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MADNESS AND MONOLOGIC FICTION: A WRITER'S
JOURNEY THROUGH SELECTED FIRST-PERSON
LITERARY CONSTRUCTS OF THE ABERRANT VOICE

&

HEADLONG, A NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation comprises a novel and a critical study. The novel is a predominantly first-person fictional text with a protagonist prone to psychosis; and the critical study, which transcribes the research journey that sustained and supported the novel, analyses signifiers of madness in a selection of first-person fictional representations and reflects upon their suitability for adaptation by the contemporary creative writer. In the Introduction to the critical element, I summarise the themes, the breadth of the analysis, and the criteria by which I focus my inquiries. I consider the influence of history, culture, geography, gender, and genre on the fictional voices of the mad. Chapter One investigates motivations and masks of madness, where the term ‘motivation’ is used in the sense of an actor researching the background to a part, and ‘masks’ – another thespian contrivance – describes the artifices that authors employ in order to obscure or regulate literary madness. This chapter contrasts some of the back-stories – or *crack-stories* – of fictional madness. Chapter Two evaluates a selection of signs and symbols of madness in fiction, and examines specific stylistic techniques that creative writers exploit to suggest the active presence of insanity. The Conclusion summarises the contextualising research with an analysis of how these literary signifiers of madness have affected the composition of my own novel, *Headlong*, which completes the dissertation and follows the Bibliographies. I engage with applicable data from various areas of expertise during the dissertation; in particular, I reference works by psychologists, psychoanalysts, and social and cultural historians.

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't

Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1602)

Act II, Scene II, lines 205-6.

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INTRODUCTION: LITERARY MADNESS

This is a journey: a journey in search of a methodology for representing madness in first-person fictional narratives. It is a personal journey. It is undertaken on behalf of Sam, the principal character in my novel *Headlong*. My perspective here is that of the creative writer, contextualising the novel which forms the central component of this dissertation. My remit is to examine and interrogate stylistic techniques and narrative devices that other writers have employed to signal a predisposition towards, or the presence of, psychosis in a fictional protagonist. This signifying process is inevitably complicated where there is a homodiegetic or autodiegetic narrator, as there is in my novel.¹ By exploring these devices I aim to contribute to the critical understanding of narrative technique as well as to authenticate my own creative work. It is a journey that will take me through an inevitably diverse selection of prose fiction, for I am looking for practices that are widespread and persistent. Literary repetition, rather than medical fact, is on occasion the single determining factor that bestows authority upon these categories of causation or symptomatology.

The madness represented in fiction is sensitive to history, culture, geography, gender, and genre. Questions arise as to how customary signifiers of madness in literary discourse have evolved to accommodate medical progress, or to what extent they repeat the tropes of former literary practice. In this introductory chapter I examine such influences, and the ways that the national identity, historical period, or gender of the author – or of the fictitious character – might affect the representation of insanity. In Chapter One my research addresses fictional *motivations* to madness, and in Chapter Two, symptoms, or *marks*. I use the term *motivation* in the way an actor might use it, as

¹ Gérard Genette's classification of homodiegetic is that the narrator speaks from inside the narrative, and autodiegetic, that the narrator is also the chief protagonist. cf. Eagleton, Terry *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p.92.

in – ‘What is my motivation in this piece?’ By *marks*, I mean the defining characteristics by which authors represent psychosis. A writer seldom consigns a character to madness without suggesting some causal connection. Bret Easton Ellis’s 1991 novel *American Psycho* was vilified for the homicidal narrator’s lack of plausible incentive. Roger Rosenblatt protested that Ellis’s protagonist had ‘no motivation for his madness’ for ‘no plot intrudes upon the pages’.² Chapter One, therefore, investigates this issue of a potentially indispensable *crack-story*, while Chapter Two concentrates on how these fictional cracks are portrayed.

Madness, in the context of my research, is necessarily defined in its popular rather than in its clinical sense. After all, fiction is not produced exclusively for practitioners in mental health. My interpretation of the term is broad-spectrum. It includes neuroses, psychoses, and psychologically aberrant behaviour, provided only that these can be adapted to the narrator of my own fictional text. Sam, the protagonist of my novel, is a young bisexual man, damaged by trauma but not by birth. In the light of his back-story I have eschewed some neurological idiosyncrasies and emphasised others. Fictional accounts of non-neurotypical behaviour such as Tourette or Asperger’s Syndrome; or those organic mental disorders the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* defines as dementia or neurocognitive disorder, would provide inappropriate material for Sam’s character. I have rejected these clinical categories in favour of literary representations of psychosis, either episodic or chronic, which are ostensibly trauma-led. My study is also limited to examples of madness that fall within the sustained, subjective, realist, prose narrative. In citing realism, I refer to narrative credibility: the so called *suspension of disbelief*. I do not propose to authenticate the speech in medical terms. Essentially, the main focus of my research is on texts where

² Rosenblatt, Roger ‘Snuff this Book! Will Bret Easton Ellis get away with Murder?’ *The New York Times*. Dec 16 1990.

the madman/madwoman speaks extensively and authentically within a partially or wholly monologic novel or short story. Even within these boundaries, representations of literary psychosis are diverse. My aspiration is to explore indicators that originate in early novel forms and are perpetuated throughout a multiplicity of later texts. I am looking for techniques and devices that are commonplace in literary fiction – for it is on account of their ubiquity that they have gained authority.

