooted from Canada to Africa, where the protagonist's husband is teaching, immobile in her hospital bed, the woman presents a complex, confusing, fragmented record of her struggle - ultimately futile - to wrest a full-term pregnancy from what she refers to as her "traitorous"[30], bleeding body. Aspects of life,

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28 Thomas, Audrey: Songs My Mother Taught Me.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993 [1973].- p. 19
29 Ibid., p. 205
30 Thomas, Audrey: Mrs. Blood.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988 [1970].- p. 93

death, the meaning of suffering and man's insignificance are presented to us in the context and the chronicle of a singular female experience: miscarriage.

In her evocative and haunting narrative of emotional and physical pain we are taken through lyrical passages of erotic moments, grotesque nightmares of fragmentation and destruction, and blood curdling descriptions of mutilation, decapitation, decay, and disease. In this out-flow of words, details of chronology, geography, history, and theology are juxtaposed, so partial, so fragmentary, that their function is less to elucidate character, personality, or setting than to help expand the moods of fear, disorientation, helplessness, frustration, resentment, and rage which characterize the woman.

The narrative is divided into three parts: the first part, which takes place in the hospital to which she is confined due to a threatened miscarriage, followed by a record of her period at home - anxious and fearful, yet hoping all will be well - which in turn precedes a section chronicling her return to the hospital and the final miscarriage. However, there is a further sub-division throughout these sections which is of far greater importance, namely the ominously schizoid split of the narrative voice into Mrs. Thing and Mrs. Blood. The whole book is divided into sections spoken by one or the other, which Thomas establishes visually by alternating these labels as subheadings for the short narrative sections which make up the novel. Both of these voices are Isobel, but each is a different aspect of her - so different that they almost seem like different personalities sharing the same body and experience.

On the one hand we have Mrs. Thing, the acted-upon, passive, fearful, self-conscious young wife and mother, performing perfunctory roles that have blurred her identity and transformed her into object and function. With respect to her domestic identity, the woman defensively asserts her fulfillment of the required qualities by stating: "I can cook, I am educated [...] My husband is admired."[31]

As she constantly analyzes, trying to construct an orderly hedge of reason around the untamed garden of fear which always threatens to obliterate her, Mrs. Thing also represents conscious thought and intellectual procedure. In her thoughts, Mrs. Thing concerns herself with present reality and present problems, with her husband and two children. She is frightened as she prepares to enter hospital, but tries to stay calm. In the hospital she jokes with the doctor and nurses, reads women's magazines, worries about her children and her own inadequacy compared to other wives in the compound, efficient at making their own clothes and organizing children's parties.

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31 Ibid., pp. 160 f.

She recalls the family's trip across Canada, their visit to Jason's parents in England; their trip by sea to Africa. She is haunted by memories of deaths which occurred during the sea voyages, which she now interprets as foreshadowing of her present misfortune. Thoughts of the past are related to the present situation.

Hospitalized and helpless, Mrs. Thing is afraid of physical processes and the encroachment of the body upon the mind:

> Lying here my brain grows musty from disuse and I am obsessed by the least twinge or rumble of my traitor body.[32]

It is clear that she is aware of the existence of the other personality since is Mrs. Thing who says at the beginning of the novel

> Some days my name is Mrs. Blood; some days it's Mrs. Thing. Today it's Mrs. Thing.[33]

By contrast, Mrs. Blood seems unaware of Mrs. Thing, although sometimes she ironically echoes statements made non-ironically by the other, such as "There are no victims"[34], which Mrs. Thing intends as a straightforward acceptance of responsibility for herself and what happens to her; in Mrs. Blood's voice this becomes purely ironic:

> There are no victims. Life cannot rape. There are no bad experiences. Say your beads and be silent.[35]

Whereas Mrs. Thing manifests the intellectual side of the personality, Mrs. Blood represents the physical, sensual, instinctual, and emotional side. She exists in terms of physical sensation and feeling: "I am here [in hospital] because I bleed"[36] and "I stink therefore I am",[37] and rather than analyze her experience as Mrs. Thing does, Mrs. Blood simply reruns it without comment.

Mrs. Blood is a guilt-ridden bundle of memories and poetic visions, wracked by physical and psychic forces beyond her control, reliving in an unplanned way the experiences which have made the most profound impact on her psyche. She recalls a gory car accident she has seen as a child, adventures of her first trip to Europe, incidents during her summer as a student aide at a mental hospital and, most

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32 Ibid., p. 93
33 Ibid., p. 11
34 Ibid., p. 69
35 Ibid., p. 91
36 Ibid., p. 14
37 Ibid., p. 21

important of all, Richard, her lover of student years, her one true love and the only man to whom she has ever committed herself passionately and wholly. Her memories of Richard are nonetheless conflicting, one reason being that the narrator still cannot reconcile herself to his leaving years after the event. The other memories are not only ambivalent but all of them have to do with injury, sickness, suffering - her own or others' - and love. The most recurring image is that of blood. She returns again and again to the words, "This is my body, this is my blood."

As the protagonist's ordeal moves towards its inexorable conclusion, the voice of Mrs. Thing, which took precedence in the earlier part of the novel, becomes less and less evident. The entire, brief third section is voiced by Mrs. Blood. This is a moving lyrical passage in which phrases recur with the motif of a haunting melody. Past and present are juxtaposed; repeated references to the most understanding of the nurses keep us in the present, while repeated calls to her former lover return us to the past. Past and present finally meet in the last scene of the novel, where we are simultaneously shown the present miscarriage and the memory of the events leading up to an earlier abortion. Thomas manages this simultaneous telling by layering the telephone call which Mrs. Blood made to the father of the aborted child years ago over her present grief about the miscarriage she is now undergoing:

> Only silence. "Richard!"
> *Oh, Jason, I'm sorry.*
>
> "Get rid of it,"
>
> he said.[38]

The two stories overlap, and it is only when the fetus is expelled from her body that the cause of the guilt and fear is fully recalled, the secret which has been haunting her with an impending certainty of retribution.

The tragic frightening experience of abortion and miscarriage also form the backdrop for the next novel.[39] In *Blown Figures*, which seems to pick up where Mrs. Blood left off, the narrator is returning psychologically, and perhaps physically, to Africa[40] to

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38 Ibid., p. 220

39 Speaking in an interview of the relationship between *Blown Figures* and *Mrs. Blood*, the author suggests ways of reading these novels either individually or as a connected pair: "Someone […] talked about the novel of sliding panels. Well, in a sense, that's what I'm doing. It's all one novel really - *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures*. But the novel of sliding panels can be read separately. […] they also fit together. It depends which way you want to do it. (Komisar, Elizabeth: Audrey Thomas: A Review / Interview.- In: Open Letter 3:3 (Fall 1975), p. 61)

40 As several critics have pointed out the whole journey to Africa might as well be just a hallucination or a kind of dream. cf. for instance: Monk, Patricia: Shadow Continent: The Image of Africa in Three Contemporary Canadian Writers.- In: Ariel 8:4 (1977), p. 16 or Coldwell, Joan: Memory Organized: The Novels of Audrey Thomas.- In: Canadian Literature

revisit the scene of her loss in an attempt to regain the spark of life and exorcise the haunting memories of her lost pregnancies, her own guilt, and her anger at the men, Richard and Jason, who were involved at different stages of her life.

Unlike *Mrs. Blood*, *Blown Figures* does not split narrative or character into halves. The protagonist's schizoid split in *Mrs. Blood* between her intellect and her instinct is merely a prelude to a further disintegration in *Blown Figures*. As in *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, the psychic split in Isobel is once again indicated by the fact that she talks about herself in both the third person ("Consider Isobel"[41]), and in the first person:

> I have such strange twinkling random thoughts, like distant stars, in the darkness of my mind.[42]

These random thoughts are evident as her narrative repeatedly breaks down into incoherence; snatches of verse and prose, lists of surgical instruments, advertisements, dictionary definitions, horoscopes, and all the other debris of memory swirl uncontrollably in her head. The text is now composed entirely of loosely connected fragments, as is the psyche of the emotionally scarred woman.

> "I'm afraid," said Isobel to the shrink, "I'm afraid all the time. Of everything."[43]

The reader is made much more aware of this connection between the text and the psyche when some of these short snippets are placed alone on a single page. The traditional novel form, Thomas seems to suggest, is unable to contain this tale of a woman's disintegration. This is a point which has been made by various feminist critics who claim that "the final criterion of orderliness, wholeness, or a harmonious shaping with which critics characterize autobiography is often not applicable to women's autobiography"[44] and are themselves developing models that deviate from the premises of autonomy, linearity and mastery.[45] As Thomas's character journeys from apparent resolution to radical questioning and loss of certainty, the form of the novel must therefore do the same. Haunted as much by her longings as by her memories, this fragmented narrative reflects the reality of her life.

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92 (1982), p. 49

41 Thomas, Audrey: Mrs. Blood.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988 [1970].- p. 11

42 Ibid., p. 48

43 Thomas, Audrey: Blown Figures.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974.- p. 20

44 Jelinek, Estelle C.: Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition.- In: Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism / ed. by Estelle C. Jelinek.- Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.- p. 19

45 Compare for example: Friedman, Susan: Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice.- In: The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings / ed. by Shari Benstock.- Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.- pp. 34-62.- and Brée, Germaine: Autogynography.- In: Studies in Autobiography / ed. by James Olney.- New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.- pp. 171-179.-

Drawn more and more into the darker regions of her mind she comes to question the reality of her experience and, correspondingly, her own sanity. "Real life had become for [her] a street marked One Way Do Not Enter."[46] As Isobel realizes, her husbands Freudian slips are all too apt: "'Isobel doesn't live, ' said Jason to a friend, 'she exits.' He meant to say 'exists'."[47] She envisions herself as split in two parts, each part observing and laughing at the other's "frantic efforts to keep the darkness out"[48].

Isobel's vision of herself as a "terrible" or "destroying" mother - the images of cannibalism, eating, and death all relate to this conception of herself - along with the physical and spiritual emptiness she experiences, which may best be summed up by her words: "Everything [is] dead or dying"[49], direct her towards symbolic self-destruction. Her journey to "explore the mind's antipodes"[50] leads not to health, but to a nightmarish confirmation of her madness. Having failed to exorcise her demons, her direct contact with the primitive, rather than bringing her to a new wholeness, results only in complete fragmentation. Since she has utterly lost contact with reality, she enters the world of madness where things both are and are not what they seem to be. In addition to conjuring up the dead child, the allusions to Lewis Caroll's Alice stories function as signposts to Isobel's own state of bewilderment and confusion. The prognosis for Isobel at the end of the novel is "a total surrender, not to the positive possibilities of life, but to the nocturnal world of the unconscious"[51], that is psychic death. By a final and pitiless irony, she has made herself not only a victim of the real world, but also prey to the demons of her own inner one since she has been unable to let go of the past, a slave to her own concept or habit of memorizing which she describes and analyzes as follows in *Songs My Mother Taught Me*:

> From as far back as I could remember I was aware - and afraid - of two things: death and the passage of time. [...] And sometimes I would say to myself, "Ten years from now you will remember this moment and it will be the past." If something truly unusual happened I tried to impale the whole complex of sight/sound/taste/smell on my consciousness and memory as though such an experience was like some rare and multicolored butterfly.[52]

and again in *Mrs. Blood*:

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46 Thomas, Audrey: Blown Figures.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974.- p. 118

47 Ibid., p. 22

48 Ibid., p. 22

49 Ibid., p. 68

50 Ibid., p. 189

51 Jung, C. G.: Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia.- Transl. by R. F. C. Hull.- Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974.- p. 436.-

52 Thomas, Audrey: Songs My Mother Taught Me.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993 [1973].- p. 157

> Thus on the way to my grandfather's cottage I would try to memorize the billboards or the number of cows in a field in order to preserve that day more perfectly in my memory.[53]

While the deliberate memorizing of details may be a means of triumphing over time, it seems that not only the "memorable" experiences are preserved this way but the horrible ones as too, and since she cannot get rid of the pictures in her head she is condemned to repeat her inner excursion of horror and thus mentally rehearses her experience over and over again. Since she has her "memories preserved intact"[54] and as the wound festers, her "bad experiences" exist as insurmountable blocks and the struggle to free herself becomes that of "a fly in marmalade"[55]. She regrettably remains a victim, as the postscript to *Blown Figures* suggests: "Time! You monstrous mole. Why are you doing this to me?"[56] Her fear that "her mind has followed the example of her body and was going to betray her"[57] proved to be well-founded, for her demons refuse to be exorcised - the past not only haunts but destroys the present.

As these novels were written out of the intensely painful personal memory of the miscarriage Thomas suffered while she lived in Ghana, they not only represent the struggle of her protagonist Isobel to come to terms with her experiences but also her own struggle as well. Not surprisingly then, Thomas has been referred to as one of the "most obviously autobiographical fiction writers in Canada"[58]. She herself has confirmed this in several interviews: "I'm an autobiographical writer"[59] she told Eleanor Wachtel and to George Bowering remarked: "I really don't know anyone as well as I know myself. I find it really presumptuous to write about other people"[60] and "I never write about anybody but myself"[61]. But there is more to it than that, for it seems that the statement

> I am an old log thrown up by the sea, and the past clings to me like barnacles.[62]

made by Mrs. Blood applies just as much to the author herself. And although Thomas answered Dorothy Livesay's criticism that she was somehow singing a one-note song

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53 Thomas, Audrey: Mrs. Blood.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988 [1970].- p. 60
54 Thomas, Audrey: Blown Figures.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974.- p. 33
55 Ibid., p. 54
56 Ibid., p. 47
57 Ibid., p. 32
58 Bowering, George: Snow Red: The Short Stories of Audrey Thomas.- In: Open Letter, 3rd Series 5, 1975, p. 28
59 Wachtel, Eleanor: The Guts of *Mrs. Blood*.- In: Books in Canada, 1979, p. 5
60 Bowering, George: Songs and Wisdom: An Interview with Audrey Thomas.- In: Open Letter, 4/3 (1979), p. 14
61 Ibid., p. 30
62 Thomas, Audrey: Mrs. Blood.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988 [1970].- p. 91

by denying that her novels are "confessional" in nature or "self-obsessed"[63] claiming instead that they are of a larger scope as

> No one, to my knowledge, had written a book about something that has happened to millions of women over the years.[64]

her personal experience of this circumstance still remains singular. Jung observes that "when a form of art is primarily personal it deserves to be treated as if it were a neurosis"[65], just as Thomas herself has acknowledged that writing about her own suffering is a form of therapy:

> [I]t had to be written, it seemed to be the only way I could organize the horror and utter futility of a six-months long, drawn-out miscarriage in a hospital in Africa.[66]

Undue repetition in this context - the fact that she has written a story and two novels about it - may furthermore point to an obsession. As Evelyne Keitel has pointed out

> Die [...] Thematisierung des immer Gleichen [...] vermitte[t] vor allem den Eindruck von etwas Zwanghaftem, Repetitiven, Irrealem, das integraler Bestandteil psychotischer Prozesse ist.[67]

It is the purely personal aspect of much of Audrey Thomas' writing, coupled with her inclination to tell and retell a single story that is both fascinating and problematic. On the one hand, novels of this kind by being so emotionally charged "verfügen über ganz spezifische Wirkungsdimensionen"[68] and are extremely captivating. On the other hand, however, one is inclined to ask, like the rats in *Blown Figures*: "Do you know only one story?"[69] As Anne Archer has pointed out

> Regrettably, resonant lines and delicious anecdotes may suffer a loss of power through overexposure. Familiarity breeds a sense of boredom; we have been here before.[70]

or as Moss puts it:

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63 Thomas, Audrey: Open Letter to Dorothy Livesay.- In: Room of One's Own 5:3 (1980), p. 71

64 Ibid., p. 73

65 Jung, C. G.: Modern Man in Search of a Soul.- London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978 [1933].- p. 194.-

66 Thomas, Audrey: My Craft and Sullen Art.- In: Atlantis 4:1 (1978), p. 153

67 Keitel, Evelyne: Psychopathographien: die Vermittlung psychotischer Phänomene durch Literatur.- Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1986.- p. 76

68 Ibid., p. 10

69 Thomas, Audrey: Blown Figures.- Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974.- p. 313

70 Archer, Anne: Real Mummies.- In: Studies in Canadian Literature 9 (1984), p. 223

> Audrey Thomas is a good writer, but Audrey Thomas as a protagonist is sometimes tiresome [...] one sometimes feels to lose patience with her, to get fed up with the [...] indulgences of her emotions, the endless ruminations over her bereft condition in the world [...]. You want to tell her, okay now, enough words; stop writing about it, stop rewriting yourself.[71]

Which she did in fact. In her two interlocking novel, *Munchmeyer and Prospero on the Island* she turns away from fictionally recreating the experience which had traumatized her for so long and instead comes to meditate on writing as such and the creativity of male and female writers, just as her novel *Intertidal Life*, as well as her short story collections *Real Mothers* and *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck* and her latest novel *Graven Images* show a larger variety of motifs and themes, dealing mainly with the subtle nuances of contemporary (sexual) relationships, human emotions in general and the strong links between mothers and daughters. Contrary to her fictitious alter ego, it thus seems that Thomas has finally managed to come to terms with the past that haunted her for so long.

8.3. The Rapunzel Syndrom: Female Self-Enslavement

8.3.1 Joan Barfoot's *Dancing in the Dark*

The novel I would like to contemplate now is of a completely different nature but just as haunting. While it is surely a story about a "woman's revision of her inheritance", to my mind it is not "a story of resistance and rebellion"[72], as Howells has claimed, but a story of frustration, fear and despair instead. What makes this book so extraordinary and all the more moving and genuine is the fact that for once, it does not focus on the strategies of male domination but exposes women's own self-enslavement to inherited gender images and romantic fantasies.

In Joan Barfoot's *Dancing in the Dark*, the female protagonist, Edna Cormick, falls victim the late-Victorian cult of domesticity propagated in the 1950s and described by Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique,* as follows

> The suburban housewife - she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife - freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the danger of childbirth and the illness of her

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71 Moss, John: A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel.- Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987 [1981].- p. 354, p. 356

72 Howells, Carol Ann: Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s.- London; New York: Methuen, 1987.- p. 137

> grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment.[73]

Brought up in the first post-war generation, Edna Cormick has willingly allowed her life to be created for her through the fictions offered by 1950's magazines with their romantic images of desirable women as lovers, brides and wives in happy marriages and glossy homes. An old-fashioned 'feminine' woman, she does not want to revise the old but prefers to exist within the artificially enclosed and supposedly sheltered space of her marriage fantasy, concentrating on polished surfaces and forcing her husband and herself to disappear into her magazine stereotypes. Only when her fantasy is threatened by self-doubts on her fortieth birthday and then radically challenged by a report of Harry's infidelity does she become aware of the fact that her fantasy has been a dangerous illusion, that the 'private space' she has made for herself was not real and that the images of "happy spaces" which are evoked utterly fail to provide security in actual life. In an act of sheer desperation and confusion, the 'Angel of the House' stabs her husband with a tomato knife after twenty years of "happy marriage". If the story had ended at that point it could surely be regarded as "a story of resistance and rebellion". However, Edna has not freed herself through this act of revenge, but falls into the silence of madness instead. Confined to a mental hospital after the murder, Edna desperately tries to detect what went wrong with her life, or more precisely where she went wrong. Through the notebooks she writes we get a glimpse of the multiplicity of unstated feelings which lie behind her silence.

It is almost impossible to discuss *Dancing in the Dark* without dealing with the question of housework and what it means to the narrator. Edna is obsessed with house cleaning; first with doing it, and then with analyzing it as a way of understanding her marriage and its sudden and violent demise. She employs a variety of metaphors to convey to her reader, and maybe to herself, a sense of why she felt compelled to give the best part of her time and energy, for twenty years, to keeping her house spotless.

Edna's notion that in order to ensure the safety of her home and her relationship she must be the perfect wife, is derived not from the examples she sees around her, particularly in her own childhood home, but from a different source, indicated as she recalls her teenage observations:

> The magazines and books, the world outside our own, showed clearly that the real and normal system was the reverse of the one in our home [...] I paid attention to the magazines and not to

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[73] Friedan, Betty: The Feminine Mystique.- York: Norton, 1983 [1963].- p. 18, p. 22

> my mother, and pledged that when I married (however that would come about; but it had to), I would cherish the state properly.[74]

Note that she does not regard her actual surroundings as "real and normal", but the fiction propagated by the books and magazines she refers to.

To her great surprise, Harry comes along in college and offers her a kind of life she had hitherto only read about. Consequently, she feels she "owe[s] him everything"[75] and the only way she can repay her debt and show her gratitude is through hours worked:

> [...] all those little jobs, they were my payment and my expression of my duty and my care. They added up to safety and escape, love and gratitude spoken in a different language, words in shining floors and tidy beds.[76]

Edna's conviction that her most important wifely role is to keep the house clean is evident in the recurrent metaphor which she uses in questioning what went wrong with her marriage:

> If I could track back through my days, could I find the spot I missed? It must be somewhere in this house. Under a bed, or in the corner of a closet?[77]

Her magazines are the holy books in the religion of marriage, in which she firmly believes, just as housekeeping is the physical manifestation of her faith in that institution. Several times in the novel she describes her daily routine in terms of religious images:

> My days were a service, a mass: precise steps and motions, all in order, to the end of either worship or comfort, whichever [...] Each task is a kind of ritual abasement, an appeasing of unknown, threatening gods [...] Or like saying prayers on beads, or making certain movements in particular ways, a form of worship or of fear.[78]

Furthermore, Edna's faith in marriage is purposely blind. The woman who calls to tell Edna about Harry's affair insists "it's only fair" that Edna should know. But Edna protests:

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74 Barfoot, Joan: Dancing in the Dark.-Toronto: MacMillan, 1982.- pp. 25 f.
75 Ibid., p. 17
76 Ibid., p. 69
77 Ibid., p. 80
78 Ibid., p. 80, p. 89

> Is knowledge more fair than faith? More valuable? Oh, God would have done better to make me Eve than the Eve He made. I would not have chosen knowledge over peace.[79]

Edna never questions whether the work she does is a waste of her intellect or her talents, although her constant vacuum cleaning is a perfect symbol for the emptiness of this childless marriage, a "vacuum into which she is finally sucked"[80]. She disagrees with the assumption that "housework is menial, unskilled, unpaid, excessive"[81]. In fact, Edna in no way sees her task as demeaning or beneath her. On the subject of grocery shopping, she states, "This is a skill"[82]. Elsewhere, she insists:

> I did more than cook and serve, much more. I arranged. I was an artist. I created his home. I sketched each moment of the day with care, so that the portrait of his desire was precise when he arrived.[83]

In addition to being a creative artist, Edna also "performs the task of stage manager, devoting her days to the preparation of the backdrop against which her marriage is acted out"[84]. She becomes the leading lady and director of what Howells describes as a "modern domestic fairy-tale with [Edna] herself in the role of little woman adoring her strong successful husband"[85]. Howells goes on to explain that "as a fairy-tale is dependent on maintaining an enclosed space wherein [Edna] and her husband were flattened into stereotypes in a deliberate reduction of complexity and contingency"[86].

For Edna, their perfect home in the suburbs is symbolic of their married relationship, and since Edna has created herself on the basis of that relationship, it is only natural that the house comes to mean so much to her. It is her very own, her actual self, an inseparable part of her. Likewise, Edna muses on the subject of vacations, "Go away, travel, leave home. But home was where my life was; leaving there [...] was to be nowhere at all"[87]. And no-one at all. Not surprisingly then, Edna feels nothing but trepidation at the thought of the world outside her haven. Edna's domestic chores are

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79 Ibid., p. 11

80 Howells, Carol Ann: Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s.- London; New York: Methuen, 1987.- p. 153

81 Barfoot, Joan: Dancing in the Dark.-Toronto: MacMillan, 1982.- p. 69

82 Ibid., p. 17

83 Ibid., p. 9

84 Grandy, Karen: Serving in the Home Guard: Housekeepers and Homemakers in *The Children's Bach* and *Dancing in the Dark*.- In: Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada 6 (Fall 1991), p. 82

85 Howells, Carol Ann: Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s.- London; New York: Methuen, 1987.- p. 150

86 Ibid., p. 150

87 Barfoot, Joan: Dancing in the Dark.-Toronto: MacMillan, 1982.- p. 133

most interesting and revealing as the building blocks of walls to protect her from the outside world. Edna states:

> Pictures I have seen of old cities: built inside great high impenetrable walls, so that no enemies could invade, and the citizens could go about their lives without the burden of fear. [...] Those walls, impracticable in our day, could be recreated, the sense of them, in clean floors and dishes and well-cooked meals and vacuumed carpets, gleaming windows. Or so my hands believed.[88]

According to Laura Shapiro, it was the "godless world of commerce and industry" which the familial walls where meant to keep out in the late 19th century.[89] Edna's fears are more personal. For one thing she's afraid of freedom. Edna does not shirk from the implication that she is a prisoner with walls around her. When Harry says "I'm glad you don't have to [work]. I'm glad you're free"[90], she thinks to herself "Free? Did he say that? A curious kind of freedom to clean and cook"[91]. She then goes on to ask, "But what would I have done with freedom anyway?"[92] Later, she explains, "If I thought of freedom, I saw chaos; a great black catastrophic pit in which anything could happen."[93] Edna believes that a messy house will precipitate familial disaster and that, conversely, a clean house not only reflects but ensures a happy home. She has no desire to look behind the superficial symbol.

No wonder Edna is afraid when she sees that the world outside her walls has been changing, that her "magazines [are] altering, and there [are] new ones besides, entirely foreign", because these changes will inevitably invalidate her whole married life. She particularly fears the women's movement: "Their words, the things they did - They were saying I did not exist. They threatened my life with their demands." She protests, understandably, that "it is unsettling enough turning thirty, without the rules changing also"[94]. Edna also believes, quite rightly it turns out, that there are threats to her relationship with Harry outside the walls. Accordingly, Harry's infidelity is depicted by her as a breakdown in the wall:

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88 Ibid., p. 6
89 Shapiro, Laura: Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century.- New York: Holt, 1986.- p. 14
90 Barfoot, Joan: Dancing in the Dark.-Toronto: MacMillan, 1982.- p. 70
91 Ibid., p. 70
92 Ibid., p. 70
93 Ibid., p. 115
94 Ibid., p. 95

> It's even possible he did not find by chance a hole in the great wall I built so carefully around us, our shining wall, but instead deliberately made one, tunneling through with his long, slender, talented fingers.[95]

Harry, however, is not the only one to venture forth outside the walls of their perfect married life. Edna escapes her domestic wifely role through fantasy. She writes:

> If Harry had secrets, I has one, too. My addiction, my single lapse from duty [...] [was] that old habit, my comfort going back to childhood, of lying silent and eyes closed, separated by blindness from where I was, listening to the music and stealing it for myself. I sang on the stage again, and danced around the same old polished floors, this time with an elegant Harry, a face to the figure now, while other people watched admiringly.[96]

The recurrent fantasy in which she is a successful and admired musical performer is most revealing in that it undermines her insistence elsewhere that her creative impulses are challenged and satisfied by housework. On the other hand, however, it is just another childhood fairy-tale fantasy she "escapes" to.