As an academic practitioner of creative writing, my work is knowingly rooted in strategies of communication; but, while the writer cannot communicate without words, the mad, frequently, cannot communicate with them. Darian Leader advises that ‘reality involves a soldering together of signifier and signified, so that we don’t perpetually ask what things mean’; in psychosis, he tells us, these dimensions can ‘come apart’.³ Clearly this breach is not manifest in all forms of madness. Indeed, Leader’s own term, ‘quiet madness’, distinguishes a type of psychosis that remains hidden, or private; never exploding into ‘spectacular symptomology’.⁴ These two extremes of madness informed the limits of my characterisation of Sam. His mental turmoil is initially concealed from the world, but revealed to the reader through small betrayals of convention, such as his curling into a foetal position inside a closed suitcase because ‘it felt good’.⁵ Gradual disclosure of Sam’s mental state was necessary in order to uphold the conceit of his continued employment, and because a novel related by a semi-coherent narrator asks much of its reader. As Sam’s psychosis deepens, the rupture with reason becomes more apparent: sparrows sing ‘in Hebrew’; and, like *virga*, words fall on him but do not ‘seem to reach’ (75, 124).

One objective of my research was to explore the facility with which other writers convey a first-person point of view when words slip their meaning, or when

³ Leader, Darian *What is Madness?* London: Penguin 2011, p.44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁵ Herve, Alice *Headlong*, p.87 (Subsequent page references to *Headlong* will be cited parenthetically).

‘words mean nothing’, as stated by Doris Lessing’s principal protagonist in *The Golden Notebook* (1962) – writing that chooses to extemporise occasional bouts of that convoluted speech that Michel Foucault defined as ‘*delirious discourse*’.⁶ Literature, in Shoshana Felman’s words, is one way in which we can restore ‘to madness its robbed subjectivity’.⁷ As with the mythological figure of Cassandra, who spoke a truth which nobody heeded, insanity has often been given a voice that is comprehensible only in the fictional world. Throughout history, it has been the fate of the mad not merely to be ignored, but also to be suppressed, erased, and sometimes deliberately misheard. Even Samuel Tuke, grandson of the founder of the York Retreat and advocate of the humane care of the insane, ‘insisted that it was unwise to allow lunatics to speak’.⁸ There is a challenge here for literature: how can it bear witness to psychological distress? Felman maintains that ‘a madman’s speech is *a priori* meaningless; at any rate it is unreadable, incomprehensible’.⁹ This is a contentious statement. There are several auto-biographical works that lucidly articulate the psychotic experience. However, one of the complications of writing fictional madness undoubtedly lies in the verbalisation of potentially incoherent emotions. If the words are comprehensible, they may not seem authentic; and if they are authentic, they may not be comprehensible. A cluster of writers have nevertheless given voice to those whose inner turmoil reflects a world, such as Jean-Paul Sartre’s protagonist Roquentin described in *Nausea* (1938), where ‘things have broken free from their names’.¹⁰ Or an experience, as undergone by Basil, the unstable eponymous hero of Wilkie Collins’ 1852 novel, in which ‘the simplest

⁶ Lessing, Doris *The Golden Notebook*. London: Harper Collins, 2007, p.418 & Foucault, Michel *Madness and Civilization*. Trans. by R. Howard. London: Routledge, 1997, p.99 (Foucault’s italics).

⁷ Felman, Shoshana *Writing and Madness*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003, p.4.

⁸ Cited in Showalter, Elaine *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*. London: Virago, 1987, p.61.

⁹ Felman, p.104 (Felman’s italics).

¹⁰ Sartre, Jean-Paul *Nausea*, Trans. by R. Baldick. London: Penguin, 1965, p.180.

forms of expression confused themselves inextricably'.¹¹ These, and other, mad voices of first-person fiction form the bedrock of my research.

Medically defined madness has many causes and it would be beyond my remit to make clinical diagnoses about what are, after all, literary texts not scientific studies. However, the extensive pathobiology of insanity cannot be discounted; and my research embraces psychology, psychoanalysis and biography, in order to underpin fictional revelations. The topic of madness has attracted diverse literary researchers, I allude to a select few; and also briefly consider the socio-cultural, political, and gendered usage of the term. The nosology of madness is complex, and since my narrator moves up and down a spectrum of lucidity, this research is not limited to those categories who struggle to communicate. If at one end of the spectrum is the raving lunatic, speaking in what R.D. Laing termed 'schizophrenese', at the other end is *quiet* madness, hiding behind the sort of stabilising strategies that I examine in Chapter One.¹²

Anxiety about 'cracking up' is pervasive. When Dr Seward noted, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, that 'all men are mad in some way or the other', he was exploiting a common fear.¹³ The step from sanity into madness may be sudden, and the crossing is not always apparent. My research will therefore be expansive enough to incorporate Patrick Bateman, the 'fucking evil psychopath' in *American Psycho*, and Eva Khatchadourian in Lionel Shriver's *We need to Talk about Kevin* (2003), the mother of a serial killer, who appears to hide behind a carapace of sanity.¹⁴ Madness is particularly challenging to identify, in reality and in literature, when it is not total or all-consuming. As Simon Cross claims, madness is 'a place many people inhabit in varying degrees'.¹⁵

¹¹ Collins, Wilkie *Basil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.260.

¹² Laing, R.D. *The Divided Self*. London: Penguin, 1969, p.177.

¹³ Stoker, Bram *Dracula*. London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000, p. 99.

¹⁴ Ellis, Bret Easton *American Psycho*. London: Picador, 1991, p.20.

¹⁵ Cross, Simon *Mediating Madness: Mental Distress & Cultural Representation*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2010, p.180.

Eliza Peabody, in Jane Gardam's 1991 novel *The Queen of the Tambourine*, described madness as 'a great leveller': age, race and status offer no defence.¹⁶ Eliza is a middle-aged, middle-class woman, outwardly composed but privately traumatised. Hers is the type of psychosis that lends itself to gradual reification. Madness may be wide-ranging, but it is not inevitably overwhelming, and this allows authors to interpret psychosis in different ways, as befits different characters, and still convey its essence. Margaret Atwood – whose 1972 novel *Surfacing* proposed that madness was 'only an amplification of what you already are' – was to write in *Alias Grace* (1996) that 'when you go mad you don't go any other place, you stay where you are. And somebody else comes in'.¹⁷ This exemplifies the diversity that literary madness encompasses, and extends the territorial metaphor of madness that Simon Cross exploited. If madness is a place, it is both alien and proximate. Literary psychosis embraces such inconsistencies.

Before evaluating specific symbols of fictional madness, I will briefly consider the five factors mentioned earlier – history, culture, geography, gender, and genre – that may have influenced the development of literary psychosis.

The History and Culture of Madness

Authors who write about madness are influenced by cultural perspectives, by medical reports and fashions, and inevitably by other writers. As Valerie Pedlar says, creative writers are not simply intent upon documentary accuracy: 'depictions of insanity are also influenced by older conventions of showing madness'.¹⁸ When researching literary elements, it is almost impossible to speak of the effect of history alone. History, for a writer, is the history of culture and the culture of history. Writers read other writers.

¹⁶ Gardam, Jane *The Queen of the Tambourine*. London: Abacus, 2006, p.112.

¹⁷ Atwood, Margaret *Surfacing*. London: Virago, 2006, p.95 & *Alias Grace*. London: Virago, 1997, p.37.

¹⁸ Pedlar, Valerie *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006, p.160.

Among the authors I review: Gogol read Richardson's *Clarissa* 'to pass the time'; Nabokov 'adored' Gogol; Jean-Paul Sartre read Nabokov, and vice versa; and *everybody* read Goethe – even Frankenstein's monster.¹⁹ Literature is not only influenced by cultural perspectives, it can exert influence in its turn. As Charley Baker says, 'literature that focuses on madness – sometimes transformed into film and theatre, or serialised for television – plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of madness'.²⁰ There is a continual interplay between modern and historical perspectives; scientific knowledge may edge us forward, but we retain – and even nurture – elements of recorded experience and past thought.

In the fifth century BCE, Hippocrates advanced the hypothesis that an imbalance of the humours was responsible for both physical and psychological illness. Although this concept endured beyond the time of Avicenna, it did not have the resonance in literary texts of madness that another fifth-century Athenian, Euripides, was to have. My focus is on a later genre, that of realist prose fiction, yet it is curious that several contemporary *marks* of literary madness have precedent in the writings of Euripides. In *The Bacchae*, Euripides links madness to divine possession, to loss of discourse, and to animality:

'Agauë was foaming at the mouth; her rolling eyes
Were wild; she was not in her right mind but possessed
By Bacchus, and she paid no heed to him.'