Edna wonders if her daydreaming "may have been a flaw: that for a half-hour or so in the day I was someone else and had these longings"[97]. It is obvious to the reader, of course, that Edna's indulgence is not a flaw, but a symptom that there is something wrong, not with *her*, but with her life. Edna is adamant in her refusal to acknowledge her own dissatisfaction, but there are clues elsewhere. She imagines that if she had sometimes told Harry what she was really thinking, "that would have broken something. Everything I suspect"[98]. On her fortieth birthday Edna looks back on her life and thinks:

> Forty years gone. Into an even division of fear and safety, twenty years of this, another twenty of that. And another twenty, forty years? Oh God the weariness, the weight, of all those years of endless little tasks. Was Harry big enough? Ah, but there was a dangerous, betraying thought. Question that and anything might happen; I might shatter into pieces just sitting in my chair.[99]

Edna considers these betraying thoughts to be a sign of imperfection. She assumes the imperfection is entirely within herself and not in Harry or the society to whose rules

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95 Ibid., p. 168
96 Ibid., p. 91
97 Ibid., p. 92
98 Ibid., p. 102
99 Ibid., p. 143

she has always strictly adhered. In her description of her singing fantasy, Edna states that her "body and voice were so free and loud in someone else's body and voice"[100]. Tragically, she never feels free in her own body until she stabs Harry:

> It is the way I once thought making love would be: a soaring loss of consciousness, transcendence, and removal. I have gotten out of myself at last - so this was the way; and I am joined and free.[101]

But even as she claims that this act of violence is

> Much better than cooking the perfect meal, or shining the perfect crystal. I have accomplished something there, I have found the moment"[102].

and thinks it might now give her joy to "drive a bulldozer to that house and smash it to splinters"[103], she still cannot free herself from her self-imprisoning fantasy of domestic bliss as she states

> I would give anything to go back. To undo and to do again, I am blinded by knowing it is not possible. It should be possible. I would be so much better, knowing what I know. I would be perfect. If I were perfect (I thought I was, but now perceive the cracks), would he not be also? And then all of this unnecessary. Unreal, impossible.[104]

And since she cannot but cling to the social fiction she has always obeyed without question, the only option left open to her is a retreat into madness. In other words, since the wall of her domestic fortress has been torn down she needs to erect another, a more reliable one:

> They thought a notebook might be an opening? It has built a new wall instead. And this time it is just my wall, I don't have to share it. So no groping fingers are going to poke through this time. In either direction.[105]

Since she will not let anyone in the mental hospital read what she has written, writing, to her, is a private activity rather than an act of communication. As Howells points out, it is "a gesture of defense against the outside world and against herself"[106].

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100 Ibid., p. 90
101 Ibid., p. 179
102 Ibid., p. 180
103 Ibid., p. 97
104 Ibid., p. 20
105 Ibid., p. 125
106 Howells, Carol Ann: Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s.- London; New York: Methuen, 1987.- p. 151

Instead of using her hands to create physical cleanliness and order, she now uses them to record the words with which she is ordering her life. She opens her notebook with the explanation that she is going to "bind her wounds with paper"[107]. Edna is still trying to erect a wall against chaos and again she fails. For eventually she discovers that "the paper no longer binds the wounds. Blood seeps between the pages, and oozes out the covers"[108]. The problem, as in her analysis of what went wrong with her marriage, is her assumption that the chaos which threatens the order she wishes to establish is external, but in fact it emanates from within. A fact she herself acknowledges when she writes:

> What good are pages and pages of neat precise letters spiraling into words and paragraphs, if they only look good? Underneath it is a mess.[109]

Edna's walls, both those of domestic chores and of words, were meant not just to keep others out but also to keep in her singing, dancing, disorderly self, which, following the dictates of the cult of domesticity, she has always tried to stifle. But despite the important self-discoveries she has made in her notebooks, she is at a total loss for a viable alternative or solution. As Edna now turns to herself to ask, "What would my own rules have been?" she does in fact have to concede "I can't imagine."[110] Too much a victim of her own conditioning and self-induced destruction, she is unable to establish an identity of her own, except in another fairy-tale fantasy. What she sees before her is "a whole pure future in which to sketch a whole new Edna, the singer and dancer, the free woman in the narrow corridor, alone in a small white bed"[111]. A fantasy that will forever trap her in silence. But like many of Margaret Gibson's characters, silence and fantasy seem to be the only sanctuary available to her. Refusing to speak to anyone, Edna - "alone in a small white bed" in a mental hospital - appears to have withdrawn from the outer world altogether into her private world of madness. In this respect, it can hardly be called a story of rebellion, far more it is a story of utter resignation. Furthermore, it is of course also a perfect rendering of what Margaret Atwood in *Survival* refers to as the 'Rapunzel Syndrome'. In Canada, she explains

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107 Barfoot, Joan: Dancing in the Dark.-Toronto: MacMillan, 1982.- p. 1
108 Ibid., p. 171
109 Ibid., p. 169
110 Ibid., p. 170
111 Ibid., p. 183

> Rapunzel and the tower are the same, [because] the heroines have internalized the values of their culture to such an extent that she has become her own prison. […] Rapunzel is in fact stuck in the tower, and the best thing she can do is learn how to cope with it. [112]

Although I would once again denounce the Canadianess of this phenomenon, the observation of the problematic situation many women find themselves in is more than apt. One of her own novels in which she investigates the extent to which the expectations of some other - be it culture, a man, a parent - interfere with the process of autonomy is *The Edible Woman*, where Marion MacAlpin suffers something similar to the 'Rapunzel Syndrome' and is desperate to "find a way out of the rigid [...] stereotype in which she finds herself shut like a moth in a chrysalis"[113].

8.3.2 Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*

A young woman just out of university, Marian is contemplating her future, not really sure of what it is she is looking for. Depressed because she feels exploited at the consumer survey institute where she is working, she is considering marriage. But as she sees what marriage has done to her old school-friend Clara, who immerses herself in diapers and drudgery, she is convinced that marriage is just another trap. Her individualistic, independent-minded and calculating roommate Ainsley does not seem to be a suitable role model either. A feminist manipulator, she exploits the roles women play to her own ends, for instance by wanting to trick her boy-friend Len Slack into making her pregnant and then keep the baby for herself.[114] What Marian feels to be missing in Ainsley's aggressive and rational approach to child-bearing is physical warmth, emotional involvement and common sense. Although she feels unable to argue against it convincingly, because on rational grounds alone it seems logical, it still appears wrong to her.

The women in her office with their artificial stereotype of femininity - dyed blond virgins with identical opinions who will travel and then settle down to marriage - are no help either. All of her women friends and acquaintances thus embody, indeed almost parody, traditional female roles in which Marian finds no satisfactory place for herself. At the same time, however, while rejecting the standards of the culturally defined ideals, she feels excluded because she is different and more than anything else wants to be conventional. We see how important it is for Marian to be normal in

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112 Atwood, Margaret: Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature.- Toronto: Anansi, 1972.- p. 209

113 Ibid., p. 210

114 In a parody or reversal of stereotypes, Len later accuses Ainsley of having used him all along and that she was not interested in him at all but merely his body.

every way, and how rigorously she tries to guard herself against any sign to the contrary as she prides herself on functioning with a coolly dexterous responsiveness at all times to what situations and people seem to expect of her. It was suggested by Jane Rule, however, that "while characters struggle to embrace normalcy, they are often being pursued by it, so that the searcher becomes the victim of her own hopes"[115], which seems to be an appropriate description of the situation Marian finds herself in.

Because she has no clear concept of herself or her future and desperately wants to fit in, she is accustomed to giving people what they want. It is this tendency to be submissive to the demands of others which eventually causes her to accept the conventions of society. Telling herself that "life isn't run by principles but by adjustments"[116], she agrees to marry the smooth young lawyer Peter, although he is at times rather thoughtless, self-centered and dominating, and although she feels that he is merely treating her "as a stage-prop, silent but solid"[117]. Although this decision is welcomed by her parents, who are mainly relieved that she has found a man to marry and will "turn out normal"[118], it nonetheless triggers a sense of alienation within herself which leads to bizarre consequences. Although she recognizes the need to escape from a world over which she has lost control, she ignores the demands of her subconscious mind and instead of acting positively, Marian embraces passivity, relinquishing decision-making to Peter: "I'd rather leave the big decisions up to you."[119]. Marian's decision to marry Peter is clearly a mistake and subconsciously Marian knows this, though she is unable to act upon this knowledge. However, her subconscious awareness is reflected in various ways. She increasingly begins to exhibit strange forms of behavior.

The first suggestion of a nightmare world underlying the everyday reality occurs when Marian meets Peter, Ainsley and Len in the Roof Lounge of the Park Plaza. What precipitates the crisis is Len's comment

> "you've got to watch these women when they start pursuing you. They are always after you to marry them. You've got to hit and run. Get them before they get you and then get out."[120]

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115 Rule, J.: Life, Liberty and the Persuit of Normalcy: The Novels of Margaret Atwood.- In: Malahat Review 41 (1977), p. 42
116 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 100
117 Ibid., p. 67
118 Ibid., p. 85
119 Ibid., p. 87
120 Ibid., p. 62

and Peter's subsequent hunting story. While the men move on to other topics and continue chatting away happily, Marian's mind imagines the scene in the forest with intense and magnified clarity :

> A group of friends, those friends whom I had never met, were gathered around him, there faces clearly visible in the sunlight that fell in shafts down through the anonymous trees, splashed with blood, the mouths wrenched with laughter. I couldn't see the rabbit.[121]

The predominant image is of Peter as hunter, Marian as prey. Reacting to the implied threat, Marian retreats to the washroom where she sees the cubicle as a "cell" and the role of toilet paper as the rabbit: "It crouched in there with me, helpless [...] waiting passively for the end."[122] On returning to the lounge, she feels an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia: the looped curtains are "concealing things" and the air is "filled with soft menace"[123]. When they leave the hotel to go for another drink at Len's she suddenly starts to run away from them. With the others in pursuit, Marian, like the rabbit, appears to be running for her life. At first Peter's capture of her is reassuring and his reality disperses the nightmare. But the sensation recurs in Lens apartment and she seeks a retreat in the "dark cool space"[124] under his bed. Although even Marian regards this as a comic scene, it is also absurd and the comedy is undercut by hysteria. As a whole these, scenes serve as dramatizations of Marion's increasing paranoia.

Little by little, her fantasy life draws her energy away from her social life, and she begins to lose her sense of reality. She increasingly moves away from the 'normal', the practical sensible young woman, and towards the world of madness. As she herself points out:

> I had broken out; from what, or into what, I didn't know.[125]

That her subconscious is rebelling as she moves closer towards captivity and imprisonment is furthermore indicated by her bizarre acquaintance with the rather peculiar graduate student Duncan. From the beginning, Duncan is dehumanized, even grotesque, a being from the underworld caves. He is the guide who accompanies Marian on her downward journey, her descent into the dark side of the self. As a guide, he enables her to free herself from Peter and society. Because Duncan lives only

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121 Ibid., p. 66
122 Ibid., pp. 66f.
123 Ibid., p. 68
124 Ibid., p. 72
125 Ibid., p. 75

in the present and expects no permanent obligation, as Peter does, he provides the opportunity to escape from responsibility. With him, she can live for the present instead of thinking about the past or the future. [126]Conventionally Duncan is often seen as a foil to Peter[127], and indeed he is his opposite in a number of ways: whereas Peter is logical and dominating, Duncan is irrational and withdrawn, while Peter is aggressive and likes efficient purposeful activity, Duncan never gets anywhere and never finishes anything. But as already suggested by Sherrill Grace in *Violent Duality*, he is not only a "foil for Peter" but also an "Atwood double, a kind of mirror self, an objectified part of Marian herself with whom she can commune but who also embodies "her" narcissism and ruthless egocentricity". He is "a symbol of Marian's inner life or subconscious; he represents her fantasies, her attempt to escape".[128] A projection of Marian's other self, he is her shadow self dwelling beneath the eminently civilized, eminently rational self, a Double who may assert its anti-social tendencies at any time.[129] When he sees her in his dressing-gown, he therefore aptly comments: "Hey [...] you look sort of like me in that"[130], suggesting that as she withdraws more and more she becomes like him. And his action of breaking the mirror - "I've got my own private mirror. One I can trust, I know what's in it"[131] - also points to Marian's rising rejection of the outside world and her retreat within her own private reality.

Some critics even came to question his very existence outside of Marian's consciousness, claiming that he might just as well be merely a symptom of her mental breakdown and escape from reality[132]. And indeed Duncan, who himself admits his lack of a birth certificate[133] and further claims "I'm not human at all, I come from the underground"[134], is never seen by any of the characters in the novel except Marian, and he and Marian are unable to coexist in the real world. When Duncan refuses to enter Peter's apartment for his first meeting with the people inhabiting Marian's reality, he explains to her: "One of us would be sure to evaporate, it would probably be me"[135]. Duncan often seems to turn up by chance wherever Marian goes,

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126 Ibid., p. 94

127 cf. for example: Rule, J.: Life, Liberty and the Persuit of Normalcy: The Novels of Margaret Atwood.- In: Malahat Review 41 (1977), pp. 42-49.-; MacLulich, T.D.: Atwood's Adult Fairy Tale: Lévi-Strauss, Bettelheim, and *The Edible Woman*.- In: Essays on Canadian Writing 11 (1978), pp. 111-129.-

128 Grace, Sherrill.: Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood.- Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1980.- p. 144

129 Rosenfield, Claire: The Shadow Within: The Conscious and Unconscious Use of the Double.- In: Daedalus (92) 1963, p. 326.-

130 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 146

131 Ibid., p. 141

132 cf. Lorsch, Susan E.: Androgynity and the Idea of the Double: Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*.- In: Dalhousie Review 63 (1983), pp. 464-474.-

133 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 210

134 Ibid., p. 146

135 Ibid., p. 250

"automatically, as though she was trailing somebody by an instinct"[136], be this a park - where Duncan tells Marian he has been expecting her[137] on a cold snowy night - or a darkened movie theatre. When Duncan again disappears from the movie theatre, Marian's response is matter-of-fact: "So I'm finally going mad [...] like everybody else".[138]

This subconscious awareness of something being utterly wrong is also reflected in the eating disorder she develops, a disorder which is remarkably similar to and exhibits almost all the main characteristics of anorexia nervosa. We get a clearer picture of what is happening to her by understanding the dynamics of this disorder. As the psychologist Bruch points out, many of his anorexic patients "have expressed the feeling [...] that there were too many choices and they had been afraid of not choosing correctly".[139] Garfinkel and Garner similarly claim that the

> conflicting role expectations which force women to be paradoxically competitive, yet passive, may partially explain why anorexia nervosa has increased so dramatically.[140]

Anorexic girls furthermore tend to have a weak sense of identity, low self-esteem and introspective, shy natures. Because they look outside themselves for value and guidance, their perception of internal signals - whether physical or emotional - is limited or distorted. Put at its simplest, anorexics have from an early age learned to be more responsive to others' perceptions of their needs than to the needs themselves. The anorexic thus grows up viewing her body as a reflected image of the desires of others. It is not herself, it is something exterior and foreign, and at the same time more relevant to others than to herself. Minuchin speaks of the "vigilance" anorexics develop over their own actions. They experience themselves as observers rather than participants in their own physical being.[141] One answer, then, to the question why some women become anorexic and others do not lies in the peculiar oversensibility of anorexics to the wishes of those around them. They are unable to distinguish between their own desires and the perceived wishes of those around them. According to Bruch, anorexics

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136 Ibid., p. 136

137 Ibid., p. 176

138 Ibid., p. 129

139 Bruch, Hilde: The Golden Cage.- Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.- p. viii f.

140 Garfinkel, Paul E.; Garner, David M.: Anorexia Nervosa: A Multidimensional Perspective .- New York: Brummer / Mazel, 1982.- p. 107

141 Minuchin, Salvador et al.: Psychosomatic Families: Anorexia Nervosa in Context.- Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.- p. 59

> grow up confused in their concepts about the body and its functions and deficient in their sense of identity, autonomy and control. In many ways they feel and behave as if they had no independent rights, that neither their body nor their actions are self-directed, or not even their own.[142]

Because of their helpless hyperobedience to the wishes of others, anorexics typically consider themselves powerless.[143] Refusing to eat is supremely obedient and supremely defiant at the same time. To refuse, literally, to 'take in' from the environment gives many anorexics the opportunity to take control over their own bodies for the first time. Traditional as well as feminist psychotherapists generally argue that women's anorexia nervosa arises from their need to control their desires and to reject their femininity in the process.[144]

Viewed from this perspective, it seems only appropriate that Marian should exhibit such symptoms. But there is more to it in her case. As she regresses through previous stages of human development, identifying with lower forms of life, she refuses to eat, and therefore prey upon, first steak and all meats, then eggs, then carrots. Eventually, she is even unable to destroy the lowest form of life, mould. Marian's revulsion finally spreads outward from the thing eaten and the act of eating to the body which lives by ingesting and regurgitating. She sees with detachment and even alienation the women of Seymour Surveys as they celebrate her engagement:

> What peculiar creatures they were; and the continual flux between the outside and the inside, giving them out, chewing, words, potato-chips, burps, hair, babies, milk, excrements, cookies, vomit, coffee, tomato-juice, blood, tea, sweat, liquor, tears and garbage...[145]

Although Marian's perceptions of herself as a hunted victim or tasty morsel about to be devoured are distortions of reality for which she is largely responsible, these perceptions carry a symbolic truth about the general nature of our society and personal relationships. In a consumer society like ours "we feed on each other economically and

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142 Bruch, Hilde: The Golden Cage.- Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.- p. 39

143 Minuchin, Salvador et al.: Psychosomatic Families: Anorexia Nervosa in Context.- Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.- p. 101

144 For further detail see: Dally, P.J.: Anorexia Nervosa.- New York: Grune and Stratton, 1969.- Bruch, H.: Eating Disorder: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Person Within.- New York: Basic Books, 1973.- Garfinkel, Paul E.; Garner, David M.: Anorexia Nervosa: A Multidimensional Perspective .- New York: Brummer / Mazel, 1982.- Beller, Anne Scott: Fat and Thin: A Natural History of Obesity.- New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.-

145 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 171

emotionally"[146]. Eating becomes "a metaphor for economic and emotional cannibalism. Either you eat or are eaten, there are no other choices"[147].

The shift from a first person to third person narration for the duration of her food restriction emphasizes Marian's psychic disintegration and the split in her personality under the pressures the situation has exerted on her ego. She has not merely lost her appetite, but her voice as well. As in the case of Thomas' protagonist, the split voice allows her "to stand back from herself"[148]. The point is made within the narrative section itself: "She had caught herself lately watching herself with an abstracted curiosity, to see what she would do."[149] And as so often before, she begins to feel "dangerously close to some edge"[150]. Although Marian tells herself quite frequently to get a grip on herself or not to act foolish, she has to discover that not being silly is a frail bulwark against her fears. The competent facade is her protection against dreams and hallucinations that she is "dissolving, coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle. [...] She was afraid of losing her shape, spreading out, not being able to contain herself any longer". Against this fear, the idea of marriage seems at times a safeguard: "She slid her engagement ring back onto her finger, seeing the hard circle for a moment as a protective talisman that would help keep her together". But the engagement ring and what it stands for is in fact the centre of the spell which holds her imprisoned. She is unable either to integrate these identities within one self or to accept the existence of multiple selves, and has thus been "closed in a sodden formless unhappiness that seemed now to have been clogging her mind for a long time"[151]. As the story progresses, mirrors and reflections become the primary means through which Atwood expresses the split between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of Marian's personality. In the bathtub, Marian contemplates herself split into three different beings in the reflections of the taps:

> How peculiar it was to see three reflections of yourself at the same time, she thought; she swayed herself back and forth, watching the way in which the different silver parts of her body suddenly bloated or diminished.[152]

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146 Grace, Sherrill.: Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood.- Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1980.- p. 91

147 Ibid., p. 94

148 Patterson, Jayne: The Taming of Externals: A Linguistic Study of Character Transfer in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*.- In: Studies on Canadian Literature (7:2) 1982, p. 151

149 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 177

150 Ibid., p. 175

151 Ibid., p. 228

152 Ibid., p. 227

After she gets out of the bathtub, the symbolic meaning of her triple reflection becomes more clear as she looks at herself in a mirror, on either side of which is a doll. The psychic split within her is symbolized by her perception of these two dolls from her childhood - significantly, one blonde and one dark:

> She saw herself in the mirror between them for an instant as though she was inside them, inside both of them at once, looking out: herself, a vague damp form in a rumpled dressing-gown, not quite focused, the blonde eyes noting the arrangement of her hair, her bitten fingernails, the dark one looking deeper, at something she could not quite see, the two overlapping images drawing further and further away from each other; the centre, whatever it was in the glass, the thing that held them together, would soon be quite empty. By the strength of their separate visions they were trying to pull her apart.[153]

The attempt to reconcile the demands of her conscious and unconscious nature nearly destroys her.

The climax for Marian comes at her engagement party. With an altogether different and glamorous hair style, a dress unlike any she has ever worn, her make-up done by Ainsley, she looks into the mirror and sees "a person she has never seen before"[154]. The falseness of her appearance reflects the falseness of her role [155] and she cannot help asking herself "What was it that lay beneath the surface these pieces were floating on, holding them all together?"[156] Clearly, Marian is threatened by a loss of self, a diffusion, a splitting, which she fears may be irreversible. Still, all of her friends and associates, beginning with Peter, comment on the beauty of the artificial self and suggest that she should always dress in this manner. Only Duncan dissents, observing the incongruity between surface and reality as he remarks on his arrival at the party: "You didn't tell me it was a masquerade [...] Who the hell are you supposed to be?"[157]

It is the party situation as a whole and a vision she has where, instead of seeing herself beside Peter as a contented middle-aged wife, she has disappeared, which finally enables her to make a decision about Peter. The vision most clearly makes her aware of the fact that if she stays with Peter, he will invade her core and destroy her. She thus runs from the party looking for Duncan who, on the spur of the moment, had decided not to come in and meet the others. At this point in time Marian really depends on

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153 Ibid., pp. 228 f.

154 Ibid., p. 232

155 Of course the whole concept of using cosmetics as the term make-up implies is to make up, meaning invent. It is thus the perfect symbol of oppression in the lives of women and the cultural pressures to make one-self over, to style one-self, in body and soul, according to the prevalent cultural image of acceptable femininity.

156 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 239

157 Ibid., p. 250

him as she has no-one else to turn to. When she finally finds him they spend the night together at a hotel. Yet Duncan is no alternative either. He treats the situation and her obvious breakdown lightly, as if one of his term papers were far more important. He had been fine as long as Marian had fitted in with Duncan's fantasy life, but he has no intention of interacting with her real problems. [158] During a long fantastic walk through the snowy ravines the next morning, Duncan tells her that she has "participated in his fantasy life"[159], just as he has been participating in hers. It is now time for her "to do something", "to go". He will not help her any further. "It's your own personal cul-de-sac, you invented it, you'll have to think of your own way out"[160]. Ironically, although his words cut through Marian "as a knife through butter"[161], they are the means by which she can finally stand on her own. She recognizes that she has always been a passive reactor to the demands and needs of other people afraid to act on her own. It is this discovery that drives her to reject both Peter and Duncan in the hope that without anyone whom she can rely on, she will be forced to become productive by relying on herself. Since Marian has freed herself from the burden of playing a role others set for her, she must now start to take responsibility for her own life and make choices from the 'core' of her personality.

Whereas "up till that point she has been evading, avoiding, running away, retreating, withdrawing", in the final section of Part II, Marian at last begins to act instead of being acted upon. "She commits an action, a preposterous one in a way, as all the pieces of symbolism in a realistic context are". She bakes a cake in the shape of a woman who looks the way she did when dressed for a party at Peter's, "obviously making is a substitute of herself"[162]. Her motivation for preparing the cake is that it is designed to be a testfor Peter. If he passes the test, that is, if he can accept Marian's claim, "You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you?"[163] and her offer of the cake-woman as substitute, he will have recognized his own dark side, his need to exploit, and she will marry him. However, already severely disturbed by her sudden disappearance the other day, he thinks she is crazy and leaves for good.

According to Atwood, the novel began with the notion of the cake-lady. She wanted to link a cake-lady to the notion - common in the 1950s - that woman was a kind of confection. Women, she observed were "offered to be devoured"[164]. A protagonist

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158 Ibid., p. 275
159 Ibid., p. 276
160 Ibid., p. 277
161 Ibid., p. 276
162 Gibson, Graeme: Margaret Atwood.- In: Eleven Canadian Novelists.- Toronto: Anansi, 1973.- p. 25
163 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 284
164 Oates, Joyce Carol: A Conversation with Margaret Atwood.- In: Ontario Review (9) 1978-79, p. 7

who protested this barbaric concept of herself would be under considerable pressure to conform, Atwood thought. She might gradually understand and then reject such expectations by eternalizing and then ritualistically consuming a representative sacrificial victim. From this perspective, the cake is seen as symbolic evidence of her development, and of her ultimate refusal to be a victim.

No longer divided, in danger of disintegration, she can detach herself from the cake-creation, and joyfully attacks this substitute self with a fork, "neatly severing the body from the head"[165]. The dark voyage downwards is over and so is the anorexia that has been plaguing her: "suddenly she was hungry. Extremely hungry. The cake after all was only a cake."[166] By eating the cake herself Marian destroys the socially approved feminine role that has been forced so destructively upon her. Ainsley is therefore quite correct when, full of indignation, she tells her "Your rejecting your femininity!"[167] although she of course means it in a different sense.

Marian's return to self-possession is also signified by yet another shift in narrative voice: "Now [...] I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again."[168] As soon as Marian severs the cake's head from its body, third person narration shifts to first person, and Part Two shifts to Part Three. Part Three itself is very brief and basically designed to pinpoint the irony of Marian's fate as expressed by Duncan, who - having come to visit - devours that part of the cake Marian has left uneaten[169]: "you're back to so-called reality, you're a consumer"[170]. Duncan's words suggest that Marian's plight is not resolved, and that the plot of *The Edible Woman* is metaphorically circular, a circumstance also hinted at by Atwood herself as she tells Linda Sandler

> "The tone of *The Edible Woman* is light-hearted, but in the end it's more pessimistic than *Surfacing*. The difference between them is that *The Edible Woman* is a circle and *Surfacing* is a spiral [...] the heroine of *Surfacing* does not end where she began." [171]

Yet even if her future is left unsure, she at least refuses to be a victim. And although she is faced with the same decisions as before and must search for a new job, new

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165 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 286

166 Ibid., p. 285

167 Ibid., p. 286

168 Ibid., p. 290

169 Lorsch has suggested that if the cake Marian bakes represents herself, her identity, then it is "only just and logical that she and Duncan both partake of it in a ritual celebrating of their joint harmonious cohabitation in that newly self-aware, self-reconciled, identity". (Lorsch, Susan E.: Androgynity and the Idea of the Double: Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*.- In: Dalhousie Review 63 (1983), p. 473)

170 Atwood, Margaret: The Edible Woman.- New York et. al.: Bantam, 1991 [1969].- p. 290

171 Sandler, Linda: An Interview with Margaret Atwood.- In: The Malahat Review (41) 1977, p. 13f.

accommodation and a new lover, she has gained a sense of identity and a new knowledge of the self. And, in a world seen as alien and threatening, she has discovered the need to integrate not only mind and body but also multiple aspects of the self, a discovery which anticipates the discoveries to be made by the unnamed narrator in *Surfacing*.

8.4 The Psychic Journey or Madness as Breakthrough: Surfacing to Survival

Margaret Atwood's later novel is fairly similar to *The Edible Woman* in that it similarly probes into the mind of a heroine in search of herself, her place in society and more satisfying personal relationships; a search which entails nightmarish experiences and temporary forms of madness.

However similar they may be, *The Edible Woman* still reflects the relative conservatism of the fifties and early sixties despite its publication date, while *Surfacing* is a product of the urgent questioning of the late sixties and early seventies. As such, it is part of a literary movement of the seventies where women's literature on madness enters a new and distinct phase, marked by a shift from a destructive to a positive, visionary notion of madness. Women writers of this decade turn to experimentation with altered states of consciousness to discover a potential of power beneath madness, effectively dissociating madness from its medical label as illness and instead valorizing its capacities for insight, knowledge, and revelation. The definition of madness is no longer limited to a "down" phase which is essentially destructive and thus has to be overcome in order to return to a patched-up socially functional identity. Rather, madness usurps the status of norm, displacing existing standards of social and individual "coherence".

The subject undertaking this psychic journey is, for the first time, the mistress of her own experience in that she voluntarily induces her descent into madness: What was an involuntary breakdown has now become a willed project towards breakthrough. The madwoman has transcended her status as a passive victim of the combined forces of illness and social circumstance to figure as a self-determining heroine on another stage. As ex-victim, she is writing about the process of transcending victimhood, the "rite of passage" from fragmentation to renewal and a newly achieved wholeness. The novels usually underscore the process rather than the achievement, and employ first-person narration to depict a ritualized procedure fraught with moments of crisis, thus conferring narrative voice to the subject of visionary experience.

This re-vision and re-valorization of the "difference" of madness as a gateway to renewal, this deliberate encouragement of what is no longer deprecated as an illness, constitutes a subversive strategy which is socially related to three other contemporary phenomena: Laingian antipsychiatry, the development of feminist spirituality and some of the theoretical innovations of the French feminists, in particular Hélène Cixous' work on hysteria. Following Laing's movement from an interpretation of schizophrenia as an intelligible and potentially healing response to conflicting social demands, to a view of madness as a form of rebellion, and the schizophrenic as the sanest person in a mad society, a large body of women's fiction of the period presents madness as a mode of release and discovery, as a poetic experience that frees the female psyche and imagination, calls forth the mythic visions trapped within and releases creative energy.

In her journey through madness the female protagonist usually passes through several phases. Starting from an acute awareness of dissatisfaction or an experience of nothingness, emptiness as well as self-hatred and self-negation, the protagonist usually turns away from society and retreats from the outside world. Naturalistic settings or moments often help the fictional heroes to cross the threshold and to aspire to a different realm of being. The fictional accounts of the subsequent journey are customarily quite similar to Laing's outline of the essential stages of the schizophrenic quest, which, in fact, he sees as "the ancient quest" for the inner light[172]:

> What is entailed then is: (i) a voyage from outer to inner, (ii) from life to a kind of death, (iii) from going forward to going back, (iv) from temporal movement to temporal standstill, (v) from mundane time to eonic time, (vi) from the ego to the self, (vii) from outside (post-birth) back into the womb of all things (pre-birth), and then subsequently a return voyage from (1) inner to outer, (2) from death to life, (3) from a movement back to a movement once more forward, (4) from immorality back to morality, (5) from eternity back to time, (6) from self to a new ego, (7) from a cosmic fetalization to an existential rebirth.[173]

Other essential elements in this journey through madness as presented in women's literature, such as a confrontation with paternal figures, "which most often takes place with memory figures rather than with actual persons"[174], guidance by an ideal and distinctly non-patriarchal "nature" lover who represents "the incorporation into the personality of one's sexual and natural energies"[175], and an encounter with one's alter

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172 Laing, R. D.: The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.- p. 97 ff.

173 Ibid., p. 89

174 Pratt, Annis: Surfacing and the Rebirth Journey.- In: The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism / ed. by Arnold E. Davidson & Cathy N. Davidson .- Toronto: Anansi, 1981.- p. 143

175 Ibid., p. 143

or shadow ego, which often leads to a coming to terms with all that is negative or destructive, have been noted by Carol Christ, Elaine Martin and Annis Pratt.[176] All of these aspects are indeed an integral part of the journey taken by the unnamed narrator in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, which, when the topic of women's visionary and transformative quest into the self first came up in literary criticism at the end of the seventies, became one of the standard objects of reference along with Doris Lessing's novels. Since this novel, which has been variously interpreted as a religious quest[177], a psychological journey, a search for national identity[178] and a narrative of emerging feminist power, is probably one of the most comprehensively discussed books in Canadian literature,[179] I can hardly expect my analysis to provide any new insights. Nonetheless, the novel as such is so extremely important as regards the productive re-evaluation of madness as visionary, that it cannot be ignored.

At the start of the book the unnamed narrator, a woman in her late twenties who is apparently an illustrator of children's books and who has been married, divorced, and left her only child with her ex-husband, is returning from Toronto to her childhood summer home in northern Quebec - accompanied by her lover Joe and two friends, Anna and David - in search of her father who has mysteriously vanished. The search for the father, who - for all she knows - may be off in the woods, may have gone mad or may be dead, has many of the characteristics of a mystery story, moving the plot along from clue to clue as the protagonist attempts to discover his whereabouts. However, the protagonist's trip to the Canadian back country, which is ostensibly motivated by a search for her missing father, increasingly becomes a search for a more authentic self.

Afraid of her own feelings and greatly influenced by the rather reclusive father to whom "isolation was desirable", who understood freedom as "freedom from interference"[180] and who above all represents human reason, the narrator lives

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176 For further details see: Pratt, Annis: Surfacing and the Rebirth Journey.- In: The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism / ed. by Arnold E. Davidson & Cathy N. Davidson .- Toronto: Anansi, 1981.- pp. 139-157.-; Martin, Elaine: "Theoretical Soundings: The Female Archetypal Quest in Contemporary French and German Women's Fiction.- In: Perspectives on Contemporary Literature 8 (1982), pp. 48-57.-; Christ, Carol P.: Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest.- Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1986 [1981].-

177 Christ, Carol P.: Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest.- Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1986 [1981].-

178 It has variously been pointed out that the protagonist's quest is not merely a search for herself but that it has national implications as well, that the search for her vanished father is symbolic of a quest for a Canadian identity in the past which will replace the rootless, mechanized culture of urban North America. For a further discussion see: King, B.: Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*.- In: Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 12 (1977).- pp. 23-32.- ; Worth, Christopher: Mapping the Boundaries: Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*.- In: WLWE (World Literatures Written in English) 25:1 (1985), pp. 145-151.- ; Howells, Carol Ann: Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s.- London; New York: Methuen, 1987.-

179 For a comprehensive list of publications please refer to the bibliography compiled by Alan Horne in: Davidson, Arnold E. & Cathy N. (eds.): The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism.- Toronto: Anansi, 1981.-

180 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 63

almost completely in her head. However, since she has chosen to live her life through her mind only, she has sterilized her feelings. Detached from the body and incapable of feeling, she finds it increasingly difficult to make real emotional contact with her own inner self and anyone else. The lack of any close relationship which the narrator feels towards her friends, for instance, becomes apparent when she remarks: "[Anna]'s my best friend, my best woman friend; I've known her two months"[181], and of Joe "I'm fond of him, I'd rather have him around than not"[182]. When comparing herself with David she even acknowledges her own inability to feel as she thinks to herself: "we are the ones that don't know how to love, there is something essentially missing in us"[183].

This failure of personal relationships and her difficulty in communication also seems to be generated by the narrator's sense of aloneness which is rooted, at least to some degree, in the relationship with her dead mother, whose inwardness and flight into self were experienced by the daughter as emotional absence. Eternally incapable of responding to the daughter's need for a more personal parent, she had always remained a distant and mysterious figure to her.

Alienated from herself as well as others, experiencing a total spiritual numbness, the narrator's psychic mutilation, her feeling of isolation, the alienation from the external world and the imprisonment within a noxious inner space is reinforced through the images of amputation, frigidity, and paralysis which permeate what she sees and remembers. Fascinated by the disjunct parts of the body, arms without hands, "the cut-off pieces of early martyrs"[184], she sees herself as a severed head or finger, and remembers the obscene drawings in a tugboat:

> I was shocked, not by those parts of the body, we'd been told about those, but that they should be cut off like that from the bodies that ought to have gone with them, as though they could detach themselves and crawl around on their own like snails.[185]

The fact that she experiences herself as fragmented and that the pervasive head-body dichotomy can just as easily be seen as a particular manifestation of such dismemberment, is expressed when she hints at the fact that at sometime in the past

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181 Ibid., p. 10
182 Ibid., p. 42
183 Ibid., p. 147
184 Ibid., p. 29
185 Ibid., p. 129

she, who had already been split by her father "between two anonymities, the city and the bush"[186] , has allowed herself to be divided:

> I didn't know when it happened [but] I must have [...] allowed myself to be cut in two. Woman sawn apart in a wooden crate, wearing a bathing suit, smiling, a trick done with mirrors. I read it in a comic book; only with me there has been an accident and I came apart. The other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live; I was the wrong half, detached terminal I was nothing but a head, or, no, something minor like a severed thumb; numb.[187]

The symbolic significance of this internal division is established quite early in the novel as Anna reads her friend's palm and questions,

> "Do you have a twin?" I said No. "Are you positive," she said, "because some of your lines are double."[188]

Since she can no longer cope with the being she has become, it is this twin she has to find in order to come to terms with her increasing psychological strain and mental instability, adroitly expressed through her encroaching paranoia.[189] There is of course no better place to find one's other side than in the wilderness which is marked by an "absence of defining borders"[190]. Far from civilization, which corresponds to "the everyday ego or the order of the rational mind", the Canadian wilderness in *Surfacing*, like Conrad's Jungle in *Heart of Darkness*, represents "the chaos of the unconscious". A return to the distant region of one's origin thus becomes a metaphor for psychological regression - for a reversion to prerational thought processes and irrational acts that may constitute a form of madness.

With its shifts between Toronto and the backwoods of Quebec, *Surfacing* exploits both the environmental and mystic aspects of wilderness in its story of a female psychic quest. The wilderness of the environment seems to have evoked a corresponding awareness of unknown psychic territory within. In other words, the wilderness she enters is in fact herself. When she is afraid of the wilderness, as in the following lines, she is thus actually afraid of what is hidden within herself:

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186 Ibid., p. 63

187 Ibid., p. 117

188 Ibid., p. 8

189 The by now classic example of her suspicion is the episode with the 'Americans' who turn out to be from Southern Ontario. Rather than question her own position, as they have mistaken her for a 'Yank' as well, her anger flares outwards: "I was furious with them, they'd disguised themselves." [p. 138] But her opinions are suspect on many other occasions as well, even towards her friends.

190 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 89

> Sometimes I was terrified, I would shine the flashlight ahead of me on the path, I would hear a rustling in the forest and would know it was hunting me, a bear, a wolf or some indefinite thing with no name, that was worse.[191]

The dark secret which is buried at the bottom of her soul indeed 'surfaces' when the narrator - diving into the lake - comes across her father drowned body. The confrontation with his corpse underwater subsequently strips away the mechanisms of denial and releases a series of cruel revelations. Drifting in its watery element these "dark oval trailing limbs"[192] remind her of another dead thing: the fetus she aborted.

> I never saw it. They scraped it into a bucket and threw it wherever they throw them, it was traveling through the sewers by the time I woke, back to the sea [...].[193]

The memory of that abortion, skillfully alluded to but sufficiently concealed throughout the greater part of the novel, eventually leads to an exposure to the sources of her psychic anesthesia and dispels the amnesiac fog she has hidden in, exploding her carefully contrived rationalizations. Her deed had left her with such a sense of defilement that she had been unable to return to her parents garden paradise, nor could she bring herself to tell them the truth. "They didn't teach us about evil, they didn't understand about it, how could I describe it to them?" In time, she herself had come to believe the fantasy, the whole tale she had constructed of her wedding, her husband and her lost child, constructed for her parents' benefit, and had repressed the real story: "I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version."[194] Her final admission of the truth, to herself and to us, her acceptance of her affair with a married man, the abortion, and her flight from the past, marks the beginning of her salvation. Having come this far she knows that she has to go even further. If she can discover who she is, she can perhaps cope with what she has become and her problems may be absolved through a recognition of her place in the larger scheme of things.

Having made her first step beyond the wall of logic she has built around her, she now comes to grasp the meaning of the notebooks and drawings left by her father, which in a way are "like the magic books of Prospero with their secret and mysterious power"[195]. She realizes that despite his extreme rationalism, his self-sufficiency in nature and his professional interest in his natural surroundings, nature and his

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191 Ibid., p. 97
192 Ibid., p. 152
193 Ibid., p. 153
194 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 154
195 Berryman, Charles: Atwood's Narrative Quest.- In: Journal of Narrative Techniques 17, 1 (1987).- p. 54

activities as an amateur archaeologist had obviously led him to an awareness of the mystical 'power' of the wilderness and that he had seen that integration of the mind and the body is not only possible but had been achieved by the native Indian culture as expressed in its art:

> He had discovered new places, new oracles, they were things he was seeing the way I had seen, true vision; at the end, after the failure of logic. When it happened the first time he must have been terrified, it would be like stepping through a usual door and finding yourself in a different galaxy [...].[196]

While it is questionable whether he truly found the way to complete harmony, he at least points her in the right direction. But her "father's intercession wasn't enough". Since she not only wants to be taught "how to see but how to act"[197], she is desperately looking for some sort of "legacy"[198] left to her by her mother as well. The message comes to her when - in a state of visionary frenzy - she takes up a scrapbook of her own childhood drawings and lets it fall open: "My mother's gift was there for me [...] the gift itself was a loose page, the edge torn, the figures drawn in crayon. On the left was a woman with a round moon stomach: the baby was sitting up inside her gazing out."[199] It does not matter to her that she herself had drawn the picture. She perceives it as a sign from her mother which tells her to assume her maternal heritage by bearing a child.

She obeys her mother's command by dragging Joe outside into the cold night and compelling him to couple with her on a bed of leaves, so that her future baby will indeed become a true child of nature "covered with shining fur, a god".

Aware of her previous abuse of her power over life, a power which she had not been willing to admit had been hers to wield, the decision to act immediately upon her mother's gift by conceiving again is clearly a life-affirming move intended to counteract the previous abortion: "He trembles and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long [...]."[200] As Catherine McLay observes, "the child heals the division in the mother between the self and the world, the mind and body"[201].

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196 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 156

197 Ibid., p. 163

198 Ibid., p. 159

199 Ibid., p. 169

200 Ibid., p. 173

201 McLay, Catherine: The Divided Self: Theme and Pattern in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*.- In: Journal of Canadian Fiction (4:1) 1975, p. 93

While she does in fact choose a new pregnancy to atone for a previous abortion, it is also an effort to revalorize natural motherhood, an affirmation of a woman's unique power of birth. As Christ has emphasized, "Learning to value everything about being a woman is a key theme in women's new naming."[202] The narrator's aim is not so much to possess a child of her own, but to establish a form of motherhood beyond the pale of culture, an undomesticated one. Her mission will be to bring into life "the first true human"[203], unspoiled by civilization.

The narrator's ensuing actions depart from all standards of rational behavior, yet they have their own internal logic, leading from breakdown and disintegration to rebirth at a superior level of sanity. She increasingly becomes aware of the fact that just as logic is a means of fencing off, keeping away the terror, "words and language based on logic can only do the same - confine, fence off, evade and lie"[204]. She eventually comes to reject the voice of reason on the grounds that "language divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole"[205]. To achieve this wholeness, a wholeness in which the oppositions between body and soul, nature and spirit or freedom, rationality and emotion are overcome, she knows that she has leave civilization behind and retreat to a world of nature with "the names of things fading but their forms and uses remaining"[206]. Only in nature and through the experience of psychic chaos will she be able to encounter the spirits of her dead parents, whose loss she cannot abide, and the gods of the underworld, gods "unacknowledged or forgotten"[207], who may admit her to their sacred order. And since she is aware that the prerequisite for such an experience is not only a willingness to divorce oneself from all preconceived rational notions but a total isolation as well, she tricks her companions into leaving the island without her, "this is what I wanted, to stay here alone"[208], and soon reverts to the next stage in her journey, the stage of life when crying came naturally. Reexperiencing such primitive emotions makes it possible for her to break through the affective paralysis that had characterized her earlier behavior:

> I'm crying finally, it's the first time [...] But I'm not mourning, I'm accusing them, *Why did you*? They chose it, they had control over their death, they decided it was time to leave and they

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202 Christ, Carol P.: Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest.- Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1986 [1981].- p. 24

203 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 206

204 Clark, M.T.: Margaret Atwood's "Surfacing": Language, Logic and the Art of Fiction.- In: Modern Language Studies 13/3 (1983), p. 7

205 Ibid., p. 157

206 Ibid., p. 160

207 Ibid., p. 155

208 Ibid., p. 181

> left, they set up this barrier. They didn't consider how I would feel, who would take care of me. I'm furious because they let it happen.[209]

Sensing the necessity for an unknown ritual, she concludes that a sacrifice of great material destruction will be required to bring forth her parent's spirits. To continue her quest from culture to nature she must not only "stop being in the mirror" in order "not to see [herself] but to see"[210], but ritually discard all cultural trappings such as housing, clothing and purchased food, which, as the narrator rightly expects, will install the scarcity economy that is required in order to "go wild", to join the animal state of being which is in touch with "the gods" and "the sacred". She thus destroys all her possessions. As "[e]verything from history must be eliminated",[211] all reminders of the past, like the ring which symbolizes her "non-husband", are either slashed or sent into the fire, and she too is metaphorically destroyed in photographs.

By uniting herself with nature, literally floating naked in the water and wandering at one with the island in a prelinguistic, 'mad' state as a human creature, she has regressed to a point of symbolic nonbeing. She understands her regression as a necessary metamorphosis in order to conjure up the spirits, who after "the transformation [...] could be reached".[212] She regresses still further, descending along the evolutionary scale from the order of the humans to that of the animals. She waits for her fur to grow, leaves her "dung, droppings on the ground and kick[s] earth over. All animals with dens do that." She sleeps "in relays like a cat"[213] and fears the "hunt", the violence of her pursuers - "the police [...] or sightseers, curious tourists"[214].

Tearing things up, slashing things with a knife, burning things, taking off one's clothes, not caring about one's appearance, eating roots covered with dirt - all these, from a rational point of view, are symptoms of madness. The narrator herself comes to the same conclusion: "From any rational point of view I am absurd; but", she continues, "there are no longer any rational point of views."[215] She finally regresses to the level of plants when she merges with the forest and becomes the earth herself.

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209 Ibid., p. 184
210 Ibid., p. 188
211 Ibid., p. 190
212 Ibid., p. 170
213 Ibid., p. 192
214 Ibid., p. 197
215 Ibid., p. 181

> I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and the animals move and grow, I am a place [216]

Poetic even to the lack of terminal punctuation, this of course marks the apotheosis of both her search for the roots of her being, back beyond father and mother to what she and they and all life came from and are, and of her insanity.[217] It is here, at the height of her madness, when the last defences of her reason and her language are broken down, when she loses all sense of a personal identity and reaches the point of total oneness with nature, that the 'transformation' is complete and the paternal visions are granted to her. At first she sees her mother feeding the jays and soon after her father "standing near the fence with his back to [her], looking in at the garden. He has realized he was an intruder; the cabin, the fences, the fire and paths were violations; now his own fence excludes him, as logic excludes love."[218] The moment is significant because of her conscious recognition that human boundaries which include, identify, define and protect, also, necessarily, exclude. Furthermore, the successive visions of her parents help her to discover that they are not gods as she has thought but projections of herself. It is only then that she is finally able to allow them to "dwindle, grow, become what they are, human. Something I never gave them credit for; but their totalitarian innocence was my own."

The ceremony of madness has come to an end. Accepting her parents, their loss and their reintegration into the cosmos, the protagonist is now prepared to accept herself. She knows that henceforth she cannot permit herself further experiments in disintegration, visionary or otherwise. That would lead only to "the hospital or the zoo"[219]. One cannot insulate oneself in a hard shell of logic, nor can one become entirely illogical, non-human, other. "The rules are over. I saw them and they spoke to me, in the other language. [...] To prefer life, I owe them that."[220]

The criticism and reviews of *Surfacing* have exhibited a continuing disagreement as to whether or not the novel can be said to be affirmative, especially in its concluding resolution. Her decision "to live in the usual way"[221] may be characterized, as Rogers

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216 Ibid., p. 195

217 As Harrison has indicated "Not to acknowledge, not even to be able to distinguish the self, is true madness - by the standards, at all events, of western culture. Now, to some such a statement may of itself seem to be a full, perfect and sufficient indictment of western society; and Atwood's handling of the way her narrator both needs and is ready to experience the old gods is highly critical, by implication, of a society whose excessive emphasis on individual fulfillment and individual gratification has locked its members in individual and sometimes very lonely lives." (Harrison, James: The 20,000,000 Solitudes of Surfacing.- In: Dalhousie Review 59 (1979), p. 79)

218 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 201

219 Ibid., p. 204

220 Ibid., p. 202

221 Ibid., p. 204

does, as "no resurrection, but just as a return to conventional reality".[222] Nevertheless, it is a return to some hard-earned insight after a rebirth and only after it has been discovered that no "total salvation, resurrection"[223] is available. She returns to sanity, but on a different level than before. Having recovered her mind as well as her body, Northey sees her as taking "a new, more hopeful attitude towards the society and the civilization she has rejected"[224].

Atwood's discovery of tenacity beyond truth suggests her familiar theme of survival, of commitment to endurance as a necessity even as one bears an acute consciousness of possible (and perhaps probable) failure. There is little hope for the future, as the narrator has no illusions of any nirvana which can be achieved with Joe or anyone else. She also knows that she cannot aspire to the innocence of "another age, prehistoric, when everyone got married and had a family, children growing in the yard like sunflowers"[225]. That ideal went out with her parents' generation. That she goes back to Joe, sensing that "we will probably fail"[226] is a kind of heroic stance that I, and James[227], find to be realistic, but affirmative as well. By reclaiming her maternal rights and joining forces with the future of the species, the protagonist does at least transform herself from a passive victim to an active mover:

> This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless [...]

because she now knows that "withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death"[228]. And as Pratt has quite correctly pointed out, "many women's rebirth novels are, [and can at best be], open-ended, the hero's precise place in society being left to guesswork on the part of the reader."[229] In this respect, the narrative yields no solution and ends with the moment of indecision when the narrator is making up her mind whether to respond to her lover's calls: "His voice is annoyed: he won't wait much longer. But right now he waits. The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing"[230].

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222 Rogers, Linda: Margaret the Magician.- In: Canadian Literature (60) 1974, p. 85

223 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 204

224 Northey, Margot: The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction.- Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976.- p. 69

225 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 154

226 Ibid., p. 207

227 James, William C.: Atwood's *Surfacing*.- In: Canadian Literature 91 (1981), pp. 174-181.-

228 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 206

229 Pratt, Annis: Surfacing and the Rebirth Journey.- In: The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism / ed. by Arnold E. Davidson & Cathy N. Davidson .- Toronto: Anansi, 1981.- p. 145

230 Atwood, Margaret: Surfacing.- Toronto: PaperJacks, 1992 [1972].- p. 208

I would like to close my considerations on women and madness in Canadian literature by pointing to the curious link which can be established between being mad, female and Canadian, all of these positions being considered marginal.[231] As Hutcheon has indicated: "Women and the Canadian find that they have much in common. [...] In both cases there is a necessary self-defining challenging of the dominant traditions (male; British / American)."[232] The same could of course be argued with respect to those deemed insane by traditional standards. All three groups thus share "an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression"[233], as the dominant Other "imposes his own values with no consideration for those of his 'counterpart' which he is unable to see as values at all"[234].

It therefore comes as no surprise that women writers have often felt themselves drawn to the theme of madness in order to voice their situation. The same holds true for some of those Canadian writers who feel the need "to find their own voices through which to challenge traditions which have marginalized and excluded them from power"[235]. Yet, while women writers usually revert to the concepts of madness within the scope of traditions described above, most of the contemporary 'nationalist' writers find the postmodernist notion of madness more suitable for their purposes,[236] because, as Hutcheon has suggested, the notable postmodern concern with the ex-centric, the different and off-center has contributed both to a "new valuing and to [a] challenging of all kinds of '-centrism'"[237]. Indeed, "since the periphery or the margin might also describe Canada's perceived position in international terms, perhaps the postmodern ex-centric is very much a part of the identity of the nation"[238]. The next chapter will hence be dedicated to the ways in which madness, as perceived within postmodernist thought tradition, has been utilized by various contemporary Canadian writers in their effort to come to terms with their heritage.

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231 With respect to women, it has variously been claimed by feminist writers such as Kate Millett that they "develop group characteristics common to those who suffer minority status and a marginal existence". (Millett, Kate: Sexual Politics.- New York: Doubleday, 1969.- p. 55)

232 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 5

233 Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth; Tiffin, Helen: The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practices in Post-Colonial Literatures.- London; New York: Routledge, 1989.- p. 174

234 Riem, Antonella: The Labyrinth of the Self: a Collection of Essays on Australian and Caribbean Literature.- Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1986.- pp. 131 f.; p. 137

235 Howells, Carol Ann: Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s.- London; New York: Methuen, 1987.- p. 3

236 It should be noted, however, that while there is hardly any English-Canadian women's fiction which could properly be called postmodernist, feminist nouvelle écriture written out of Quebec shows a greater tendency towards postmodernist approaches.

237 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 11

238 Ibid., p. 3

9. The Postmodernist Approach to Madness

9.1 The Principles of Postmodernism

Despite its frequent use in the criticism of literature, the term 'postmodern' "suffers from a certain semantic instability"[1], which is to say that its definition remains decidedly vague. As Andreas Huyssen suggests it is "the amorphous and politically volatile nature of postmodernism" which makes the phenomenon itself "exceedingly difficult to define, if not per se impossible".[2] Furthermore, one critic's postmodernism is another critic's modernism or a variant thereof and as the boundaries between modernism and postmodernism vary according to different usage it is thus almost impossible to define the latter without recurrence to the former. In a similar vein, David Harvey has pointed to the fact that there is more continuity than difference in the movement from modernism to postmodernism and that the latter represents a crisis within the former in which fragmentation and ephemerality are confirmed while the possibility of the eternal and the immutable is treated with far greater scepticism.[3] While modernism took on multiple perspectivism and relativism as its epistemology for revealing "what it still took to be the true nature of a unified, though complex, underlying reality"[4], postmodernism, in contrast, tends to retain the relativism while abandoning the belief in the unified underlying reality. Where the modernist searches "for order in the face of moral and social chaos", the postmodernist wants "to trouble, to challenge, to question, to make both problematic and provisional any such desire for order and truth"[5]. Postmodernism thus has to be understood as an art or culture which simultaneously extends and breaks with modernist techniques or conventions. In a way it could be regarded as modernism taken to an extreme stage. This is also suggested by Linda Hutcheon, Canada's best known critic and theoretician

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1 Hassan, Ihab: The Culture of Postmodernism.- In: Theory Culture and Society 2 (1985), p. 121

2 Huyssen, Andreas: After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernis. London: Macmillan, 1988.- p. 58

3 Harvey, David: The Condition of Postmodernity.- Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.- p. 116

4 Ibid., p. 30

5 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 2

of Postmodernism, who says that with regard to literature postmodernism could be seen as a "merely more intense [version] of the practice of modernism"[6].[7]

Those modernist characteristics which may produce postmodernism when taken to their most extreme forms, would include the rejection of representation in favour of self-reference, the substitution of confrontation of the reader for collaboration with him or her, the rejection of a coherent plot and the rejection of meaning itself as a hopeless delusion, a general belief that it is not worth trying to understand the world - or to believe that there is such a thing as "the world" to be understood. Postmodernism takes the subjective idealism of modernism to the point of solipsism, but rejects the tragic and pessimistic elements in modernism in the conclusion that if one cannot prevent Rome from burning then one might as well enjoy the fiddling. That this world is one of increasing fragmentation and chaos is not a point of dispute with modernism. Whereas the major modernists reacted with horror or despair to their perception of this fact, in one view of the issue it is typical of postmodernism to react in a far more accepting manner:

> Instead of feeling threatened by this un-fixing of certainties, postmodern culture tends to find it liberating and stimulating.[8]

In its tendency to become fundamentally and openly self-reflexive and self-conscious postmodernist writing brings to the fore the act of writing and also makes visible the artist within and behind the work of art. In doing so, many of these works undermine or dismantle themselves by admitting that they are fiction and by deliberately exposing their own artificiality. As the reader is further robbed of traditional means of orientation and identification, his role becomes more and more complex as he is asked to become an active participant within the imaginative and creative process by reconstructing a new context from disparate fragments, or to discover this context by

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6 Ibid., p. 10

7 The announcement of the 'death of modernism' by authors like John Barth (Barth, John: The Literature of Exhaustion.- In: Atlantic Monthly 220 (1967), pp. 29-34.-) and critics like Ihab Hassan (Hassan, Ihab: The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Postmodern Literature.- New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.-) is therefore rather misleading. As W.J. Keith points out "the setting up of 'post-modernism' against 'modernism' is an inadequate way of coming to terms with the development in literary achievement [...] in the last twenty years or so. To talk of 'the death of modernism' [...] is to posit a totally false scenario. To claim, when making a case for non-realistic elements within the new literature, that the literature of the past was trapped within the confines of a naively 'photographic' realism; to suggest that the fictional creation of imaginative worlds transcending the limitations of ordinary 'reality' is somehow uniquely contemporary; to argue that literature has only recently begun to concern itself with the literary process as process; to posit an earlier literary model which asserted an eternally fixed system of values to the neglect of process, organicism, and discontinuity; to imply that exploring 'the modern dilemma of self and meaning' [...] was an original breakthrough of the 1960s: all this runs so plainly against the demonstrable historical facts that a counter-argument is hardly necessary." (Keith, W.J.: An Independent Stance: Essays on English-Canadian Criticism and Fiction.- Erin: The Porcupine's Quill, 1991.- pp. 101 f.)

8 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 18

deconstructing the structure of a written text. The relationship between writer and reader becomes more democratic as the author is no longer seen as the source of meaning, who hands down to us from on high his firm doctrine, in all its illusory simplicity, but sets us to work picking our way through his ambiguities, gathering meanings as we go. Transparency, certainty and truth have given way to multiplicity, contingency, fragmentation and discontinuity. This of course involves one inescapable implication for the process of interpretation - literary or otherwise. As the postmodernist is suspicious of the very notion of final answers, the interpretation of a text can never arrive at a final or complete 'meaning' for a text, but only at a provisional one. There is no closure to the text, no single interpretation, no univocal message. Any summary would be a misreading.[9]

In its increased emphasis on (inter)textuality and the importance of literary theory, as well as aesthetic and aspects, postmodernism has often been accused of being ahistorical and hence apolitical, refusing to engage seriously with social issues.[10] Indeed it seems that the postmodern invites a passive resignation to or, worse, a cynical reinforcement of the way things are. However, despite its increased emphasis on the above mentioned aspects postmodern approaches do not, however, lead to some kind of vain narcissism and amount to more than a critical questioning taking the form of playful subversion.

In their self-reflexivity these novels hint at the fact that 'reality' is simply one structure, one mode of experiencing the world, among many. Furthermore the discovery and integration of cultures whose artefacts proceeded on radically different principles than ours, leads to an understanding that all our systems of understanding are deliberate and historically specific human constructs, that they are not, after all, eternal, universal, and unchangeable givens. However, stressing this fact, postmodernist literature must be seen as a disruptive force intent on subverting the status quo. Viewed from this perspective, the postmodern opens up avenues for political change. It is thus a movement in which the self-consciousness of art as art paradoxically provides the means for a new engagement with and a re-evaluation of the social and the historical world. As a literature that is openly aware of the fact that it is written and read as part of a particular culture, having as much to do with the

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9 One of the most recurrent criticisms of the readings or interpretations generated by deconstruction is that they are not subject to falsification. Another objection is that these same readings and interpretations have a tendency to end up all looking the same, all demonstrating a ceaseless play of the signifier and nothing much else, just as crude psychoanalytic readings of the 1930s and 1940s tended all to end up demonstrating certain recurrent items of Freudian faith.

10 Some deconstructionists distance themselves from the reproach that their practice is a "self-involved textual" one by suggesting that deconstruction necessarily involves a political attitude, one which examines authority in language. See for instance Salusinszky, Imre: Criticism in Society.- London: Methuen, 1987.- p. 167

literary past as with the social present, both theory and contemporary fiction, in Canada as elsewhere, are responding to common social provocations.

Furthermore, the refusal of many contemporary thinkers and postmodernist writers to take for granted certain basic assumptions of Western aesthetics, philosophical tradition and its metaphysics, has led to a reassessment of the cultural myths of Western civilization and a reassessment of the concept of myth as such. It was among others Lévi-Strauss' discussion of myth in *The Savage Mind* which helped to establish the new idea of myth as a kind of thought, one, as he puts it, based on elements that are "half-way between precepts and concepts"[11]. This is very different from the traditional view of myth, conventionally defined by Scholes and Kellogg as "a traditional plot which can be transmitted"[12]. This shift of emphasis from myth as a sort of plot to myth as a way of thinking with close reference to ideology, can be found in Roland Barthes, whose great achievement was to bring myths home to contemporary life, to make present-day readers aware that myths were not just something that other people (remote African tribes, Russian peasants, the ancient Greeks) believed in and created - but were part of the stuff and fabric of everyday modern life in the West. Barthes explained that for him the notion of myth explained a particular process, whereby historically determined circumstances were presented as somehow "natural", and that it allowed for the uncovering of the "ideological abuse" hidden "in the display of *what goes without saying*"[13] What he is indicating is that what any society calls universal 'truth' is really socially, culturally, economically, and historically particular. In recent usage then the concepts of myth and of ideology are interlinked: myths perform an ideological function while ideologies function by means of myths.

Linda Hutcheon now in *The Canadian Postmodern* suggests that postmodern literature disrupts any naturalised assumption that tries to efface its status as an ideological construct.[14] What is aimed at is a playing with - often a deliberate confusion of - such sanctioned opposites as fact and fiction, truth and falsehood, history and myth, sanity and madness. Postmodernism thus does the same examining of social circumstances as earlier literature, it only does it in a different way. Consequently, MacLulich is wrong to see postmodernist fiction as losing all desire to examine specific social conditions and particular backgrounds, be it ethnic, religious or

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11 Lévi-Strauss, Claude: The Savage Mind.- London: Weidenfeldt & Nicolson, 1972.- p. 18

12 Scholes, Robert & Kellogg, Robert: The Nature of Narrative.- London: Oxford University Press, 1966.- p. 12

13 Barthes, Roland: Mythologies.- First publ. in French 1972.- Transl. and ed. by Annette Lavers.- Frogmore: Granada, 1973.- p. 11

14 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 12

regional.[15] On the contrary, the postmodern has a pronounced interest in anything which might be labelled ex-centric.

This again can largely be attributed to arguments raised by theoreticians like Derrida and Foucault for not only do they expose immutable truths as being merely changeable social and political constructions specific to a particular place and time, they also draw our attention to the fact that in traditional philosophical oppositions such as fantasy and reality, sanity and madness, to name just a few, we have no peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy: "One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position."[16] As the mutually exclusive and hierarchical oppositions of Western metaphysics are themselves perceived as constructions of ideological impositions, various modern thinkers have underlined the necessity to undermine Western thought tradition by undoing these hierarchical oppositions and to "put into practice a *reversal* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system"[17] as a whole.

Postmodernism therefore tends to single out some 'privileged centre' - of culture, of race, of gender - as embodied in traditional literary discourse, and then, via Postmodernist means, displace it. Postmodern writing achieves this end by first appropriating the techniques of the central line to then use these not, as in the case with these central movements, 'realistically', i.e. to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying these movements, but rather to create an alternative world *correcting* so-called existing reality 'from the inside out', so to speak, and thus to unmask the wrongs this 'reality' depends upon. Hence it reveals itself as a trick to invade and take over dominant discourses.[18]

9.2 Canada and the Postmodern

Since, as Hutcheon has suggested, "the periphery or the margin might also describe Canada's perceived position in international terms"[19], and since the cultural debate in

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15 MacLulich, T.D.: What Was Canadian Literature: Taking Stock of the Canlit Industry.- In: Essays on Canadian Writing 30 (1984-85), p. 25

16 Culler, Jonathan: On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism.- London: Routledge & Paul, 1983.- p. 85

17 Ibid., p. 85

18 What should be noted, however, is that even though the establishment of concepts such as the postmodern was designed to replace master narratives, it seems that it has become yet another monolithic and legitimizing discourse and in this respect the new approach ended up resembling the system it was meant to replace. As so often it seems that the unorthodox soon becomes the doxa, a standard formula of representation. What has suffered violent marginalization because of oppressive ideology is in turn violently centralized.

19 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 3

Canada, at the time when postmodernism entered its literary scene, was set largely within a paradigm of cultural colonization with the Unites States and its cultural monopoly cast in the role of colonizer, Canada like other post-colonial societies came to utilize the lessons of postmodernism in a very specific manner. In their art, philosophy, and literature they have not simply adapted European or American models, but used them for their own ends, for liberating themselves. Indeed, the process of literary decolonization has involved a radical dismantling of the European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. This dismantling has been frequently accompanied by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered pre-colonial 'reality'. While it is, of course, as Hutcheon admits, not possible to return to or to "rediscover an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implications in the European colonial enterprise"[20], a lot of Canadian contemporary writers came to see postmodernism as a suitable way to cast off identity clichés imposed from outside.

As many Canadian writers came to regard the rereading and the rewriting of the Canadian past as a vital and inescapable task, it was the historical narrative, in particular, which became a favorite target for the process of deconstruction and transformation. The new scepticism taught to us by this so-called historiographic metafiction, brings to the fore the ordering and selecting processes involved in any attempt to reconstruct the past and thus unmasks "history itself as just another kind of fiction"[21]. To write anyone's history is to order, to give form to disparate facts, in short, to fictionalize.[22] "Of course", Hutcheon grants, "the past once existed", but our way of knowing it today is only through "its traces in the present. If our knowledge of the past is something constructed or even re-constructed, its meaning cannot be eternal and is certainly not un-changeable."[23] The same scepticism towards absoluteness and finality is expressed by Margaret Laurence when she has Morag Gunn in *The Diviners* declare:

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20 Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth; Tiffin, Helen: The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practices in Post-Colonial Literatures.- London; New York: Routledge, 1989.- p. 196

21 Pache, Walter: 'The Fiction Makes Us Real': Aspects of Postmodernism in Canada.- In: Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature / ed. by Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985.- p. 66

22 A realization which can surely be attributed, to a large extent, to the works of Michel Foucault, who came to see history foremost as a construction, as having been made by the historian through the process of selecting, ordering and narrating, which by necessity cast doubts on the claims of an objective historical consciousness and stressed the fictive nature of 'historical reconstructions'.

23 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 22

> A popular misconception is that we can't change the past - everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer.[24]

By examining the relationship between fiction and history in a self-conscious manner that recognises both are human constructions rather than simplistic givens, history, like narrative, becomes a process rather than a product. It is a lived experience for both the reader and writer. Both the past and the text are like archaeological sites, composed of layer upon layer of implication.

In the most recent period we thus find that writers, such as Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, Howard O'Hagan, Wallace Stegner, Margaret Laurence, Joy Kogawa, and so many others curving back into the past for a usable history, returning as it were to their history in order to discover their historical myths. This tendency in contemporary Canadian writing to excavate has also been noted by Margaret Atwood: "there is", she says, "a distinct archaeological motif in Canadian literature - unearthing the buried and forgotten past".[25] Through their reassembling of fragments from colonial history or Canadian prehistory they are fabricating a historical context within which to exist in the present. It is their aim to reinvent the country's past or history, a history which so far had been subject to concepts of exclusion of certain realities, to place at the centre what used to be at the margins, voices which so far had been silenced by a colonial culture. As Klooß has pointed out many contemporary works of fiction therefore take into account both the immigrant and native contribution to Canadian history and by telling stories of difference, "promote multicultural visions of Canada"[26].

> [The] emphasis on regional forms of cultural expression, such as folklore, local myths and vernacular language, the new poetological understanding of place has been highly instrumental in granting the formerly ex-centric a central position and a decisive voice in Canadian literature.[27]

This notable concern with the ex-centric, the different and off-centre and the new scepticism, the radical questioning of cultural givens does of course also constitute a new framework for the discussion of madness, but almost as if in accordance with the

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24 Laurence, Margaret: The Diviners.- Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978 [1974].- p. 70

25 Atwood, Margaret: Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature.- Toronto: Anansi, 1972.- p. 112

26 Klooß, Wolfgang: From Colonial Madness to Postcolonial Ex-centricity: A Story about Stories of Identity in Canadian Historio-graphic (Meta-)Fiction.- In: Engler, Bernd; Müller, Kurt (eds.): Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature.- Paderborn; München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1994.- p. 73

27 Ibid., p. 58

postmodern inclination towards diversity the use of madness in postmodernist fiction cannot be nailed down to one single aspect.

9.2.1 Re-writing History: Madness in the Works of Rudy Wiebe

The emphasis in Rudy Wiebe's deliberately historical works, for instance, lies in recovering the voices of those regarded as eccentric: the native peoples of the Canadian Plains, the underdogs and the mad. His novel *The Scorched-Wood People* portrays the Northwest during the tumultuous years late in the last century when treaties were forced and rebellions surged. The focus here is on the fate of the Métis, a people whose history is as different from that of the whites as it is from that of the Indians. Their story is presented to us by their 'singer' Pierre Falcon. Having Falcon narrate the story means that history is seen completely from a Métis point of view, which Wiebe, given the dominance of the white Anglo-Canadian view of Canadian history, surely regarded as a necessary corrective, a need he had already felt with regard to another chapter in Canadian history. In *The Temptations of Big Bear* Wiebe had set out to present a more diverse picture of the events leading to Big Bear's refusal to sign a treaty in 1876 and his inadvertent involvement in the killings at Frog Lake in 1885. While Wiebe's Indians are by no means presented as saints, their mystic communion with the land, which sharply contrasts with the attitude of the new settlers and trespassers, still impresses itself upon the reader, just as the whole novel shows a profound respect towards a people, who - confronted by new circumstances and a reality which was so entirely different from their own - had no chance of survival.

The Métis version of history is basically told through their heroes, and especially through the figure of Louis Riel, who was charged with treason for leading the Northwest Rebellion. Repudiating the efforts to save him on a plea of insanity, he was sentenced to death and hanged on November 16, 1885. Although Riel's messianic asceticism is at times not unrelated to dementia and although Wiebe shows us the disordering fury bursting within Riel at the time of his mental "breakdown", his portrait of Riel refuses to accept traditional interpretation. The book does not treat him as an insane and backward-looking rebel standing in the way of economic progress and political unity, but as the religiously inspired leader of a people threatened with extinction. Wiebe takes Riel's controversial visions as examples of divine inspiration rather than as the megalomaniacal ravings of a man who had been classed as insane and confined at Longue Pointe and Beauport. This willingness to present Riel as the Métis still see him, as prophet of a vision of community rather than madman, probably constitutes Wiebe's boldest and most controversial re-interpretation of

history. Near the novel's end Pierre Falcon discusses with the reader this question of Riel's sanity:

> Poor fool; it was immoral to hang him; clearly he was mad. The necessity of hanging him was simply, clearly Sir John A.'s Conservative politics. You believe that? Many Canadians, even many Métis believe and will believe it; but I cannot. I agree with white-haired Dr. August Jukes, senior surgeon of the North-West Mounted Police, that we are too likely to call men whose understanding of life goes counter to our usual opinion, insane. Sanity becomes then a mere matter of majority opinion, not a test of the wisdom of what is spoken.[28]

Wiebe's entire enterprise, his attempt to render "Riel's great vision", depends on convincing the reader that, if Riel was mad, he was so in an inspired way, and in the way Wiebe restores Riel to history he hints at the fact that there was not inevitability to the Métis demise, but that it was a matter of political intent.

The Mad Trapper is yet another piece of his fiction which tells history from a different angle. It is the story of Albert Johnson, the so-called Mad Trapper of Rat River, whose actions in the winter of 1932-33 led to the most exciting manhunt in Canadian history. Before he was finally gunned down by his pursuers, he had killed one Mounted Policeman and seriously wounded two other men. No one yet knows who he was or what his motives were, but ever since his death, Johnson has become firmly entrenched in Canadian mythology as a kind of perverse folk hero and subject of various songs, poems, articles, books and movies. He became a legend, a figure of great mystery and a symbol of extraordinary endurance. One has only to imagine the existence of a lone man in an eight by ten cabin, half underground, with no distractions whatever in the form of literature or human contact, through the interminable months of Arctic darkness, to realise why so many Northern trappers become 'bushed'. And even if Johnson was a pathological killer, which appears possible, one cannot help being impressed by his amazing endurance and bushcraft and his astonishing ability with the gun. And even if Johnson was unrelentingly rotten, there is a certain wistfulness accompanying the realisation that Johnson probably would have escaped except for Wop May's plane and that this episode therefore - in a sense - marked the end of Canada's last frontier - the end of a romantic era which abruptly evaporated as modern technology found the North.

However, even as the factual information about Johnson is so sparse and there has thus existed an open season on interpretation, particularly in the area of motivation,

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28 Wiebe, Rudy: The Scorched-Wood People.- McClelland & Stewart, 1992 [1980].- p. 330

Wiebe's novel was still met by instant hostility from those close to the actual facts of the story. Jennings voices a similar scepticism:

> Wiebe is bringing to the novel his pet theme of compassion and understanding for the underdog and minorities [...] The evidence, [however], leads the historian to speculate that Johnson was not the persecuted underdog which Wiebe's unctuous liberalism has manufactured.[29].

Although I would agree that *The Mad Trapper* is surely not one of Wiebe's better books and not as convincing as his earlier pieces of fiction, arguments like the above are totally beside the point when dealing with historiographic metafiction. And naturally Wiebe defended himself on the ground that he was writing an historical novel, not just recording the facts. As Bailey has pointed out, "the question is not who is Albert Johnson [...] but what is he in our collective unconscious?"[30] And as Wiebe himself argues it is more important "what the imagination has made of the man known as Albert Johnson".[31]

9.2.2 Deconstructing Reality: The Absurdist Fantasies of Robert Kroetsch

While Wiebe's approach to madness within the postmodern framework is clearly that of restoring its voice to history, other writers use it more as a literary device for deconstruction of reality, as well as that of fiction - as is the case in the absurdist fantasies of Robert Kroetsch. Much like Wiebe, Kroetsch calls for a reinterpretation of the past as he feels that the "authorized history, the given definition of history, was betraying us on those prairies"[32] . He too sees the need to fill in the absences, the elisions of official history. He does so, however, in a decisively different way. While they both severely question the existence of one single historical truth, thereby problematising both historical knowledge and historical narrative, Wiebe's "way out" had been to provide us with a different view, while Kroetsch on the other hand aims at deconstructing historical narrative on the whole. Put still differently - while it could be argued whether Wiebe can be labelled postmodernist at all, Kroetsch, on the other hand, in his dedication to telling the 'truth' while labelling it absurd, came to be

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29 Jennings, John: *The Mad Trapper* in Literature and Film.- In: Journal of Canadian Studies 20:2 (1985), p. 88

30 Bailey, Nancy: Imaginative and Historical Truth in Wiebe's *The Mad Trapper*.- In: Journal on Canadian Studies (20:2) 1985.- p. 71

31 Wiebe, Rudy: Notes on a Possible Legend.- In: In: Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of Sheila Watson / ed. by Diane Bessai and David Jackel.- Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1979.- p. 226

32 Kroetsch, Robert: On Being an Alberta Writer.- In: Kroetsch, Robert: Essays.- Special Issue of Open Letter, 5th series, no. 4 1983.- p. 71

regarded as "Mr. Canadian Postmodern"[33] *per se*. Much in line with Michel Foucault's archaeological model of history, he holds that like the archaeologist, we "may have only shads"[34], and everything we will ever arrive at by looking at these traces is by necessity bound to be incomplete, shifty, relative and unstable. Respectively, in his fiction he tries to give life not to fixed perceptions but to energy, change and possibility. His scepticism towards unexamined 'truths' and his desire to deconstruct them does not only apply to history, however. Highly influenced by the works of Foucault and Derrida, Kroetsch in general is a problematiser and questioner of our cultural givens, which is not to imply that he denies their existence, he merely challenges their authority.[35] Much like Lacan, or structuralist philosophy in general, he denounces the humanist notion of the self as coherent, unified, and stable. He, too, wants to confront "the preposterous notion of self"[36] in the name of the subject as "a kind of fragment, a shifting pattern"[37] and thus attacks Freud for his dated concepts of the self, for his "confidence in a locatable centre or explanation"[38]. Consistent with his valuing of process, Kroetsch denies that the sense of the self is ever a completed thing, a product. To him it is inchoate and ever changing and a "consequence of many stories"[39]. According to Kroetsch, no deep, single, stable, autonomous identity is available to us, except as an acknowledged human fiction. In his novels this conviction takes shape in the presentation of his "mad" characters as they feature in his *Gone Indian* or *The Studhorse Man*.

Gone Indian is a postmodern construct, set in a realistic world precariously bordering on the surreal, whose fast-moving plot and characters constantly seem to elude the reader's grasp. It is the story of the young graduate student Jeremy Sadness from Binghamton, New York, who is sent to Canada by his supervisor, Professor Madham. Instead of going for a job interview at the University of Alberta, however, Sadness gets involved in a series of chance events, and eventually ends up at winter carnival festival where he meets a woman by the name of Bea Sunderman with whom he finally disappears into the north. Read only at this level of plot, the work is simply a

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33 Hutcheon, Linda: The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.- Toronto: New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.- p. 160

34 Neuman, Shirley and Wilson, Robert R.: Labyrinth of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.- p. 10

35 The notions explored in his essays cannot be separated from those offered in his fiction, which obviously seeks to combine the theoretical and the creative. One cannot help feeling, however, that there is a strong bias towards the theoretical and as his work lacks the emotional intensity of either Wiebe or Ondaatje, for instance, it at times runs the risk of appearing rather sterile and contrived.

36 Neuman, Shirley and Wilson, Robert R.: Labyrinth of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.- p. 6

37 Ibid., p. 7

38 Ibid., p. 107

39 Ibid., p. 189

funny series of adventures. On a deeper plain, however, it is the story of the protagonist's confused and confusing flight from American civilisation to the Northern wilderness in search of himself. As Snyder has suggested the novel portrays "the struggle to escape the definition of identity in the restrictive binary form of "if I'm not that, then I must be this"."[40] Jeremy is tormented by the notion that "There is always a loser [...] There is always a winner"[41], a logical outcropping of our Western culture's habit of binary thinking. Kroetsch's position is not that we live in a dualistic, dichotomised world, but that the human mind seeks dualistic structures and easily assimilated binary oppositions. Consequently he asks: "should not the dichotomies themselves be dissolved?"[42]

In order to find a self he can live with, Jeremy must cast off inherited and imposed restrictions of identity, not only his own but those of others. His response is to embark on a quest to the Northern prairies, a place which in Madham's conviction leads to a "diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self"[43]. The dream Jeremy pursues is that of becoming Grey Owl. The historic figure of Grey Owl, the Englishman Archibald Belaney (1888-1938), is himself one of the most fascinating figures in Canadian literature. The young man, who came to Canada at the age of eighteen, soon after disappeared into the Canadian wilderness and re-emerged a full-blooded Indian.[44] By reinventing himself as "the truest Indian of them all"[45] he deconstructed his English past and invented an Indian heritage for himself. His story nicely indicates, however, that by the early twentieth century, the terror of the wilderness had already turned into nostalgia for the sanity of the primitive wilderness in Europeans, who were stumbling towards another war. What was once the God-forsaken wilderness became an object of longing. Similarly, in "Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* both the natives and the land exist mainly in [...] psychological and archetypal terms. "Indian" is something within the overcivilized white man which Jeremy Sadness is drawn to search for."[46] By transforming himself into Grey Owl, Jeremy opposes his dream of going Indian to the dream his parents and Madham share of his becoming an academic. As Kroetsch himself remarked, he was playing the phrase to go Indian, "to become released or wild in the carnival sense", off against those "people

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40 Snyder, J. R.: A Map of Misreading: Gender, Identity, and Freedom in Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*.- In: Studies in Canadian Literature 18:1 (1993), p. 2

41 Kroetsch, Robert: Gone Indian.- Toronto: New Press, 1973.- p. 120

42 Kroetsch, Robert: Death is a Happy Ending.- In: Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature.- Saskatoo: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978.- p. 210

43 Kroetsch, Robert: Gone Indian.- Toronto: New Press, 1973.- p. 152

44 cf. Dickson, Lovat: Wilderness Man: The Strange Story of Grey Owl.- London: Macmillan, 1974.-

45 Kroetsch, Robert: Gone Indian.- Toronto: New Press, 1973.- p. 80

46 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.- p. 200

who are into the whole notion of control [...] ordering, explaining"[47], like Madham who hails academic discipline and rationality.

The question of identity is given still greater complexity when we observe the way in which this book is told. Basically, there are two narrative voices: those of Professor Madham and Jeremy Sadness. The frame-narrator is Madham who purports to offer an edited version of a series of tapes recorded for him by Jeremy during his time in Alberta. Sometimes Madham appears to be giving a verbatim transcription of the tapes, at other times he provides his own summary of Jeremy's oral reports, freely admitting that he is only "transcribing a few passages"[48] and has "had to select from the tapes, in spite of Jeremy's instruction to the contrary"[49]. Professor Madham, as the name suggests, has a strangely "obsessive" interest in shaping Jeremy Sadness's story for what is presented to us is hardly an objective account, but an entirely subjective reconstruction of the original tapes or traces, a story which has been transcribed, edited, interrupted and interpreted by a man who makes love to Jeremy's wife while Jeremy pursues himself. As Pache points out:

> In *Gone Indian*, there are two narratives contradicting each other like the two halves of a split personality. The very names of Madham and Sadness, in fact, suggest that they both have to be seen in a Doppelgänger-relationship.[50]

But, as Jeremy's journey progresses and he more and more removes himself from civilization and its imposed dualities he seems to be able to find his way out. Exposed at one point to the overwhelming elemental force of a blinding blizzard, the chaos of the swirling snow forces Jeremy to find his own way, to create a new path, just as he is seeking to find a native, fluid identity instead of appropriating another's. "I was in trackless snow, making my own path"[51]. As Sadness is progressively affected by his experience in the Northwest, he feels less and less the need to speak to his cassette recorder and to Madham. And finally through his physical union with the "earth goddess"[52] Bea, he has transcended language and his inherited voice to find the silence and fresh beginning he had sought. It is the perpetual return to the point of

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47 Neumann, Shirley; Wilson, Robert: Labyrinth of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.- p. 36-7

48 Kroetsch, Robert: Gone Indian.- Toronto: New Press, 1973.- p. 1

49 Ibid., p. 13

50 Pache, Walter: 'The Fiction Makes Us Real': Aspects of Postmodernism in Canada.- In: Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian literature / ed. by Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985.- p. 70

51 Kroetsch, Robert: Gone Indian.- Toronto: New Press, 1973.- p. 144

52 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.- p. 200

origin, of creation, always beginning again, never concluding, which Kroetsch is hailing here.

Once Jeremy has thus finally removed himself completely from dialogue, Madham fills the silence for him. The final chapter should be in Jeremy's voice, but since that voice has been silenced, Madham has the last word. Professor Madham clearly is, if not a madman, then a seriously unbalanced and unreliable narrator. We have no way of confirming the veracity of any of the information presented, so the game becomes to learn about the narrator and to try to piece together the story through his disordering it.

Along traditional lines, Sadness' behaviour, his abandonment of his academic career and his tape recorder, his descent into silence, exile and cunning, could be deemed insane. What Kroetsch is implying, however, is that Madham, in his effort to order what cannot be ordered, to limit was is boundless and by assuming something which does not exist, a coherent identity, is the one who is mad. Leslie Fiedler, with regard to madness in the American New Western claims that it signifies the ultimate West, the final escape from the White reason and intellect which has tyrannised America from the beginning.[53] In Kroetsch's novels it would be more accurate to say that madness is that White reason and intellect. *Gone Indian* thus celebrates Jeremy for his will and ability at the end of the book, and briefly during the narrative, to make his mind a virtual blank, to experience without interpreting, without reducing existence to a system of binary opposites. Sadness, like the book as a whole, remains an open field. What is offered to us is a series of metamorphoses, rather than a single switch from one pole to its opposite.[54]

In *The Studhorse Man* we are once again confronted with a mad narrator trying to order the world he is confronted with. In this novel, set immediately after the Second World War, we follow Hazard Lepage, the last of the prairie studhorse men, on the annual journey he makes offering his horse to service mares. Because Poseidon, the blue stallion he travels with, is the last representative of a line of Lepage horses, Hazard's yearly trip has become something more than a means of earning his livelihood. He is now on an obsessive search for a perfect mare to ensure the continuation of the breed. On his journey through Alberta the protagonist has a number of absurd, comic and surreal encounters with various figures from the Canadian past and present. Acquiring a strange travelling companion, a man named

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53 Fiedler, Leslie: The Return of the Vanishing American.- New York: Stein and Day, 1968.- p. 185

54 see also Turner, Margaret E.: Endings be Damned: Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*.- In: Canadian Literature (119) 1988, pp. 57-71.-

Eugene Utter, Hazard eventually turns back home where his fiancée Martha awaits him, but he encounters only disaster when he arrives. Caught in a fire, he is declared dead until Martha's caresses bring him back to life. In the episode which follows, Hazard is, however, really killed as he is trampled to death by Poseidon during a confrontation with Martha's young cousin, Demeter Proudfoot. After Hazard's death, Utter marries Martha and Poseidon ends up at a farm where with his help contraceptives are produced from the urine of pregnant mares. The novel closes with the news that Martha has given birth to Hazard's child, a daughter named Demeter Lepage.

The whole novel is quite evidently a fable about the downfall of the way of life that once produced the myth of the American West. As Harrison remarks the horse itself "becomes the appropriate image for the vanishing agrarian prairie not only because of its literal part in pre-industrial farming but because it carries all the associations of freedom and power and pride we attach to the open spaces of the plains"[55] .

At the same time, however, much of the mythic material in *The Studhorse Man* serves to parody myth, as Hazard and his mighty stallion are, for instance, presented as the distorted image of the cowboy and his faithful horse. Furthermore, what at first sight looks like an episodically structured, linear chain of crazy events turns out to be a free adaptation of the Odyssey with picaresque traits. The prairies, which by various Canadian writers have been metaphorically associated with the endlessness of the ocean, are turned into a dangerous sea in front of which the Canadian Odysseus, Hazard Lepage, whose name already implies venture, daring and risk, has to encounter his adventures.

Once again, as in *Gone Indian*, the story of the main protagonist is (re-)constructed by another in an attempt to write his biography. And once again this attempt turns into a farce, as the conventions of biography are as much parodied as followed, as much abused as used. This time the novel is told from the point of view of Martha's cousin, Demeter Proudfoot, who evidently believes, that to be realistic is to have an exaggerated obsession with minute detail and thus meticulously researches Hazard's story by means of objective data, lists and notes. We learn that he has followed Hazard's earlier paths on the map of Alberta, handled objects Hazard once held, even measured the railway ties of a train station his subject has visited, "trying to get some sense of the response our hero must have known when he himself encountered that

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55 Harrison, D.: Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.- Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977.- p. 206

sudden and alien world"[56]. What he in fact does, however, is add documentation of ludicrously irrelevant fact to his narrative and, as naturalistic detail is so obtrusively introduced, the whole enterprise of naturalism is mocked.

The intrinsic absurdity of a fictional representation of reality is fully revealed when it comes to "treating" the carefully researched material. Fully aware that he is faced with certain problems, Demeter, looking over his notes, despairingly asks: "What have we captured? what saved?"[57] and later, in an attempt to give a "true of life" description of Poseidon, "Is the truth of the man in the man or in his biography? Is the truth of the beast in the flesh and confusion or in the few skilfully arranged lines?"[58] The answer is given to us at the beginning of Chapter 9, where we see Demeter in the act of composition. Here he shows us a few fragmented and disordered "facts" he has collected on 3x5 note cards and then proceeds to tell us:

> "I have arranged the next three cards so as to suggest an order that was not necessarily present in Hazard's rambling conversation"[59].

By attempting to impose reason and significance on the wanderings of Hazard, Demeter thus presents us with the exhibition of the biographer recording as well as fictionalising. Much like Madham, he time and again interferes with the action and does not hesitate to fill in the gaps in memory or received facts. Still we are never given a full account of Hazard's life. Some chapters are lost, others left unfinished. With Demeter to spell out how he reconstructs 'truth', the fictional and hypothetical quality of the supposedly factual events in Demeter's story is clearly exposed. Since Demeter is the one who brings Hazard to life, he consequently takes the right to actively take part in the identity search of his protagonist. Demeter as biographer could even be said to be identifying with his subject to the point of confusion. This, in fact, is typical of how Kroetsch images the fluidity of identity. Demeter at some point even comes to the conclusion that "...we are all, so to speak, one ... each of us is, possibly, everyone else..."[60]. As a result the genre borders of biography and autobiography are dissolving just as the authority of the very narrating instance is questioned and any remaining notion we might have of the presumed authority and objectivity of the biographer indeed crumbles away when we discover, that our narrator is in fact mentally deranged. Sitting naked in an empty bathtub at a mental asylum while writing the story, he is viewing the world through a clever arrangement of mirrors.

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56 Kroetsch, Robert: The Studhorse Man.- Toronto: Random House, 1988 [1970].- p. 24
57 Ibid., p. 45
58 Ibid., p. 63
59 Ibid., p. 46
60 Ibid., p.. 115

The narrator, who once guaranteed the authenticity of the story, is thus presented here as a madman, which to Pache "marks the final stage of a narrative convention which dates back to the 18th century"[61].

Once again it is man's rage to order, according to certain conventions of consciousness, the world around him which, in truth, is random and chaotic which is considered mad. Demeter retreats from the madness of disorder, uncertainty and chance, embodied by his biographical subject, Hazard Lepage, into a personal "madness" of excessive order. As he himself points out: "I myself prefer an ordered world, even if I must order it through a posture of madness. It is the only sane answer to prevailing circumstances."[62] This implies that he is fully aware of the dilemma he, as a writer, is faced with. While it is madness to order, it is still the only way available. And while he is striving to tell the truth, he has to acknowledge that it is a project which is bound to fail. Demeter's work is therefore just as much about himself and his problems of writing, his quest for an ideal mode of expression, as it is about Hazard Lepage's quest to breed the perfect horse, and in this respect *The Studhorse Man* can be seen as manifesting the typically postmodern obsession with the ways in which we create meaning in a world which has lost its transcendental signified(s). The tension, however, remains unsolved, because, faithful to postmodern creed Kroetsch himself admits, "I guess I don't like to solve the problem"[63], insofar as solving the problem or any problems at all would mean having answers, would mean stasis and product. Kroetsch's writing does not strive for a balance between order and chaos, but pushes the chaos to its limit. Kroetsch warns us that when the reader encounters the author as trickster, "he has entered a world where possibilities not only co-exist but contradict. Where thesis inspires antithesis".[64] The reader has entered a Derridean experience of madness. While his characters try to embrace order and exclude madness, Kroetsch keeps madness moving, rhetorically, throughout his writing. Shoshana Felman, reading the Foucault-Derrida debate, concludes that madness is "beyond control, precisely since, eluding a thematic apprehension, it is *rhetorical*, that is, consisting in the very principle of *movement*, in an endless metaphoric transformation".[65]

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61 Pache, Walter: 'The Fiction Makes Us Real': Aspects of Postmodernism in Canada.- In: Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian literature / ed. by Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985.- p. 68

62 Kroetsch, Robert: The Studhorse Man.- Toronto: Random House, 1988 [1970].- p.

63 Neuman, Shirley and Wilson, Robert R.: Labyrinth of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.- p. 4

64 Kroetsch, Robert: Death is a Happy Ending.- In: Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature.- Saskatoo: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978.- p. 210

65 Felman, Shoshana: Writing and Madness: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis.- Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.- p. 54

In Kroetsch's novels, as within much postmodern literature in general, madness is no longer the pathological symptom of social injustice and psychological repression, nor is the madness theme used for political or ideological purposes, it is more than an escape from an unbearable reality. It is the key to deconstructing reality.

Moreover, the close relationship between madness and postmodernist theory/literature with regard to the deconstrution of reality becomes overtly clear when we consider the following.

Since the early years of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, the language and thought of schizophrenics, or rather deviation from so-called normal speech and communication, has been under keen observation by psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts. One such study opens with a quotation from Pavy's article *Verbal Behaviour in Schizophrenia*, in which he states:

> It is frequently observed that though schizophrenics use proper words and produce reasonably well-formed sentences, one is unable, after having heard a series of such sentences, to comprehend what has been said.[66]

A description like this may also serve as a reader's definition of at least some kinds of postmodern literature: although sounds, words, sentences, and their mutual relationship are recognisable, the meaning of the text as a whole seems to vanish in the haze: one is unable to comprehend what has been said. Just like postmodernist writing, the insane elude precise interpretation.

Normal life demands some kind of order. In postmodern literature, as well as in madness, our invisible and obvious order is at stake. In madness, or at least in certain forms of madness, language is 'liberated' from its otherwise tightly bound relation to what it means, signifies or refers to. Saussure would say that the signs have been broken down into abnormally independent signifiers and signifieds. Lacan would say that the Master Significant has fallen out of the Symbolic Order. The psychotic language is thus an expression of a production of signification or meaning without historical anchorage. Therefore, we cannot help but experience a unique fascination with the schizophrenic. We witness a process in which our reliable knowledge is suddenly confronted with a radical lack of knowledge or not-knowing, which is definitely a threatening gesture against our security. This could also be said about reading postmodern literature, which re-symbolises, re-writes and thereby also disturbs our otherwise reliable, safe, and secure knowledge. These kinds of expression endanger

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66 Rochester, S. & Martin, J.R.: Crazy Talk: a Study of the Discourse of Schizophrenic Speakers.- New York, London: Plenum Press, 1979.-

our common symbolisation of everyday life, sometimes in terrorist fashion, sometimes with hopeless, useless beauty, sometimes even with revolutionary insight. But first and foremost by undermining our symbolisation per se, that is, language. In *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll creates the following dialogue:

> [Alice] tried another question. "What sort of people live out here?" "In *that* direction," the Cat said, waving its right paw round, "lives a Hatter: and in *that* direction," waving its other paw, "lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they are both mad." "But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked. "Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice. "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." Alice didn't think that proved it at all: however, she went on: "And how do you know you're mad?" "To begin with," said the Cat, "a dog's not mad. Do you grant that?" "I suppose so," said Alice. "Well, then," the Cat went on, "you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now *I* growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad." "I call it purring, not growling," said Alice. "Call it what you like," said the Cat.[67]

It is reasonably easy to see that the whole question of right or wrong, normal or mad, is a question of language, of what we call things and how they are perceived. In a way the Cat is right: it is mad. The Cat may be a cat, but it uses dog's language to think with. What was already anticipated by Carroll is that one has to free oneself from the notion that there is such a thing as an objective reality. To highlight this point and to attack the logocentrism of Western metaphysics postmodernist writers thus frequently find themselves drawn to present their texts through the fragmenting prism of madness. What is presented to us are the mind games conducted by mad characters. Linear plot, unified personality, and simple meaning are discarded in favour of dream logic, fragmented and multiple personalities, and multiple levels of interpretation.

> [The identity of characters turn] out to be nonexistent; [they are] shifting disguises, and nothing else. There is no timeless, consistent identity behind appearances; there are only appearances behind appearances, an infinite proliferation of them.[68]

Here, there is no clarification of the madness question, no return to sanity. As we can never be sure whether the events are real or simply the hallucinations of a madman we experience a poetic madness which undermines the structures of reality and of fiction. Madness is thus used to create a demystified fictional discourse, to invent a sort of (meta-)fiction which constantly multiplies its levels of meaning to reflect the

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67 Carroll, Lewis: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.- p. 88f.

68 Vernon, John: The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in 20th Century Literature and Culture.- Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973.- p. 66

fragmented mind of the mad character and to draw attention to the impossibility of fixing truths.

10. The Mad Worlds of Timothy Findley

Much madness is divinest sense--
To the discerning eye--
Much sense--the starkest madness --
'Tis the Majority
In this, as all, prevail --
Assent --and you are sane--
Demur --you're straightaway dangerous--
And handled with a chain--

Emily Dickinson, Poems

Reminiscing about truth, knowledge and facts Gilbert Winslow, in the *Last of the Crazy People*, states: "Factually, we're civilized."[1] That reality proves otherwise is one of Findley's major themes and concerns. By returning again and again to the same issues - "the betrayal of the child in the mausoleum of upper-middle class family life, the revulsion of violence and war, the primary values of animals and nature, displaced by a technological and anthropocentric Western civilization"[2], murder, insanity, and other manifestations of "the heart of darkness" - Findley's novels all display a common preoccupation with the madness of the so-called civilised or sane. In all of his works he continually questions the commonly held notions of sanity and morality by showing that the ones conventionally regarded as "sane" are madder than their insane counterparts. A key word in all of Findley's writings and conversations is thus by necessity "crazy". Asked by Buitenhuis whether his concern for the mentally obsessed and the unbalanced is largely for dramatic effect, or because he himself has "a fascination with the world of the mentally excessive and unbalanced", Findley replied:

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1 Findley, Timothy: The Last of the Crazy People.- Harmondswoth et. al.: Penguin, 1983 [1967].- p. 201
2 Gabriel, Barbara: Rev. of *Dinner Along the Amazon*.- In: Canadian Fiction Magazine 54 (1985), p. 87

"I think the latter. It's a conception of what other people call crazy."[3] Just as he told Gibson:

> "[W]hat pleases me most about my work as a novelist is my own awareness of having that special twisted view which is a dependence on the insane people to do the sane things. The ultimate sanity comes from the insane I believe. [...] What I mean is - we call the sane "insane". In fiction you have to heighten this, treat it symbolically."[4]

As "the assertion of identity in the face of apparent chaos and loss"[5] is a another constant feature in the variable worlds of Findley's fiction, there is an abundance of characters in his works who are trying to maintain defensible positions on life's contours - an especially difficult task for those already unbalanced by the abnormal pulls of temperament and habits of mind. We see how his characters are thrown off-centre, how they are diminished or enlarged or in some way distorted (often tragically, sometimes comically) by the emotions which roil within them and which result in eccentricity. His central characters are all in some sense or another marginalised figures. Hooker Winslow in *The Last of the Crazy People* is a child, shut out from understanding the adult dilemmas swirling around him. Robert Ross of *The Wars* cannot participate in the militaristic orgy violence that is consuming his civilisation and Lilah Kemp from *Headhunter* is a schizophrenic. All of them witness the horrors of their respective worlds gone insane and each acts to the best of his or her ability to resist. And although their resistance is by "normal" standards deemed crazy, "they represent the fragile forces of love, the power of the imagination to dream otherwise, and the willingness, not only to speak out and bear witness but also to strike back in violence against the exercise of evil"[6].

10.1 "Lemonade" and *The Last of the Crazy People*

In *The Last of the Crazy People* we are basically presented with the same the devastation of a child's psyche caused by the private anguish of adults as in Findley's early story "Lemonade", which deals with the desperate attempts of an eight year old to attract his mother's attention. In this remarkable sensitive early piece of fiction Harper Dewey, whose father died in the Second World War, shares his home with his mother

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3 Buitenhuis, Peter: The Return of the Crazy People: An Interview with Timothy Findley.- In: Books in Canada (17:9) Dec 1988, p. 18

4 Gibson, Graeme: Eleven Canadian Novelists: Interviewed by Graeme Gibson.- Toronto: Anansi, 1973.- p. 122

5 Pennee, Donna: Moral Metafiction: Counterdiscourse in the Novels of Timothy Findley.- Toronto: ECW Press, 1991.- p. 50

6 Brydon, Diana: Timothy Findley: A Post-Holocaust, Postcolonial Vision.- In: International literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers / ed. by Robert L. Ross.- Chicago; London: St. James Press, 1991.- pp. 585 f.

Renalda and the strong and courageous black maid, Bertha who attends to the big house and nurses the spoiled and drunken mother. Severely struggling with her own existence, Renalda locks herself alone in her room to suffer the miseries of her conditions and thus lives a life apart from her child, unreachable behind curtained bedroom windows or inside her hearse-like limousine. As summer wanes, it seems "that Harper didn't see his beautiful mother for days on end".[7] Apart from the fact that Harper is confronted by such a determined retreat on his mother's part, he is further haunted by the "Duty Letter", written by his father just before he died in the war, which enjoined the son to look out for his mother. Although he tries almost everything to draw his mother out of her self-imposed exile, he feels that some unspeakable burden will keep him from fulfilling his responsibility. It is through one of Harper's nightmares that the degree of his inner turmoil is revealed:

> He was about to reach [his parents], about to throw the gun away, when his father's face suddenly blanked out the entire picture and he shot at it, firing three times into the mouth. The face fell apart as though it had been torn like a piece of paper and the pieces melted into the air and ran, waxlike, down the pane of glass. After that, everything began to fade - the pictures and the noises together - rushing away into a final darkness and silence.[8]

Significantly it is during this dream that Renalda, unable to deal with her life any longer, makes her ultimate retreat by shooting herself with her husband's revolver. And although Harper has now lost his mother forever, he is at the same released from his conflicting duties. Furthermore looking at his dead mother Harper acknowledges: "She is not dead now, but she was the other day."[9]

While Harper "merely" had to struggle with his mother's madness and retreat, Hooker Winslow in *The Last of the Crazy People*, who is only slightly older than his predecessor and to whom Findley referred to as "another of my silent, watchful children"[10] , has to deal with a whole range of psychically disturbed individuals as each member of his family is haunted by his or her own private nightmare. The difference between "Lemonade" and *The Last of the Crazy People*, as pointed out by Lorraine York, is thus one of complexity as well as degree and the earlier story "could therefore be regarded as a blueprint".[11]

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7 Findley, Timothy: Dinner Along the Amazon.- Harmondsworth et. al.: Penguin, 1984.- p. 14

8 Ibid., p. 56

9 Ibid., p. 60

10 Findley, Timothy: Inside Memory: Pages from a Writers Workbook.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1990.- p. 68

11 York, Lorraine M.: Civilian Conflict: Systems of Warfare in Timothy Findley's Early Fiction.- In: English Studies in Canada 15:3 (1989), p. 339

The narrative of Findley's first novel unfolds with all the inevitability of Greek tragedy, just as it apparently draws on an already-existing code of Southern Gothic. As one reviewer has commented:

> Mr. Findley's portrayal of this household full of emotional cripples has, only too obviously, all the earmarks of a Drama of the Deep South, despite its Canadian setting: the destruction of A Fine Old Family from within, through madness, sexual conflict and physical violence erupting in the heat of the summer.[12]

Bearing in mind Findley's declaration that

> "the particular situation in that book is peculiar to Canada. It doesn't exist anywhere else in the world, that kind of family. [...] Canada [...] had [...] a rise towards a kind of aristocracy at the turn of the century. [...] the rise came at a moment of cataclysmic change: the turn of the century. War brought it down; we then became after the First World War, a cultural eunuch; we were neither male nor female, but we had the propensity of feeling one feeling and of being another."[13]

it could be argued that *The Last of the Crazy People* is indeed a home-grown southern Ontario variety of the American Southern Gothic as for the writers of the American South, such densely woven family histories inevitably locate themselves within an ante-bellum situation as well [14] and even if it had been a different war the implications of a lost Eden, a world from which one had been unceremoniously and unjustly exiled are still similar, just as the literary re-creations of this loss invariably show a preoccupation with parental ancestors who, in the end, only served as reminders of an irrecoverable past. This is the meaning of the "shelves of careful photographs" that Hooker pursues in his Aunt Rosetta's study, "male relations of every description at every possible age"[15], culminating in Grandfather Winslow, "large, impossibly young, and striking in a suit and vest, fingering his golden watch chain"[16]. As such the Winslow family suggests more than an individual family in turmoil. They represent a form of decadence, values and attitudes no longer viable in contemporary society and as Findley himself has stated, "as individuals and collectively, [they] represented a lot of [Canadian] values and things that must go"[17].

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12 Rosengarten, H.J.: Innocence Confused: Rev. of The Sparrow's Fall, by Fred Bodsworth; The Last of the Crazy People, by Timothy Findley; and Little Portia, by Simon Gray.- Canadian Literature (36) 1968, p. 79.-

13 Gibson, Graeme: Eleven Canadian Novelists: Interviewed by Graeme Gibson.- Toronto: Anansi, 1973.- p. 134

14 Cash, J.W.: The Mind of the South.- Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.- p. 81, 141

15 Findley, Timothy: The Last of the Crazy People.- Harmondswoth et. al.: Penguin, 1983 [1967].- p. 253

16 Ibid., p. 254

17 Gibson, Graeme: Eleven Canadian Novelists: Interviewed by Graeme Gibson.- Toronto: Anansi, 1973.- p. 133

All family members are individually haunted by psychic structures traced over patriarchy. Rosetta Winslow's devotion to her brother Nicholas is indelibly written over her preoccupation with "that other man, [...] her father, who had died and left her"[18]. For her, everything has a firm place in a social game played according to strict rules. Frozen in the past, she maintains the house as a museum to honour "that fabled lifetime which encompassed the semi-mythical figure of grandfather Winslow"[19], refusing to acknowledge the presence of an abyss beneath the elegance she cultivates so carefully.

In turn, Rosetta's imaginative escape into memory is mirrored by Jessica Winslow's physical retreat to her bedroom. Unwillingly made a wife and a mother, she withdraws from community and family, and lives in the fringe of madness. She is the fragile, neurasthenic Williams heroine, the broken doll, who dominates Findley's early fiction. As Renalda in "Lemonade" and so many of Findley's female characters, she has recoiled into her own haunted inner self. Almost all of the characters in the book spend considerable time standing at the foot of the stairs, straining to hear Jessie moving in her room, halting outside her door, doorknob in hand, or performing a "balancing act [...] against the upper banister."[20] Not only does she refuse to be the recipient and creator of any further children, but she has also removed herself from her sons Hooker and Gilbert whom she no longer wishes to give birth to

> "day ... after ... bloody ... day ... for the rest of my LIFE! [...] The mere idea that you were ever inside of me ... [...] I can't bear you ... Don't you - won't somebody understand that? I hate you!"[21]

Just as Mauberley, the protagonist of *Famous Last Words*, at the age of twelve, has long been exposed to his mother's madness, caused as his father explains, "Because we're here [...] and have intruded in her life"[22], Hooker and Gilbert have to come to realise that their mother regards them as nothing more than invaders.

While Jessica is caught in one structure of memory and Rosetta is consumed by the past, Nicholas seems to posses no memory at all - only the husk of a worn-out family ethic. He sits in Gilbert's sportscar, "trying to remember his own youth, his own car, his own drinking, and his own girls [...] He could not remember". While he is

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18 Findley, Timothy: The Last of the Crazy People.- Harmondswoth et. al.: Penguin, 1983 [1967].- p. 33
19 Ibid., p. 17
20 Ibid., p. 157
21 Ibid., pp. 154 f.
22 Findley, Timothy: Famous Last Words.- Toronto; Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin, 1981.- pp. 1f.

lamenting his wife's retreat, he fails to acknowledge that he, too, has locked himself away. His words are, as it were, defenders guarding his proper emotions:

> It was true he did not speak to his wife, and now he did not speak with his children. Only with his sister [...] They talked , and she decided things.[23]

> He would not talk to anyone anymore. He could not make anyone listen to him. All the right words remained in his mind, where he inserted them between the phrases he said aloud.

Cut off from both his family and his feelings, "a stranger to himself"[24], he can no longer fulfil the mandate of his ancestors: "To the edict that in society you must do something to belong. To the edict of continuity, generation to generation"[25]. He clings to the "old dream of Gilbert as someone brilliant"[26], but is nonetheless utterly unable to establish a form of relationship to his son.

Gilbert's undefined strangeness, his poetic interests, his inclination to question things and his alcoholism place him on the margins of community and family as well. Yet, his marginal position confers to him a certain amount of insight into the family dynamics and as he is, by temperament and by design, a trespasser it comes as no surprise, that he not only directly approaches his mother, but also charges his father by asking, "crying with rage, like a child":

> "What's wrong? What is wrong? Aren't you my father? I'd like to know what kind of fucking father *you* had. What kind of father was that bloody photograph in the other room? He must have thought he had a bunch of goddamn saints on his hands, what with perfect you and perfect Pat and perfect sweet Rosetta. [...] Or did he just have contempt for you, the way you have for me - and *all* your children, dead or alive?"[27]

In much the same way he rages against his mother, drunkenly approaching her: "You aren't really sick, you know." "I want to talk to you. [...] Mother! I have got to talk to you!" seem to echo endlessly through the novel. Yet all she ever utters is: " Get away from me. [...] Get away."[28] While his general role is that of a fearless teller of truths in a household dominated by self-delusions and lies, his frontal attacks nevertheless prove to be just as futile as they bring neither his father nor his mother to any new resolutions, but put them even more solidly on the defensive.

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23 Findley, Timothy: The Last of the Crazy People.- Harmondswoth et. al.: Penguin, 1983 [1967].- p. 147
24 Ibid., p. 268
25 Ibid., p. 147
26 Ibid., p. 64
27 Ibid., p. 146
28 Ibid., p. 150

Against the backdrop of a house continually marked by its 'silence' and dominated by closed doors, be it Jessica's bedroom door upstairs or Nicolas' closed library door downstairs, little Hooker is left almost completely alone in his struggle for knowledge, meaning, and certainty: "He wanted to wake Rosetta up. He wanted to ask her questions about love [...] about her father ... but [...] he knew that her determined silence could not be broken.[29] The extent of his resultant confusion is best expressed by the following statement: "As far as heaven was concerned, it was cold and clear [...] and in the whole sky, everything whirled in circles but drifted without plan."[30]

Unwillingly kept at the margins of life by virtue of his age and lack of knowledge, Hooker spends much of his time simply watching other people and himself. He is an onlooker, an observer. As he is ignored by an emotionally ineffectual father and aunt and rejected by a mother who has withdrawn from the insanity of the role thrust upon her by society into her own madness, the only ones to guide him are other marginal figures like Gilbert, the maid and storyteller Iris and Iris's friend Alberta Perkins, keeper of biblical history and prophecy. As such Hooker stands in the centre of an early configuration of voices from the margins and of possible modes of reaction to existence and human relationships that will gain greater complexity as it will variously recur in Findley's other novels.

Increasingly aware that he is surrounded by a doomed family and wondering how the suffering can be made to stop, Hooker looks for advice around him. A possible option is provided to him by Alberta:

> "Some of us will die in pain , some will die in glory, and the sick among us will go easy into their death, and there will be [...] no more suffering. [...] for those of us in [...] perdition *now*, it will surely be a blessed relief, a glorious day of release. [...] Like it is for us. Me and the nigras, Hooker, Or like it is for your mom and women. Like it is for John Harris and the sojers. [...] Like it must be for all the crazy people caught in madness. [...] An' the answer to per-di-tion [...] is merciful death, Hooker - sudden and unknown [...]."[31]

The lesson comes to him even more dramatically in the shape of the "Frankie and Johnny" song that echoes throughout the novel. Gilbert asks Iris repeatedly to sing it, claiming: "There's nothing like a good murder story"[32]. Iris, however, insists that it is a love story. And even though Gilbert scoffs, "Nobody kills someone they love"[33], Iris

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29 Ibid., p. 257
30 Ibid., p. 186
31 Ibid., pp. 99 f.
32 Ibid., p. 41
33 Ibid., p. 45

explains: "they kill *because* of love. Perhaps they kill some people because they love them so bad they can't stand to see them do wrong that way. Or because they can't stand the unhappiness anymore."[34] This interpretation of 'Frankie and Johnny' as "love story" is taken literally by Hooker, who is too young to distinguish between fiction and fact as they are presented to him by Iris, Gilbert and Alberta. His belief in everything they are saying leads to a number of misunderstandings that eventually motivate his later actions.

Things start to culminate when Hooker, brooding on what is presented to him, asks his brother, "Isn't hurting people wrong, then?" and Gilbert is forced to answer,

> "that's the most loaded … lousy … question of all time, because the answer is presupposed to be yes. [...] But the facts are, it can't be wrong, 'cause s'many folks indulge in it!"[35]

That 'loaded' question about hurting people, the true answer to which is contradicted by experience and history, is a question that Findley and his characters return to again and again.

Soon after Gilbert removes himself from the scene by committing suicide, and Hooker, attending the inquest, hears the verdict: "Death by his own hand" - presumably "while of unsound mind".[36] While his father is above all mortally shamed by Gilbert's suicide: "One of us has killed himself [...] It's like having a bloody gun at your head all the time."[37] Hooker ever more clearly comes to realise what he has been suspecting all along:

> "I think that we are crazy people", said Hooker. "Like those crazies in the asylum. [...] It's like a whole list of crazy people, and we are the last of them."[38]

His brother's suicide was all the confirmation he needed. As Hooker now appropriates the messages he is supplied with and orders his experience through them, he takes a terrifying step to end the confusion, a step made inevitable by a relentless accretion of motives. In "hooking" his finger around the trigger of a pistol Hooker completes his brother's gesture in death by shooting his mother, father and aunt because he loves them and because he wants the unhappiness to end in merciful death.

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34 Ibid., pp. 45 f.
35 Ibid., p. 202
36 Ibid., p. 250
37 Ibid., p. 249
38 Ibid., pp. 205 f.

Not in the least afraid of him, it is Iris who takes the gun from his hands: "There, honey, [...] There now [...] You're all right now [...] You've done it. It's over."[39]. As he accepts her embrace, she looks into his face and "For the first time, ever, in his whole life, the questions were gone. She would never have to answer him again."[40] He has found his peace in releasing his family into death and himself into the sanctuary of eternal madness. After he is committed to an asylum Iris is told it's best to think of him as dead - another of those "sudden apparently inexplicable suicides that must be understood as the dawn of a hope so horrible [...] it is unendurable."[41]

As the book closes with Iris walking Hooker's field, certain that the shooting of his family is a positive achievement and he will be forgiven. And as she is once again singing the song of Frankie and Johnny, it is emphasised that *The Last of the Crazy People*, like the song, is a murder story that is also a love story. Hooker's killing of his family was an act of love, and even if his action is not entirely justifiable, it is surely understandable and the only logical outcome of the story. As Findley himself points out, "Hooker had to murder in order to achieve peace for those people, in order to demonstrate his love for them."[42] He has "killed his family to save them from themselves. This is the logic of innocence, not yet familiar with poise, battered by too much reality".[43] The main strength of this novel indeed lies in the author's ability to capture the irrational logic of a child's mind without treating childhood sentimentally or - as Grosskurth puts it - Findley's "evocation of Hooker's bewildered sense of a bewildering world"[44].

10.2 *The Wars*

While in *The Last of the Crazy People* the reader was made witness to madness on a private level and its devastating impact on a young and innocent mind, in *The Wars* he is exposed to madness on a larger scale. In Findley's own words it is the story of

> a young man from Toronto who goes off to fight in World War I [...] and then he does something that everyone thinks is insane, and after that he's horribly maimed in a fire and finally dies![45]

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39 Ibid., p. 280
40 Ibid., p. 281
41 Ibid., p. 250
42 Cameron, Donald: Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part One.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.- p. 55
43 Findley, Timothy: Inside Memory: Pages from a Writers Workbook.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1990.- p. 70
44 Grosskurth, Phyllis: New Canadian Novels: Rev. of *The Last of the Crazy People*.- In: Saturday Night, May 1967, p. 39.-
45 Findley, Timothy: Inside Memory: Pages from a Writers Workbook.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1990.- p. 136

From a national point of view one of the novel's most important themes is the dramatic change both Robert Ross and the society in which he lives undergo, as World War I overturns the past and destroys the philosophical and moral foundations of the pre-War world, thereby implicating that it was not just another war, but the initiation of humanity into the concept of total war. For Canada it also marked the passage into national adulthood and - as already hinted at in *The Last of the Crazy People* - the end of the WASP-aristocracy. Yet, there is more to it. As Howells already remarked, the novel does not simply "rehearse disillusion at the evil and the waste of a war begun far away by European imperial powers into which the colonies were sucked"[46]. While it might surely be placed in the war novel category, Matthews suggests, that it is really a 'novel of self-indulgence' that portrays the civil world as decadent and the military world as pointless.[47] Indeed it is Findley himself who provides us with the major clue for the interpretation of the novel as a whole when he tells Nothof with regard to the violent events of war

> "As illustrations, for what they say about the human condition these events are wonderful. I hate to say 'wonderful', but it's quite true."[48]

In Findley's work war thus becomes a means of illustration as well as a phenomenon to be illustrated. This way the individual tragedy of a of a nineteen-year-old Canadian officer's experiences in the trenches of World War I, which illuminates the tale of an entire generation"[49], is masterfully turned into a universal metaphor not only for the catastrophic events of the "overwhelming horror of the 1914-18 carnage"[50], but war in general. A fact which is also underlined by the title as the plural invites an analysis beyond the narrow historical confines. This is to say that while the novel does in fact deal with a very precisely circumscribed historical event, it is still about all wars, national and international, as well as personal and internal. As we are presented with the most horrible, inhuman and absurd destruction of innocence, decency, sanity and life, it questions society's need for wars, the value of unquestioning obedience to authority and blind belief in progress and humanity's subordination to human purpose.

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46 Howells, Carol Ann: 'Tis Sixty Years Since': Timothy Findley's *The Wars* and Roger MacDonald's *1915*.- In: World Literature Written in English 23:1 (Winter 1984), p. 131

47 cf. Mathews, Robin: Private Indulgence and Public Discipline: Violence in the English Canadian Novel Since 1960.- In: Violence in the English Canadian Novel Since 1960 / dans le roman canadien depuis 1960 / ed. by Virginia Harger-Grindling and Terr Goldie.- St. John's: Memorial University Press, 1981.- pp. 33-44.-

48 Nothof, Anne: Timothy Findley: Author of *The Wars*. In: Athabaska University Magazine Feb. 1987, p. 38

49 York, Lorraine M.: The Other Side of Dailiness: Photography in the Works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje and Margaret Laurence.- Toronto: ECW Press, 1988.- p. 84

50 Ibid., p. 81

Living long after Robert's death, an unnamed narrator is sorting through the fragments of the past trying to piece together the story of Robert Ross and a history of the Great War in an effort to discover a pattern that makes sense for him:

> You begin at the archives with photographs. [...] Boxes and boxes of snapshots and portraits; maps and letters; cablegrams and clippings from the papers. [...] Spread over table tops, a whole age lies in fragments underneath the lamps. [...] The boxes smell of yellow dust. You hold your breath. As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles. Other parts, you know you'll never find. This is what you have.[51]

Attempting to understand a violent age through the fragments which lie underneath his lamp, he stands as a representative for all of us in a generation that has not had a war, as we try to bring it closer to ourselves. In his attempt to re-create the past he has no choice but to rely on the above mentioned material, the transcript of the court martial and the first-hand accounts of numerous witnesses, above all those of the two women who were part of Robert's life: Lady Juliet d'Orsey and Marian Turner, his nurse. However, while the traditional function of documents, court-martials, and witnesses has always been to reinforce the sense of reality and to confirm the official interpretation of truth, which in this case would be to justify war and its actions, Findley warns us against trusting documentary evidence unquestioningly by revealing to us the unreliability of such testimonies. Not only does every witness see things differently, to a degree that the individual testimonies may even contradict one another, but their accounts are also highly selective and subjective, as in the case of Lady Juliet d'Orsey who reads to the narrator selections from a diary written by her when she was a girl. As the reader is thus presented with extracts of a child's diary filtered by an old lady, he is not treated to "facts" or "experiences" but to interpretations. It is d'Orsey herself who points out: "The conclusions are for you to make."[52] Paradoxically, then, the inclusion of documents and eyewitness accounts accentuates a constant struggle between asserting the possibility of factual accuracy and the impossibility of escaping fiction. By presenting a historical document and then devaluating its function, Findley sets off a process in the novel whereby in the end there is no longer a hierarchy between fact and fiction, between historical documentation and imaginative creation, they become so inextricably intertwined that one begins to replace the other.[53]

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51 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 11

52 Ibid., pp. 143 f.

53 For a detailed discussion on the narrative technique see: Bonanno, Giovanni: The Function of Documentary Sources in the Narrative of Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.- In: Commonwealth Literary Cultures: New Voices, New Approaches. Conference Papers Leece 3-7 April 1990 / ed. by Giovanna Capone, Claudio Gorlier and Bernard Hickey.- pp. 239-250.-; Cobley, Evelyn: Postmodernist War Fiction: Findley's *The Wars*.- In: Canadian Literature 147 (Winter 1995), pp.

By choosing to tell the story as he does, Findley, much like Kroetsch and Ondaatje and postmodernists in general, demystifies the illusion of the text as a direct reflection of reality and undermines the assumption that reality is open to observation and classification, which many First World War writers still subscribed to. Their reliance on Enlightenment, self-understanding of the human subject as a rational agent capable of making sense of an essentially transparent objective world, suggests that modern civilisation can accommodate even the madness of war, and this is precisely what Findley seems to be denying. A text can never be an immediate representation of reality, let alone of a reality as incomprehensible as the madness of large-scale homicide.

The catalyst for the story of Robert Ross, the Toronto teenager from a well-to-do family and his devastating experiences in the trenches of Word War I, is his love for his hydrocephalic sister Rowena. It is her accidental fall to death in the family barn which prompts him to enlist and not his belief in the conventional rhetoric of war as documented by the responses of soldiers and civilians alike in the photographs described early in the novel. On the contrary, Robert doubts "the validity in all this martialling of men but the doubt is inarticulate. It stammers in his brain."[54]. Ross's true motivation for joining the army is his guilt over his supposed failure of duty to Rowena and the rest of his life can be seen as an attempt to compensate for that momentary lapse of attention.

Robert's first experience with death and guilt is followed by his first experience of the irrationality of authority as his mother, after her daughter's death, insists that Robert must kill Rowena's rabbits. Readers are always puzzled by this incident, because as Robert points out killing the rabbits "can't possibly make sense."[55] Yet this seems to be precisely the point. Life doesn't make sense, although we are constantly trying to deny this insight by inventing connections to explain the inexplicable. This is also why, as Brydon suggests, "Robert prefers Rowena's death to be his fault rather than simply an accident, something meaningless"[56]. The futility of life and the isolation of the individual is further heightened when Mrs. Ross, who constantly rails against the

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98-124.-; Tumanov, Vladimir: De-automatization in Timothy Findley's *The War*s.- In: Canadian Literature 130 (1991), pp. 107-115.-; Seddon, Elizabeth: The Reader as Actor in the Novels of Timothy Findley's Fiction.- In: Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature / ed. by John Moss.- Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987.-;Ricou, Laurie: Obscured by Violence: Timothy Findley's *The War*s.- In: Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960 / ed. by Terry Goldie and Virginia Harger-Grinling.- St. John's: Memorial University, [1981].- pp. 125-137.-; Pirie, Bruce: The Dragon in the Fog: 'Misplaced Mythology' in *The Wars*.- In: Canadian Literature 91 (Winter 1981), pp. 70-79.-

54 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 13

55 Ibid., p. 22

56 Brydon, Diana: 'It could not be told': Making Meaning in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.- In: Journal of Commonwealth Literature 21:1 (1986), p. 73

sham rhetoric that surrounds the war whether it is articulated by the church or by the press, tells Robert:

> "You think Rowena belonged to you. Well I'm here to tell you, Robert, no one belongs to anyone. We're all cut off at birth with a knife and left at the mercy of strangers. You hear that. Strangers. I know what you want to do. I know you're going to go away and be a soldier. Well - you can go to hell. I'm not responsible I'm just another stranger. Birth I can give you - but life I cannot. I can't keep anyone alive."[57]

The death of his sister, the killing of her pet rabbits, and the strain of parting from his mother, are the first steps in the pattern of circumstances which will lead to Robert's growing psychological disease eventually culminating in his final action which - though officially certified insane - has to be seen as a hopeless gesture against a world gone mad.

As Robert himself is at a loss concerning the conventional rhetoric of soldiering and of war he seeks an example he can identify with: "What he wanted was a model. Someone who could teach him, by example, how to kill."[58] He seems to have found this someone in Eugene Taffler whom he meets during his training in Alberta: "Taffler was a hero. He'd already been to France - wounded and returned to Canada [...] He had also been a varsity all-round-athlete"[59]. Taffler, in his supreme self-conceit, epitomizes the image of the soldier as conquering hero. That this is, of course, an ironic image becomes evident when the war later on costs Taffler his athletic arms and he does not want to live anymore. Besides it turns out that the decorated hero is in fact a homosexual, as Robert painfully witnesses in the abortive ritual masculine initiation in the whorehouse Wetgoods. Since Robert identifies with Taffler, the homosexual encounter between Taffler and the Swede has a somewhat traumatic effect on Robert. As the only lessons Robert learns from Taffler are negative ones and as the scars of the latter's impotent homosexuality cast long shadows over Robert's subsequent relationships with men and women, this episode initiates the second stage of his psychic development.

Similarly, the episode on board the troopship when Robert is forced to shoot an injured horse, serves both to intensify his loathing for violence and to foreshadow his motivation for his later act of mercy. It is on this voyage to England that he makes friends with Harris, who is described by Lady Juliet as "[a]lmost, if not, a poet. Certainly

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57 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 28
58 Ibid., p. 28
59 Ibid., p. 33

a story-teller"[60]. Coincidentally, they are both confined to hospital on their arrival, Harris by pneumonia, Robert as a result of an accident in the hold when he was compelled to shoot the horse. Later on Robert visits Harris daily in the hospital eager to listen to him:

> Harris said the strangest things. [...] Strange and provocative. Robert didn't know, sometimes, what to do with Harris sentences; where to fit them in his mind, or how to use them. He only knew they went somewhere inside him and they didn't come back out.[61]

However, Harries dies and Robert, once again alone, scatters his ashes in the company of Taffler and his mistress, Lady Barbara.

Sent to the front, Robert gets lost, almost drowns in the dikes and experiences an air and a gas attack immediately afterwards. He seems to be almost constantly confronted with the psychic collapses of the people around him. While one of his fellow soldiers, Levitt, goes insane during a massive artillery bombardment, Captain Rodwell, who is unable to prevent shell-shocked soldiers from roasting little animals alive and thus knows that he has reached the cannibalistic bottom of the night world, commits suicide by putting "a bullet through his ear"[62]. Although, from an official point of view this may also be deemed as an act of madness, another Findley character from a later novel, Charles Marlow, claims: "Crazy people don't kill themselves. [..] Sane people kill themselves because they are concerned."[63]

Back in England he has an affair with Lady Barbara and meets her twelve year old sister, Lady Juliet, who falls in love with him. His savage love-making with the callous Barbara, who has sealed herself off from emotions, seems to be a prelude to the final key episode in the pattern of violence: the brutal sexual assault made upon him on his return to the front. In the baths at Désolé Robert is raped by a gang of men he never sees. While he at first assumes the aggressors to be inmates of the asylum where the rape occurs, he has to learn that his "assailants, who he thought were crazies, had been his fellow soldiers. Maybe even his brother officers".[64] The cold, calculated violence of rape, like the violence of organized warfare, is thus presented as more terrifying - more truly insane from the novel's perspective - then the violence of those locked up in asylums.

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60 Ibid., p. 105
61 Ibid., p. 95
62 Ibid., p. 135
63 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 475
64 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 169

Asked by Margaret Laurence why the rape had to be there Findley defended the scene by replying:

> "It has to be there because it is my belief that Robert Ross and his generation of young men were raped, in effect, by the people who made that war. Basically, their fathers did it to them." Margaret said: "yes, I agree with you. But surely that's implicit in the book already. You don't have to *say* so." [...] "But I cannot remove it. As a scene, it is intrinsic - deeply meshed in the fabric of my book as I first conceived it. I cannot cut away its arms and legs - no matter how convinced other people are that the book will stand and function without them. "[65]

Paradoxically, when it seems his psyche can no longer absorb the guilt, the cruelty, and the violation of war, Robert finds the mental strength to strike back. After being both symbolically and literally raped by war, Robert Ross chooses to stop living by the practical, tactical, logical rhetoric of war taught and glorified by society through respective books and the media worship of war 'heroes' like Taffler. He decides to save a supply of 130 hundred horses from certain slaughter by freeing them from the stables under attack and guiding them from battle, an action which goes against Capt. Leather's orders to leave the animals where they are. He justifies his action by claiming its essential sanity: "Leather is insane", said Robert flatly. "It cannot be called disobedience to save these animals [...]."[66] Although he justifies his release of the horses by saying that they will be needed, there is certainly more to it. As Brydon points out,

> his attraction to them springs from beauty. They are beautiful to him because they are wholly alive in a world dedicated to its own destruction. He wishes to save them for the life they represent [...] and to expiate his earlier failures: his failure to be there when Rowena fell, his failure to save her rabbits, his failure to save the horses on the ship, and his failure to save the German who spares him and his men.[67]

His amazement at things still being alive within this rage of destruction and his affinity for innocent creatures was already hinted at an earlier point when even during one of his worst moments in the trenches, Robert took the pains to save a rat from drowning - a meaningless gesture perhaps - but he could not help marvelling, "here is *someone still alive*. And the word *alive* was amazing."[68] Robert, like Hooker before him, seems to have retained his childhood innocence and compassion, "one of the

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65 Findley, Timothy: Inside Memory: Pages from a Writers Workbook.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1990.- p. 151

66 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 177

67 Brydon, Diana: A Devotion to Fragility: Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.- In: World Literature Written in English 26:1 (1986), p. 80 f.

68 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 115

first things", as Findley tells Cameron, "that people try to eradicate in children [...] What we have done to the human race is to brutalize it beyond recognition."[69] Despite his participation in the violence of a civilization gone mad, however, Robert, like Harris, the 'weakling' who dies of bronchitis before ever reaching the front, and Rodwell, is able to maintain his consideration and respect for life. In seeking to save the horses, he attempts to align himself with life in opposition to the deadly mechanisms of the wars and sets in motion his private war against a collective insanity that respects no creature's right to live in peace and dignity.

Watching Leather shoot the soldier who is trying to help him save the animals from being unnecessarily killed, and the overall carnage all round him, he pauses "for the barest moment looking at the whole scene laid out before him and his anger rose to such a pitch that he feared he was going to go over into madness."[70] It is at that point that Findley's protagonist becomes prepared to do violence to oppose - and however paradoxical it may seem, to stop - the violence he has experienced. As Findley already stated in reference to Hooker's violence in *The Last of the Crazy People*,

> "We must destroy what is destroying us. We must kill what is killing us. We must violate the violators. [...] There's always violence, because you hate so strongly what is happening that it can bring that It Must End sense."[71]

Respectively, Robert does not hesitate to shoot Captain Leather and Private Cassles as they are trying to prevent his escape with the horses. And although from a military point of view this act is considered both mad and treasonous it has to be seen as a necessity in order to achieve his aim, just as his whole final action has to be viewed as a desperate last gesture to pull himself out of the lower world of war in order to affirm his own humanity, an effort to offer a significant resistance to the horrors around him. As Klovan points out, the distinctive quality which enables Robert to attempt to save the horses, and to endure his resultant suffering, is something Findley calls "moral momentum".[72] This phrase appears in his first novel, *The Last of the Crazy People*, in a scene where Rosetta is listening to Gilbert raging at his mother and is unable to intervene although she knows that things are getting out of hand:

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69 Cameron, Donald: Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part One.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.- p. 58
70 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 178
71 Cameron, Donald: Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part One.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.- p. 62
72 Klovan, Peter: 'Bright and Good': Findley's *The Wars*.- In: Canadian Literature 91 (Winter 1981), p. 64

> She heard the crash upstairs and the voices, but she could not gain the moral momentum to intervene. Years, and ancestors, leaned against her. She thought, "Maybe we should all die. Maybe we should all just be satisfied to die. "[73]

In contrast to Rodwell, Levitt and Taffler, the three officers who all succumb without a struggle to the same forces which Robert attempts to defy, he has the moral momentum within himself to overcome his inertia and resist the cumulative pressures around him.

In his final act, Robert knows what to do with the words of Harris, who had earlier tried to explain to him that people must learn to return and live in their element, when they find it[74]: he rejects the 'we' of soldiers for the 'we' of "we shall not be taken"[75], meaning himself and the horses.

As it is nonetheless an insane gesture by militaristic standards and as he has disobeyed orders and killed his superior, when Robert and the horses in their flight end up trapped in a barn, Major Mickle decides that because Robert must be mad, he must dispense with both mercy and reason. "That he did so", the narrator comments, "puts the state of his own mind in question - for what he did cannot be interpreted as being less 'mad' than what Robert had done in taking the horses and deserting the battle."[76] Mickle sets the barn on fire in order to drive him into the open. As Robert cannot get out in time, however, the horses are destroyed and he himself, although staying alive, is badly burned. Taken into custody, he is inevitably court-martialled as he flagrantly disobeys military orders. Similarly, to most of his contemporaries, Robert's defiance of orders is the act of a maniac. When asked to speak about him, however, they say they don't remember, look away or change the subject, suggesting by their discomfort the mixed feelings they harbour about him. His brother refuses to speak of him as do the surviving veterans:

> Ask what happened, they say: "I don't know". Mention Robert Ross - they look away. "He's dead", they tell you. This is not news. "Tell me about the horses", you ask. Sometimes they weep at this. Other times they say: "that bastard!"[77]

Yet, while from a military point of view he is rightly court-martialled, given the circumstances of his transgression, there are others who disagree with the official

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73 Findley, Timothy: The Last of the Crazy People.- Harmondswoth et. al.: Penguin, 1983 [1967].- p. 153
74 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 95
75 Ibid., 185
76 Ibid., p. 185
77 Ibid., p. 10

judgement. To them is was not an act of rebellion "to step outside the ranks and take individual initiative against institutionalized madness"[78], but a kind of moral heroism. Significantly it is the narrator and the women who refuse to see him as a traitor or madman. The reason why they are able to arrive at a different interpretation was convincingly suggested by Simone Vauthier:

> Because the two interviewees never shared in the male code of war and the interviewer belongs to a different generation with different cultural assumptions, they can re-define Robert Ross's gesture and through their combined (re-)telling, make available to the present day its positive affirmation within negation.[79]

As Robert rejects the masculine virtues and publicly acts in a feminine way, it comes as no surprise that he should be fondly remembered by Lady Juliet d'Orsey, as a man who craved love and strove for perfection, and that Marian Turner has no difficulty choosing to see Robert's act as heroic. It may be a revised rhetoric of heroism with regard to the accepted pattern, but her words demonstrate its validity, its greater truth:

> "My opinion was - he was a hero. Not your everyday Sergeant York or Billy Bishop, mind you! [...] But he was a hero nonetheless. You see, he did the thing that no one else would even dare to think doing. And that to me's as good a definition of a "hero" as you'll get. Even when the thing that's done is something of which you disapprove. "[80]

When he refuses to play a part in the enormities and wanders off, he becomes an anti-hero, or rather, what Stanley Cooperman calls "a hero of the negative act."[81] It is once again Turner who puts both Robert Ross and the Great War into a different perspective and hints at the fineness of the dividing line between sanity and insanity when she goes on to say:

> "Well. It was the war that was crazy […]. Not Robert Ross or what he did. "[82]

[83]Unable to accept the absurdity or the ill-logic of masculine war ethics as exposed by Robert's mother when she dares to ask:

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78 Howells, Carol Ann: 'Tis Sixty Years Since': Timothy Findley's *The Wars* and Roger MacDonald's *1915*.- In: World Literature Written in English 23:1 (Winter 1984), p. 133

79 Vauthier, Simone: The Dubious Battle of Story-Telling: Narrative Strategies in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.- In: Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature / ed. by Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985.- p. 15

80 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 16

81 Cooperman, Stanley: World War I and the American War Novel.- Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967.- p. 189

82 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 17

83 Brydon, Diana: 'It could not be told': Making Meaning in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.- In: Journal of Commonwealth Literature 21:1 (1986), p. 70

> "What does it mean - *to kill your children*? Kill them and then ... go in there and sing about it! What does that mean? "[84]

unable to accept organised violence of a whole society or civilisation, unable to endure the mindless slaughter, the absurdities of the war machine, and the ensuing brutalisation of the human spirit, Robert Ross commits a decisive act the world chooses to name madness. As Findley has pointed out in various interviews, however, in a world gone insane the conventional definition of madness has to be reversed. He thus tells, Graham Gibson:

> "The ultimate sanity comes from insanity, I believe"[85]

and Donald Cameron:

> "There's always someone [...] who must do insane things in order to clarify what, for want of better words is bright and good."[86]

Rejecting the actual madness of war and the wholesale destruction of life by his positive effort to save the horses he chooses a social suicide through desertion and apparent madness as the only route he can see to preserving life and all the values associated with it. No matter that his self-appointed mission fails, it still affirms life in the midst of death and the possibilities of commitment beyond the self. The pointlessness of his destruction in not denied but at the same time it is paradoxically made valuable.

He finally dies of his burns - but the life-assertive statement that appear throughout the book insist that there is still triumph in Robert's end: the epigraph from Euripide, for example - "Never that which is shall die"[87] - or Rodwell's last letter to his daughter - "Everything lives forever"[88] - or Robert's reply to Marian who, "ashamed of life"[89], offers to help him die:

> "Not yet". *Not yet*. Do you see? He might have said "No". He might've said "never". He might've said "Yes". But he said "not yet". There, in those two words, in a nutshell - you have the essence of Robert Ross. And perhaps the essence of what it is to be alive.[90]

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84 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 54
85 Gibson, Graeme: Eleven Canadian Novelists.- Toronto: Anansi, 1973.- p. 122
86 Cameron, Donald: Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part One.- Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.- p. 55
87 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 5
88 Ibid., p. 135
89 Ibid., p. 188
90 Ibid., p. 189

He fully knows the presence of death and he holds onto life. Knowledge of death feeds this human impulse to survive. Robert refuses Marian Turner's offer of an easy death - rejecting Rodwell's way - but he also refuses Levitt's retreat into madness. Thus his manner of dying or rather refusing to die, his survival for another six years blinded and burned and almost but not quite obliterated is his final resistance to the pressures imposed on him by history. As Findley himself remarked, this book "is positive. No more doom and gloom. This book says yes!"[91]

But even though the book says yes, it only does so with regard to Robert's act. Findley's view of the world as a hell-hole does not change. The belief "that we are here for the slaughter"[92] remains as he does in fact continue to create dystopias and societies gone insane in order to reveal the irrational heart of rationality and the violence masked by Western civilization.

10.3 *Headhunter*

Inspired by Joseph Conrad's great 1902 novella, *Heart of Darkness*, Findley created yet another novel in which morals are inverted and the insane become the guardians of sanity. A *Heart of Darkness* set in Toronto, *Headhunter* is a journey into the heart of evil and the depths of human desire where limits have disappeared, where perversions and insanity have changed places with humanity and reason. Dense and intricately patterned, rich with literary allusions and packed with intrigue, the book is concerned with the moral decline and fall of western civilization as made manifest in the upper-middle-class citizens of Toronto and in the operations of a psychiatric hospital. Once again a few characters try to rebel against the madness of those in power who have vested interest in preserving the status quo - no matter how much suffering it may cause others. In this case, however, Findley's exploration of the insanity of conservatism and selfishness penetrates the realm of pure evil. It is unquestionably his darkest novel. What distinguishes *Headhunter* from Findley's previous novels is the 'when' of the apocalypse. Until now it has always taken place in the past. This time, however, Findley has put it directly ahead of us: *Headhunter* takes place in the near future, a future in which all of Toronto resembles a battle zone. Rancid fog rolls in from the polluted lake. AIDS has run rampant, while another incurable and deadly plague, called sturnusemia, is even more wanton.

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91 Findley, Timothy: Inside Memory: Pages from a Writers Workbook.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1990.- p. 136

92 cf.MacFarlane, David: The Perfect Gesture.- Books in Canada March 1982, pp. 5-8.-

> So little was known and so much rumoured about the plague, there was nothing with which it had not been credited. Lunacy, rape and murder had all been blamed on sturnusemia.[93]

Nobody knows how it is transmitted but public health officials, in absence of a scientific explanation, have in desperation blamed birds. As a preventive measure so-called D-squads are sent around the city spraying trees, gardens, and ravines with deadly chemicals, exterminating birds and smaller animals that are presumed to feed on them by the thousands.

In addition to that gangs of Moonmen and Leatherheads commit rape and mayhem. Moral and sexual taboos seem to have evaporated altogether while men abuse their own children and women drowse themselves in alcohol and sex. Everyone is either psychically disturbed, corrupt, a victim or impotent.

> Sturnusemia and AIDS were not the only plagues. Civilization - sickened - had itself become a plague. And its course [...] could be followed by tracing the patterns of mental breakdown. The Parkin Institute was not alone in being overcrowded, overworked overextended. Psychiatric case loads, everywhere, carried alarming numbers. Broken dreamers, their minds in ruin. This was the human race.[94]

Into the middle of this ruined landscape, Findley has dropped one of the most original, loveable and, at times, comical characters that he has created. The amiable, slightly deranged and totally delightful Lilah Kemp. A former librarian with unruly hair, she storms around the city pushing a baby carriage with nothing in it but an imaginary baby.

In her "evangelical passion for literature"[95], fiction to her has become life and purpose. She takes books so seriously that their characters come to life - literally. Not only does she talk to Peter Rabbit and Susanna Moodie, she also has the power to bring literary icons to life, a gift that Lilah's spiritualist mother, Sarah Tudball, bequeathed to her daughter. Herself a medium she had the power to raise the dead. Unfortunately, however, when Lilah was just ten her mother was killed:

> She had been gone no more than half an hour when her screams and their echoes began to rise up through the mists [...] She was found with multiple bruises, and strangled with her scarves.

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93 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 9
94 Ibid., p. 388
95 Ibid., p. 11

> Lilah never ceased to hear her crying [...] Sarah Tudball had gone forth to conjure Doctor Jekyll - but the man she had found was Mister Hyde.[96]

A traumatic incident in itself, it also leaves her to the care of an abusive father, whose "verbal attacks were beyond imagination"[97]. However, despite all the savagery she has to witness, like all of Findley's victim-heroes before her, she has been able to preserve her compassion. In a world full of destruction hers is a lovingness which is heading for extinction. Gentle and kind, her Alice-in-Wonderland innocence is contrasted to the violent madness and oblivion all around. One of the books great accomplishments is in fact that it establishes a voice for the dispossessed, and even lends them an odd potency. Furthermore, as an outpatient of the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, Lilah is fundamental to a novel that explores not only the destruction of the environment and human values, but provides a critical analysis of the world of psychiatry and its practices. As such the book does of course, as already exemplified by the previous chapters, take up an issue which has variously been thematised within twentieth century literature. Liberator and enslaver, healer and quack, the analyst has quite often served as the object of intense ambivalence. Alternately worshipped and reviled, deified and damned, he simultaneously has evoked both the artist's fascination as well as his or her contempt.[98] One of the most famous therapists in literature, who embodies the artist's condemnation of the whole profession in general, is Sir William Bradshaw, the psychiatrist in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

> Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion.[99]

The bitterness in Woolf's tone reflects the dominant attitude among writers, who regard psychotherapy as a thread to free will, creativity, spiritual belief, and individuality or equate psychotherapy with brutal mind control. Similarly, Lilah, who experiences her madness as a precious solitude and above all wants to be left alone, feels pestered by her doctors who, by treating her "with bouts of forced confinement and massive doses of various neuroleptics", want to separate her "from her "imaginary" companions". An elimination which she refers to as "Murder by

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96 Ibid., p. 33

97 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 31

98 Only a handful of sympathetic analysts have been portrayed in literature. Significantly, most of them, such as Dr. Johanna von Haller in Robertson Davies' *The Manticore*, are women.

99 Woolf, Virginia: Mrs. Dalloway.- London: Grafton, 1986 [1925].- p. 89

milligrams."[100] Above all, however, she refuses the sanity which is offered to her on the following grounds:

> All those bottles and vials and pills - ways to pull yourself into the dark and wrap yourself in normalcy. Or what the sane called normalcy. Little did they know [...]. Little all the way to nothing. [...] They have offered me a way of giving up [...]. Sanity which is very tempting. More relaxing. Peaceful. But I must refuse it. [101]

One of the authors who hints at the tremendous power this profession has been granted over the critical aspects of patients' lives by a society which wants to believe the psychiatrist can change the individual's reality, is Peter Schaffer who in his play *Equus* has the psychologist Dysart acknowledge:

> "My profession is based on total mystery! In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place - and yet I do ultimate things. Irreversible, terminal things [...] I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking heads."[102]

He is in fact an agent of social control and numerous studies by psychologists and others have validated the substance of Dysart's concern[103]. Moreover, it is important to remember the enormous power of psychiatry in terms of prestige, money, and *ultimate* control over psychiatric politics. Psychiatrists, both medically and legally, decide *who* is insane and *why*; and *when* and *if* they should be released from treatment. Nobody can understand how powerful over the human mind the belief in the "divinity" of psychiatrists can be, unless he has watched the wrong people wielding authority in psychiatric institutions, unless he has watched its effects where the psychiatrist has been mad, where the "Therapist" does in fact become "The rapist"[104], which is exactly what happens here.

The story begins with Lilah, who

> while a blizzard raged through the streets of Toronto [...] inadvertently set Kurtz free from page 92 of *Heart of Darkness*. The escape took place at the Metropolitan Reference Library, where Lilah sat reading beside the rock pool. She had not even said come forth, but there

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100 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 43

101 Ibid., p. 507, p. 512

102 Shaffer, Peter: Equus.- London: André Deutsch, 1973.- p. 105

103 For example: Azorin, Louis A.: The Analyst's Personal Equation.- In: American Journal of Psychoanalysis, (17) 1957, pp. 34-38; Farber, Leslie: Schizophrenia and the Mad Psychotherapist.- In: R.D. Laing and Anti-psychiatry / ed. by Robert Boyers and Robert Orrill.- New York: Harper & Row, 1971.- pp. 90-118.-

104 As one character misreads the label on a door.

> Kurtz stood before her, framed by the woven jungle of cotton trees and vines that passed for botanic atmosphere.[105]

Horror-stricken, she tries to force him back between the covers. Unable to do so she watches in alarm as the incarnation of evil escapes from his literary cage into the streets of Toronto. Not only is this an intriguing beginning, but while the reader might at first be tempted to observe this event rather patronizingly as an amusing fantasy of Lilah's, Findley masterfully establishes Kurtz's objective reality, and thus forces the reader to accept and trust Lilah's point of view, as fantastic as it may be. Next we know the person Lilah identified as Kurtz in the library is indeed a celebrated psychiatrist by the name of Rupert Kurtz. As head of the Parkin Institute of Psychiatric Research, the brilliant and amoral Kurtz acquires absolute power over his domain and gains access not only to the mangled psyches of his and other doctors' patients, but also to their fortunes. He gets it by violating his patients - clients as he calls them - using their intimate revelations to escalate their depravities, to blackmail them emotionally, and to subjugate their psyches.

Feeling responsible for Kurtz' escape, Lilah tries to summon up another Conrad character, Marlow, who in *Heart of Darkness* is responsible for bringing Kurtz to heel. Waiting desperately for him to appear she is more than relieved, when soon after a man called Charlie Marlow, who has recently returned from Harvard to work at The Parkin Institute of Psychiatric, moves in to live beside her. While most of his colleagues are either overly fond of somnificating their patients into vegetable passivity or rigorously abuse their powers like Kurtz, Marlow is one of the few remaining psychiatrists in this barbaric world whose humanity and ethics have remained intact. What is central to Marlow's own techniques with his patients is

> the logic of madness [...]. Never to draw the patient towards reality for reality's sake alone, but only for its place in the madman's sense of logic. It was Marlow's opinion - shared for the most part by Austin - that modern psychiatry depended far too much on placating the mad by stressing the comforts of reality - ignoring almost entirely the madman's fear of it. This way, drugs had played too large a role in the lives of too many patients.[106]

Instead of drugging his patients, he above all uses literature as psychotherapy since he believes in its healing powers - not because of its sentiments, but because of its complexities. Complex in itself, *Headhunter* snakes its way through a whole labyrinth of characters, most of which are either patients of Marlow or Kurtz. While some of

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105 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 3
106 Ibid., p. 396

them could be classified as dangerously psychopathic, there are others who are only mildly deranged and still others who are merely frustrated or lost. Regardless of the degree of their psychological problems, however, almost all of them are suffering in some way or the other and, as such, they are able to make the most powerful statements about life and the various ways in which it can destroy and derange an individual soul. As one of the characters points out for instance: "Life sucks [...] I always used to think that had a sexual connotation. Now I don't think so. I think it means exactly what it says. Life is a vampire."[107] It is their fates and their individual explications, assumptions and perceptions which form the background to the picture of society presented to us.

There are for instance the various members of a venerable Toronto family by the name of Wylie; a family which in its overall traits bares a striking resemblance to the Winslows in *The Last of the Crazy People*. The oldest living member is Grandmother Wylie, whose position can be best established by the following passage in which she refers to her son who had not been able to recover from the horrors witnessed at Dieppe and who died of despair in one of his mental absences 18 years after the traumatic event:

> It was [her] opinion that men did not deserve sympathy. Men went to war because war was their job - their duty. And it should have been their job. That Eustace Wylie had been destroyed by a war - and not a mark on him - was one of the family's deepest disgraces. No matter Eustace had been brave - no matter the lives he had saved - no matter the decorations that had followed. Once home and haunted by the cries that had seemingly followed him there, he had ceased, in Grandmother Wylie's eyes, to be a 'man'. *Male, yes - man, no,* she had said.[108]

While Eloise Wylie can see what caused her husband to go insane, she is at a total loss with regard to the psychic disorders of her daughter Amy, the youngest of the three famous Wylie girls.

> "After your father died we all knew why. We could all say - *yes, the War did that. He went away to war. It broke his spirit. And long, long after he came back to us - it killed him*. People understand this kind of thing. It's tragic - but you know what it means. *Look,* you can say - and you can even point to the map - *it happened right here. On a beach. In Normandy*. [...] Terror defeated him. Pity did it. All those dead young man. But where is there a map [...] something

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107 Ibid., p. 214
108 Ibid., p. 351

> you can pin-point for my daughter? [...] People have no right to suddenly remove themselves from everybody's life like Amy has. With no explanation. Nothing."[109]

But the reader knows all too well that Amy, the poet, as yet another compassion seeker cannot abide all this destruction around her. While she started out as an activist trying to save the birds and other endangered species, as time progresses she becomes more and more paranoid: "Somebody's trying to kill all the animals [...] Birds. Dogs. Cats. All of them. [...] They want the world entirely for human beings. It's quite deliberate"[110]. Finally trapped in a horrible nightmare and visions of dead birds all around her, she is committed to an asylum. "The fact was, Marlow conceded, that Amy Wylie suffered from a madness called *benevolence*. And it was killing her."[111]

Her sister Olivia, on the other hand, is trapped by her own silence, a silence she had practised early

> [p]artly in deference to Grandmother Wylie's wishes, partly in respect of listening for her father's voice, or her mother's. But mostly in order to ward off commitment. She had noted that, when people spoke, there were often alarming consequences. Her father's having said I am afraid had cost him his mother's love.[112]

The question of facing commitment has become a dominant one, however, as she had to find out that she is pregnant. Having told neither her family nor her husband about it yet, she is waging a battle as to whether she is going to have the baby or not. This psychic combat is intriguingly realised as it is presented to us as an ongoing dialog between her and the unborn life within her, referred to as *The Voice*. Yet another emotional cripple is her sister Peggy, whose reticence where private matters were concerned is "almost legendary". "Someone had said of her: *Peggy died at birth*. However unkind this comment had been, Olivia could not deny its authority. The speaker had been Eloise Wylie, their mother."[113] Apart from that there is their homosexual cousin who committed suicide. As Olivia points out: "Whoever told him being a homosexual was a mental illness put him in a cage and took away his voice."[114] Not from the Wylie family but just as pitiful in their existence are Warren Ellis, who captures a financial empire by wearing a dress to satisfy its power broker and the writer Richard Appleby, who due to his disturbed relationship to his reckless self-

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109 Ibid., p. 24, p. 23
110 Ibid., p. 323
111 Ibid., p. 524
112 Ibid., pp. 351 f.
113 Ibid., p. 308
114 Ibid., p. 473

made father suffers from impotence, literally as well as metaphorically: both pen and penis fail him. The list almost seems to be endless.

Many of the characters are drawn directly from literature, but they stand up just as much on their own, as in the case of Emma Berry, who is not only married to the plastic surgeon Maynard Berry, but also his masterpiece. She had come to him for corrective surgery following an automobile accident. The extent of the facial damage was minimal - but Berry had seized the opportunity to perform maximum alteration.

> The woman had bones that nature had failed to take advantage of - and by the time Berry's efforts were complete, she had become *the most beautiful woman in the world*. Or so he thought of her. She was his perfect gesture - the creation of an artist whose medium was flesh.[115]

As far as Emma herself is concerned, however, her reshaping has left her utterly confused. A manic-depressive "catalogue of contradictions"[116], she severely suffers from having been robbed of her identity and her sense of self:

> She was filled with hate - and despised herself for it. She hated her parents - she hated her husband - she hated his family - she hated her beauty - she hated her fame. She was always in hiding - in behind the perfect image Maynard Berry had made of her with his knives and scalpels [...] She hated her life.[117]

The essence of Emma's problem is also expressed by her daughter when she accuses her father:

> "You didn't want her the way she was." [...] [Her face] was a problem for you - but not a problem for Mommy." [...] "You wiped out who she really was when all you had to do was restore her. But you made her someone else instead. Someone for you to look at."[118]

Frustrated by her Frankenstein existence[119] she has become a twentieth century Madam Bovary. Like her famous predecessor, she sexually gratifies her lovers in the back of a moving vehicle - in Berry's case it is a white stretch limousine, ironically

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115 Ibid., p. 66

116 Ibid., p. 254

117 Ibid., pp. 201 f.

118 Ibid., pp. 559 f.

119 As Nicolas Fagan, the novel's Irish seer, author and literary critic points out the choice of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the archetypal texts for the century dedicated seems dead on as nothing "better illustrates than these two books the consequence of human ambition. On reading them again I fell away from my complacent view that nothing could be done to stop us, and took up my current view that the human race has found its destiny in self-destruction". (Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 139)

known as the Great White Whale, that glides the streets of Toronto as if stalking prey. One of her lovers is the wealthy James Gatz, who in his ambition - "He wanted a great deal more than money - he wanted advancement"[120] - and his solitude reminds one of Jay Gatsby, as the name already implies.[121] Left by his adored wife and daughter, abused by his father, he is yet another one of the numerous lonely and destroyed creatures this book stages in abundance.

> [Gatz] called her by his father's name. Never her own. She accepted that. This was Gatz as he was, and she had learned, over time, that her job in the Great White Whale was to bring her lovers back full circle to themselves. All the way out into danger and all the way home, like a lunatic passing through the phases of the moon, to safety.[122]

But safety, in the world which Findley has created, is a deadly illusion. Next we know he is shot by the father he had run away from, but who eventually tracked him down: "I want my boy back [...] It doesn't matter how long it's been. You owe me. I'm entitled ..."[123] - to kill you.

That this is indeed a privilege some of the characters assume to hold at their hands is demonstrated most terrifyingly in the workings of a secret society called the Club of Men, consisting of respectable citizens, who hire teenagers to perform or pose pornographically for them. While Robert Ireland is the one recruiting them, the photographer John Dai Bowen, in whose drawing room they are assembling, is the one who provides them with the pictures taken on these occasions. Findley describes the obscene scenes adroitly, but his purpose is moral, not salacious. Shocking material is indeed presented deliberately as he feels that contemporary society has grown too complacent and too indifferent to issues that it cannot afford to be indifferent to. His role is in fact to unsettle, to make us "pay attention"[124]. It is through the cannibalisation of the young that the overall onslaught and destruction of the environment and human values is exemplified. As the novel progresses, the horror deepens as the children of these men eventually become the performers and tragic victims. One of the children, George Shapiro, even ends up dead. The sacred bond between parent and child, specifically father and child, is unspeakably violated as the parents in *Headhunter* willingly offer up their children for sacrifice, just as Findley feels parents in 1914 offered their sons to the First World War. Once again, as in *The*

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120 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 243

121 The connection is furthermore underlined by the fact that the chapter in which he is introduced is preceeded by a quotation from Fitzgerald's famous masterpiece.

122 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 287

123 Ibid., p. 293

124 Findley, Timothy: The Wars.- Toronto: Penguin, 1986 [1977].- p. 11

Wars, this sacrifice is portrayed in explicit sexual terms. What proves even more grotesque is the fact that this violation is actually encouraged and manipulated by Kurtz, who knows all too well what is going on, as most of these men are his clients and confide in him. He is clearly aware of the fact that

> they should be prevented and pulled in from their perverse activities. Brought, so to speak, to psychic heel. But he was waging the wars of necessities - and in order to survive, he needed those activities to continue. It was part of his scheme - his plan. He wanted to see what could be accomplished by giving what he called permissions. Let a psychosis have its way with a client - and see what the client would do in return for permissions having been given.[125]

While his clients are not so much victims as instruments that Kurtz wields for his own vicious purposes, the real victims in Findley's eyes are the children who are traumatised and tortured by their fathers. The unspeakable horror created by this supposedly sane manipulator and "king of psychiatry"[126] is adroitly visualised in the paintings of another of his clients, the schizophrenic artist, Julian Slade. Dedicated to Kurtz, "the man who released my demons"[127], these paintings, which above all express an "overpowering sense of menace"[128], are "a perfect rendering of the schizophrenic nightmare that passed for Slade's reality"[129]. Looking at the most disturbing piece, *The Golden Chambers of the White Dogs*, at an exhibition:

> Kurtz was mesmerized. Somehow, the painting soothed him. It verified his fears. But it also informed him that fear was wonderful. It told him there was nothing in the whole wide world of madness that was not the property of sanity as well. The figures told him that [...] Their inflammatory nakedness was an open invitation to join in what could only be seen as the beauty of madness - and the gift of power that madness bestowed.[130]

Eventually he buys this piece to be displayed in the entrance hall of The Parkin Institute. When Lilah's first sees it there she is completely taken by surprise:

> What are you? she asked.
> *A painting.*

She keeps talking to the painting until she identifies in it the image of the four human heads stuck up on their poles.

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125 Ibid., p. 207
126 Ibid., p. 87
127 Ibid., p. 85
128 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 91
129 Ibid., p. 100
130 Ibid., p. 102

One of the heads appeared to be grinning - its lips pulled back in a wide grimace.
Who did this to you?
Guess.
I can't. You frighten me.
Think where you are.
The Parkin Institute of Psychiatric Research.
So?
Lilah's chin went up.
Kurtz. The horror-meister.
Kurtz, the headhunter.[131]

While Marlow, at this point, does not have even a glimpse of the outrageous activities of his colleague, Lilah who has known Kurtz and Marlow for many years, knows

> what awaited Marlow at the end of his journey. The station where Kurtz had been agent, with its human heads stuck up on poles and its drugged inhabitants were not the half of it. Worse was to be revealed. The horror of what had been done in the name of civilization.[132]

There are only two other people of steady decency who, apart from Lilah, slowly seem to guess what is actually happening outside as well as inside this madhouse of horrors, which feeds off disease rather than curing it. One of them is the child psychologist Eleanor Farjeon, who investigates the mysteriously identical symptoms of disturbed children at the Parkin Institute. Sensing that something devastating and shared had been done to these frightened "refugees from nightmares", who "would sit, sometimes, for forty-eight hours or more without closing their eyes"[133], her growing realization of the horrible truth leads to a bizarre consequence as she is apparently trapped between the doors of an elevator and killed and thus silenced.

The other one is Marlow's colleague and friend Dr. Austin Purvis, one of the few doctors at the institute who does not feel that the task of psychiatry is to drag the patients "willy-nilly into our world [...] till every last one of them is sitting, sedated, in his allocated place at McDonald's"[134]. Completely terrified at what he has found out, he asks Marlow to bring the horror - to be revealed by his files and notebooks - to an end. After advising him: "In my notebook look for Kurtz. [...] Kurtz is everywhere [...] You will find him everywhere"[135] he pulls a gun to his head and kills himself in

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131 Ibid., p. 411
132 Ibid., p. 46
133 Ibid., p. 225
134 Ibid., p. 189
135 Ibid., p. 401

front of his friend. While his words are above all a hint at the fact that Kurtz's shadow is looming over every single affair he has researched, they can also be read metaphorically and as such are in line with the implication made by Lilah's friend, the author and literary critic Nicolas Fagan: "Kurtz is with us always [...] The human race cannot take a single step, but it produces another Kurtz. He is the darkness in us all."[136]

It is at this point that Marlow's chilling task of bringing his boss to justice begins. Lilah and her buggy enable him to secretly remove the medical files which provide the necessary clues to unravel a web of horrors and the vicious behaviour of Kurtz. Not only do they reveal the activities of the Club of Men and the fact that Kurtz has been involved in questionable experiments on patients with an illegal, mind-altering drug, fittingly called Obedion as it is used to make people docile, they also uncover the true source of sturnusemia. The alarming disease supposedly spread by birds is in reality caused by a virus which escaped from a secret experiment in genetic engineering, one whose effects have been altered by the depletion of the ozone layer. Sturnusemia is a hoax, a propaganda program to allow the great corporations and their willing governmental allies to exploit and profit, unhindered. And once again it becomes evident that Kurtz has known this all along, as the true source of the plague had been revealed to him by one of his patients, Smith Jones, *The Paranoid Civil Servant*. The words with which he had opened his confession are yet another reminder of the fact that in the world presented to us by Findley, insanity is quite often merely a label pinned to those who seek to speak the truth.

> The first thing you must understand [...] I am perfectly sane. Others will want you to think I am not, but their denial of my sanity is part of the conspiracy I have uncovered.[137]

Although it stands to reason that Kurtz did in fact believe him, he nonetheless had him committed to penetanguishene, the ward for the criminally insane, in order to silence him. Nothing could prove more clearly not only that the will to power can wreak the most devastating kind of destruction, but that the most dangerous madmen are the ones who have power. In his lack of sympathy or emotional poverty, his unconcern over the rights and privileges of others and the overvaluation and ruthless pursuit of his immediate goals, Kurtz has in fact become a public menace.

What may up to here sound like a melodramatic, good-versus-evil scenario is in fact not as simplistic as it may appear. First of all because the battle between good and evil

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136 Ibid., p. 373
137 Ibid., p. 543

is complicated by the fact that the psychopath wears the mask of sanity and that evil has also assumed the appearance of good. Apart from that even Kurtz has his attractive sides: a cultured intelligence and a potential skill whose workings are a pleasure to behold. More than this, however, Kurtz himself is presented as having fallen victim to his own ambitions.

When Marlow goes to see Kurtz in order to confront him with his knowledge he finds him ill and dying, "speckles [showing] on the back of his hands and his forehead"[138] - a symptom of the final stage of sturnusemia. It is in their last conversation that we come to know just how much Kurtz, in his inability to resist the wilderness outside and within himself, has cut himself loose from reality or the strictures of reality. As in the case of his literary predecessor

> The wilderness had found him out early, and taken on him a terrible vengeance ... it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took council with this great solitude - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core...[139]

Corrupted by the absolute power he wields over his patients, Kurtz has been consumed by its exercise, "The will can be purchased", he tells Marlow. "Sometimes it can be bent by force. But when all else fails, the will must be broken."[140]

> "*That is where*, Marlow thought, *the absolute exercise of absolute power puts you*. Not beyond reality itself, but beyond awareness. What Kurtz was saying - his *apologia* for the darkness he had engendered - could not be accounted for within reason. Where had reason gone - and humankind - humanity?"[141]

What is still more revealing with regard to Kurtz' mental development is his own personal background revealed to Marlow after Kurtz' death by the gallerist, Fabiana Holbach, the woman to whom Kurtz wanted to give his life, but who refused him:

> "His father watched his son from a distance. From a great way off, in the world of impossible demands. That, I think, is what set Rupert off on the wrong track. He wanted to please his father - not himself. He wanted to fulfil father's dream - not his own. He wanted to best a man who could not be bested. Not because Kurtz-the-father was better, but because he could not bear his son's success. No success was going to outdo his own. *More, more,* he kept saying. *I want to see*

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138 Ibid., p. 610
139 Ibid., p. 563
140 Ibid., p. 612
141 Ibid., p. 614

> *more. Run until you drop. Run until you die. I will not be bested.* His criterion, of course, was money - not achievement. In the end, he simply laughed at Rupert's efforts. Laughed at them, and died still laughing. Mocking. A multiple millionaire. All of it left, of course, to his mistress. None of it to his son."[142]

As such Kurtz, the horror-master, who says of himself: "I was not an evil man. I was just lost."[143] is transformed from a symbol of evil into a pitiable man, who in his behaviour can be placed along the same lines as the abused children of whom he tells Marlow:

> "None of the children were forced [...] That was the beauty of it, Marlow. Every single one of them was persuaded from within. [...] They craved their fathers, too. They craved their attention - their approval. "[144]

Kurtz then is not merely a murderous villain, ruthless opportunist, cold-blooded psychopath or cynical evil doer as presented to us in various ways by Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, for instance, who were indeed depicted as unnatural, monstrous, and were judged - usually within the world of the play itself - accordingly. It is not solely individual will which is responsible for his misdemeanour and his psychopathic mentality is not simply sin. Gone here is the concomitant faith that each man is sufficient, free to direct his life, free to choose salvation or damnation. A product of his own particular circumstances and his general social context, Kurtz is a problem for our time. That all of society should have contributed to his making is a sign of representativeness. He is an emblem, a personification, of the irrational violence of the society from which he comes. His behaviour is still mad and outrageous, but he has been humanised. The derangement becomes intelligible - there are reasons for it. His action is not simply crazy but a plausible, although unacceptable, response to his own particular situation. We are, devious as he may be, presented with just another lost soul who, under another set of circumstances, might have avoided this fate. He is a maladjusted individual who has externalised his own torment.

It is, however, important to distinguish between causal explanation as explication, as rationalization, and as justification. The 'reason why' can become an excuse for irresponsibility. Explanations can appear as justifications. To denude behaviour altogether of its moral qualities by reducing these qualities to the underlying causes of that behaviour is a convenient way of escaping from the anguish of taking a moral stand. Explanation does not alter the quality of the act, nor can it be a substitute for

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142 Ibid., p. 620
143 Ibid., p. 617
144 Ibid., p. 612

ethical considerations. However, moral implications aside, to the degree that the writer renders explicable irrational behaviour, to the degree that what would otherwise be a 'mad act' begins to appear a reasonable one, to that degree the writer has both exploited the dramatic potential of the image of madness and undermined the validity of the label. In short, if it makes any kind of sense it is no longer 'mad' in quite the same way.

But Findley does more than reveal to us the proximity of conventional sanity and madness and the fact that if this proximity is not recognised, the 'sane' may do as much damage, if not more damage than the 'insane' who are their repressed Other and victims. The impact of this brilliant psychological thriller extends beyond the fact that it tells us of the dangerous consequences of failing to pay attention and the savage consequence of ignorance. As the evil in *Headhunter* becomes less the property of isolated villains than a symptom of a larger social malaise in which nearly everyone is implicated, as Findley is able to seduce his readers into identifying, at least briefly, with *Headhunter*'s sleaziest characters, he acknowledges the bad and mad in everyone, hinting at the fact that all of us are in fact "a hiding place for monsters"[145], a statement he made about himself in his autobiography *Inside Memory*. After all contemporary culture is made up of events in which we participate as active agents; it is not something outside us that happens to us.

However, the moral obligation of his art is not simply to describe and evoke that which we must fear, nor is it enough for him to force us to confront what we would like to avoid - the destructive potential within our own personalities. The most vulnerable experience will provide illumination, a way out of the labyrinth. It is Fagan's inscription in Lilah's copy of *Heart of Darkness* which tells us:

> Every Kurtz must have his Marlow - and Marlow will always come to take Kurtz home. It is a mark of our respect for those who lead us into darkness that we bring them back for burial, pay their debts and console their loved ones with lies. This process is played out over and over - and with every journey up the river, we discover that Kurtz has penetrated just a little farther than his counterparts before him. Poor old Marlow! Every time he heads upstream, he is obliged to a longer journey, through darker mysteries. Well, we might wonder, why does he always agree to go? For myself, I would guess it is because he is beholden to Kurtz for having provided him, after darkness, with a way to find new light.[146]

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145 Findley, Timothy: Inside Memory: Pages from a Writers Workbook.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1990.- p. 306
146 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 624

Whether the source for the picture of civilisation Findley has drawn is stagnation, the endless triviality of civilised life and the violence of suppressed emotion, or whether it is conformity to an exaggerated perception of the aggressiveness implicit in our capitalistic economic system, what he seems to be implying is that in either case contemporary society must find a suitable creative outlet for man's aggressive instincts. A nihilistic or despairing vision only leads to the aggravation of man's paralysing sense of powerlessness. The way out of the morass is through the imagination - through art, literature, individual creativity and positive action, as exemplified by Olivia, who at the end finally tells her husband with a smile that they are going to have a child, after the baby has restlessly made it clear to her that it "wants to be born", despite the fact that nothing ever changes and it will probably only get worse [147],

Albeit his acknowledgement of the ongoing destruction from outside and within Findley's approach is similar to that of Fagan's, who "did not resort to pessimism. He resorted instead to the stabilizing influence of his anger. He fought back. He drew a bead with his ageing eyes and fired at pride and wilful ignorance"[148] - with his literature. How much he himself does in fact belief in the redemptive quality of great books is expressed in the following lines:

> It is only in fiction, only in memory that our eagerness to be trusting is justified. This is one of fiction's - one of memory's and one of imagination's - bravest functions. It is by these media we are urged towards hope and sanity; maybe even compassion.[149]

A homage to other novels, *Headhunter* is a book about books and as the closing line insists, it is a "story. Just a story."[150] But it is just as much, like Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, a book about divination. As Fagan informs Lilah, and by extension the reader in general, "All books are a conjuring"[151], a conjuring of humans and our world. Books, like Lilah's ability to make their characters come alive, are precious gifts of power, loving gifts that cut through time. They are

> a way of singing […] A way of singing our way out of darkness. The darkness that is night - and the darkness that is ignorance […] These characters drawn on the page by the makers of literature […] are distillations of our thwarted selves. We are their echoes and their shadows.

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147 Ibid., p. 600
148 Ibid., p. 381
149 Findley, Timothy: The Countries of Invention.- In: Canadian Literature (100) 1984, p. 108
150 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 625
151 Ibid., p. 373

They move us through our muddied lives [...] What we cannot describe, they articulate. What we cannot imagine, they reveal. What we cannot endure, they survive.[152]

[152] Ibid., p. 138

11. Concluding Remarks

When dealing with madness one soon comes to realise that at the heart of the image there are a series of contradictions as the madman can be both the expression of an authentic self and the demonstration of the obliteration of personality. He can represent an image of freedom in an age of conformity, an unhibitedness in a time of psychic repression and - by virtue of his consciousness and abandonment - he is also the image of one of the most imprisoned. At one and the same time he may be envied because he owns a private, inaccessible fantasy into which he can retreat, a reality which he prefers, and yet he may be pitied for precisely the same reason. The uniqueness of his vision can be praised, mocked, feared. There is an aura surrounding him which finds expression in terms that reveal the ambivalence with which he is viewed.

Romantic tradition and its later variants have celebrated the systematic derangement of the senses on the grounds that 'normal' behaviour is so appalling, so contemptible in its complacency and rigid reasonableness, that any kind of alternative vision seems preferable. From that perspective the stance of the madman is that of the rebel - he is the uncompromising figure who holds on to the dream, who does not dissemble, who proves that real choice, like real insurrection, begins at the limits of alienation. To this is added an ancient belief that madness is knowledge, that irrationality brings insights the man of reason cannot hope to have.

More often, as a contrast to technological and repressed social man, the madman is a figure praised for his emotional fervour and passion. The experience of madness here is directly related to the dynamics of passion, which, by its very nature, tends towards the extreme. Madness participates both in the necessity of passion and in the anarchy of what, released by this very passion, transcends it and ultimately contests all it implies. This is why Susan Sontag claims that "insanity becomes the privileged, most authentic metaphor for passion; or, what's the same thing [...], the logical terminus of any strong emotion."[1]

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1 Sontag, Susan: Styles of Radical Will.- New York: Dell, 1966.- p. 129

In this emotional intensity, this alertness to his own inner voice, he can provide the single image of vitality, functions as a figure of rebellion escaped from the mass mould, a form representing total imagination and pure subjective being. Freed of the restrictions foisted on reasonable characters, he can be entirely himself. In his anger, however, the romantic madman can give vent to rage, to a fury so impressive and terrifying in its implacable ruthlessness, that it is bound to endanger both himself and others.

The image of the madman is an ambiguous one, however, because we are not only frightened by him but also frightened for him. He may not only be a dangerous species but an endangered one as well.

Thus, the image of the madman is surrounded by equally negative and pessimistic connotations. Out of step with his times, a victim of forces more irrational than himself, he can be the tormented soul who symbolises an impotence born out of general disillusionment and despair. He is seen as a victim who suffers isolation, alienation, fear. A victim of both personal and social circumstances, the defeat of the madman may be viewed as martyrdom but that is not, by any stretch of imagination, a role one might wish for oneself. He suffers not only the terrors of his own imagination, he is also entirely alone, locked into a world into which no one can follow him. And when he speaks in worried tones of the fragmentation of our times, or the spiritual confusion, or the sense of alienation felt by too many, it is clear that the madman can portray these concerns in their extreme.

Bearing all this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the madman has been a dominant figure in much of Western literature and is so in vogue especially with current writers. For one, he is obviously a versatile figure who can be exploited for his positive or negative associations. Madness can be presented as affliction, as sanity, as menace, just as the madman can be self-affirming or self-deceiving, a victim or villain, a rebellious spirit or a broken one. Compact and compressed, this is an image which seeks to many levels of meaning. The writer can take advantage of all the theatrical possibilities a portrait of the deranged can conjure up. He also provides the writer with a special kind of freedom: he offers a reasonable explanation for the writer's inclusion of poetry, dream, hallucination, and the wonderful phantasmagoria of the wildest imagination. Being mad, the character can do, say, believe anything. There are no limits: the boundaries which constrain the reasonable, sane characters have already been crossed.

The insane elude precise interpretation. According to Susan Sontag, the prevalence of the image is not simply

> a fashionable interest in the psychology of psychopathic behaviour. On the contrary, the concern with insanity in art today usually reflects the desire to go beyond psychology [...] Freed from the limitations of what Artaud calls 'psychological and dialogue painting of the individual', the dramatic representation is open to levels of experience which are more heroic, more rich in fantasy, more philosophical. [...] The choice of 'insane' behaviour as the subject-matter of art is, by now, the virtually classic strategy of modern artists who wish to transcend traditional 'realism', that is psychology.[2]

With regard to Canadian literature and how Canadian writers have made use of this wealth of association surrounding the image of madness in order to bear witness to the fact of its existence - as almost all of the fiction considered in this context was not simply about the derangement of the protagonist, but was concerned with larger political, social, and psychological issues - the following aspects can be highlighted.

In early Canadian literature madness was basically thematised in two ways. It was either the hostile wilderness itself and everything that was concerned with it which was conceived as the embodiment of the other, the strange, the unknown, the dangerous and mad or it was the madness that emerged out of the confrontation of the Age of Reason and the New World which was thematised. Madness at that point was - above all - perceived as a direct result of the garrison situation, the early immigrant's struggle to survive the exposure to the elements, disease, exhaustion, the new culture and the inappropriate upbringing to face the new conditions.

The all-too-common phenomenon of pioneering madness provided material especially adaptable to the fictional purposes of Canadian novelists way into the 20th century, although in later years the emphasis was less on the wilderness than the prairie experience accompanied by the often disastrous effects of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. As befits their situation, early prairie writers usually emphasised the nightmarish aspect of the pioneer's existence and the picture of madness presented here is thus, by necessity, basically one of suffering and breakdown and although the accounts of madness are fictional, the style of presentation is essentially realistic.

However, as the century proceeded the way in which madness came to be viewed, thematised and presented in Canadian literature grew decisively more varied. Adele Wiseman, for instance, though still dealing with the immigrant theme in her novel *The Sacrifice*, has her main protagonist offer his sanity as a sacrifice for a new beginning. Suffering and madness here not only eventuates in a higher wisdom but a collective catharsis as well. In a similar vain Morley Callghan, in his *Such Is My*

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[2]Sontag, Susan: Styles of Radical Will.- New York: Dell, 1966.- p. 139

Beloved, presents us with a rather spiritual approach to madness as his protagonist's retreat into madness has to be understood as a surrender to the spirit of the true God. Although both these characters end up being consigned to institutions, it is through the sacrifice of their sanity that they are granted transcendental visions and knowledge and it is their 'divine madness' which elevates them above the worldings to aspire to some higher goal. In their madness they have found their true God and their peace.

Then again we find those works where for the protagonists life is so painful, so oppressive, or so incomprehensible that their 'sanest' recourse is insanity and where the outbreak of the illness has to be seen as a mechanism for coping with their lives, serving variously as a way to escape, to fill emotional voids or to come to terms with losses. Madness here becomes a strategy of deception designed for self-protection, a special strategy invented in order to live an unliveable situation and is thus presented as a form of escapism or protective metamorphosis, enabling a retreat from a source of terror or the culmination of extreme emotional distress, as it is the case, for instance, with the protagonist of Margaret Laurence's short story "Horses of the Night".

Apart from that, there is also a large body of texts which holds a more ambiguous point of view on the value both of sanity and insanity, the relationship of these states (which are usually understood as diametrically opposed), the credibility of the label dementia itself, and on individual versus social responsibility for the insane condition.

When ambiguity does exist as to 'who is mad' or 'what constitutes madness', the writer is in general deliberately drawing attention to the relative nature of insanity. In other words, the writer is manipulating the notion that insanity cannot exist without its correlative: madness implies its opposite and depends on its presence; if sanity did not provide the encircling environment, deviance could not be recognised.

In short, these works exhibit a more complete expression of a dual perspective on madness, an awareness of what is gained and what is lost, for the madman can be used as a reminder of the necessity to think again, to admit - at least intellectually - another way of seeing. A popular technique for achieving this effect is through the device of the mad narrator as the reader is drawn into the narrator's subjective vision and his ideas as to what constitutes 'reality', 'fiction', 'sanity', 'illusion' are challenged and his position colours, usually by contrast, our response to the world view of those that surround him. The reader is left with a kind of sadness that our complicated, well-rationalised world does not permit his type of simplicity to exist in its midst. Here, it is above all Margaret Gibson's short story collection *The Butterfly Ward* which is worth noting.

Next to this approach we find the celebration of the madman on the grounds that the place of the imagination and the place of madness are one and the same and that the line between madman and genius is a thin one. One of the Canadian authors who was obviously fascinated by and variously drawn to the subject of the mad artist is, as we have seen, Michael Ondaatje. In both *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter* we meet with a protagonist who due to an too intense identification with the object of fantasy, empowering feelings insufficiently bridled to preserve the barrier between self and created object, has an insufficient sense of self-preservation, a compulsiveness, an obsessiveness which is, in essence, neurotic. In the case of Buddy Bolden it is the act of creation, which involves over-exertion and immoderate mental strain, which makes him go wild. Art here becomes "a demon, an exterminating angel; it exacts a terrible toll; it burns you out. To produce great art, the artist is sapped of health, mental or physical."[3]

Especially in the sixties and seventies - in Canada as elsewhere - madness became a major element of feminist protest against a sense of entrapment, a rebellious attack on interiors, homes, houses, families and their architecture of imprisonment. While women's novels on female madness during the sixties do not romanticise madness but place the blame on "the limited and oppressive roles offered to women in modern society"[4], the seventies saw a transformation of the female agent from a victim of madness and society into a newly empowered female character aware of her prophetic potential. It is the period of the visionary quest and the psychic journey.

While in the sixties the psychiatric setting has a crucial function in the career of the madwoman, typically as another place of oppression rather than a harbour for cure the hospitals, doctors and therapies lose their significance in the visionary quest. This does not mean that the protagonists are not hospitalised. But the exterior and interior worlds are kept strictly separate. The doctors can no longer influence the inner events, let alone actually enter the patient's hallucinatory existence. The only traveller is the madwoman herself. As conspicuous evidence of the transcended victimhood, the madwoman alone occupies the liminal position between reality and fantasy, between the other-defined roles of patient, mother, daughter, lover etc. and the self-defined roles of seer and prophet. Her double positionality constitutes the resource of her power, which is the freedom to create, envision, discover what has never been and the opportunity to relate and re-integrate the vision with external reality. As to the success of the final return and reintegration, these novels offer widely different answers.

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3 Porter, Roy: A Social History of Madness: The World Through the Eyes of the Insane.- New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.- p. 64

4 Showalter, Elaine: The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980.- London: Virago, 1987.- p. 213

Finally, in an age so unsure of its reason, an age which has lost its faith in the purely rational approach to things because we cannot assume that life is susceptible to comprehension and thus to management, in an age which has radically come to doubt the validity of such notions as common sense, objective reality or fixed values and meanings, the theme of madness has also become a means of challenge, revision and deconstruction. As Kroetsch has suggested, in contemporary society, and Canada in particular,

> We have Conradian complexities in which Marlow has lost all his confidence. The voices threaten to override the voice. The moral and intellectual and emotional complexities refuse the coercion of 'sane' speaking.[5]

Decentered, alogical, schizophrenic - however we choose to diagnose its symptoms, postmodernism is usually treated, by its protagonists and antagonists alike, as a crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions.

Compact and compressed, madness is thus an image which seeks to many levels of meaning. It can be considered or presented as breakdown, affliction, escape, sanity, sacrifice, rebellion or menace, as conferring knowledge and insight or simply as means of deconstruction.

Whatever concept they adhere to, and no matter whether the individual approaches result from personal experience or are purely theoretical, all of the writers I have considered in this book write within the traditions they are part of in order to use them for their own ends. As such, their works are variant versions of the attempt to deal with given circumstances, resulting in a network of features through which Canadian writing is constituted. The possibilities for contradiction and multiple perspectives are obvious and indeed are a necessary consequence of the limits and range of this study. What emerges is no fixed definition of either Canadianness or Canadian literature, but rather an open web of fictional responses to the pressures and influences that have shaped the consciousness and awareness of the individual writers.

The thematization of madness will undoubtedly continue, not merely as a repetition or as an urge of each generation to deal with the particular circumstances of its time but as a continuing effort to raise questions about the human condition and to approach the central mystery of life, be it in Canada or anywhere else. This way "*we*

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[5] Neumann, Shirley; Wilson, Robert (eds.): Labyrinth of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch.- Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.- p. 155

write each other's lives - by means of fiction. Sustaining fictions. Uplifting fictions. Lies. This way, we lead one another towards survival. This way we point the way to darkness - saying: come with me into the light."[6]

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6 Findley, Timothy: Headhunter.- Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994.- p. 622

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