Agauë, 'enraptured' by the god Bacchus, becomes senseless to her son's pleas, and hunts him down like a 'wild beast', tearing him apart with her bare hands.²¹ British iconography, as a signifier of the breakdown in logical thought, fed into my own

¹⁹ Troyat, Henri *Gogol: The Biography of a Divided Soul*. Trans. by N. Amphoux. London: George Allen, 1974, p.90; Bloom, Harold *How to Read and Why*. London: Fourth Estate, 2000, p.56; Sartre, Jean-Paul *Critical Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. & Nabokov, Vladimir 'Sartre's First Try', *The New York Times*, April 24th 1949; Shelley, Mary *Frankenstein*. London: Penguin, 1992, p.124

²⁰ Baker, Charley et al. *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p.2-3.

²¹ Euripides, 'The Bacchae' in *The Bacchae and Other Plays*. London: Penguin, 1973, p.232, 235, 236.

characterisation. From the depths of Sam's psychosis he records hearing 'the sound of an animal. A plaintive sound' (229). The unfamiliar noise emanates from him.

In an earlier play, *The Women of Troy*, Euripides referenced another influential character: that 'frenzied child', 'possessed with prophecy', Cassandra.²² As Lillian Feder observed, madness in Ancient Greek society could be 'a blessing, an inducement to prophesy and poetry'.²³ The enduring idea of the psychotic as visionary, or artist, blessed as well as cursed, is another of the categories that have particular resonance for my own work. After further research into the persistence of the Cassandra figure, I elected to style the narrator of my own novel as a poet manqué.

In the Middle Ages, Foucault tells us, 'madness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast', and it was deemed unmanageable except 'by *discipline* and *brutalizing*'.²⁴ More tolerant views developed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, largely as a result of pioneers such as Phillippe Pinel in France and William Tuke in England. Lunacy was acknowledged as a mental illness, not as a moral curse, and began to be treated with dignity and respect. Psychiatry developed into an autonomous branch of medicine with distinct theories and therapies. It proclaimed that the mad could be cured systematically, by human rather than by divine intervention. The regime at William Tuke's York Retreat was moderate and pragmatic, 'but its ultimate rationale was to restore normal conduct by example and imitation'.²⁵ The mad were still silenced, but the movement from brutish or demonically possessed creature, to sentient, if sick, human being, gained momentum. Insanity, it was now believed, could be regulated.

In the eighteenth-century novels by Richardson, Goethe and Diderot that I examine in my research, an enlightened view of the mad is already at the forefront. The

²² Euripides, 'The Women of Troy' in *The Bacchae and Other Plays*, p.95, 100.

²³ Feder, Lillian *Madness in Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p.6.

²⁴ Foucault, p.72, 75 (Foucault's italics).

²⁵ Porter, Roy *Madmen: A Social History of Madhouses, Mad-doctors & Lunatics*. Stroud: Tempus, 2004, p.226.

central characters are not apathetic brute creatures, but humans suffering from mental distress instigated by identifiable trauma. Nevertheless, signifiers of madness from a less enlightened age remain evident within the texts. Clarissa, the eponymous heroine of Richardson's 1748 novel, references the assumption, if only figuratively, that she has been visited by a demon. She accuses Lovelace, the man who raped her and instigated her breakdown, of being 'Satan himself'.²⁶ Goethe's suicidal narrator Werther, in the novel of 1774, claims to be in the condition 'those wretches must have been in who were said to be possessed of an evil demon'; and the hysteric Suzanne, incarcerated in a convent in Diderot's *The Nun* (1796), 'screamed horribly, howling like a wild animal'.²⁷ There is no reason to assume that these nods to an earlier age were anything more than echoes of signifiers of madness that had been effective in their time. After all, as Allen Thiher notes of Shakespeare's earlier plays: 'madness is not tied to any theological allegory or belief in possession'.²⁸ Literature had moved on, and so had literary madness, but the former had preserved symptoms of the latter's earlier manifestations, if only as a habitual linguistic trace. These echoes retain their potential for the creative writer, even if their present-day potency is diluted. When I elected to name a predatory character in my novel *Père Nicolas*, with the diminutive Pan, I did so in order to profit from the words' former associations. At one point Pan is explicitly linked to the priapic goat-god; at another he is identified as 'Old Nick' (13, 132).

During the nineteenth century, the belief that madness need not be absolute became an established truth. It could be governable. It could be curable. It could exist on the borderlines of reason. One contemporary nosological term, that of Moral

²⁶ Richardson, Samuel *Clarissa*. London: Penguin, 2004, p.894.

²⁷ Goethe, Johan Wolfgang von *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Trans. by M. Hulse. London: Penguin, 1989, p.111 & Diderot, Denis *The Nun*. Trans. by R. Goulbourne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.42.

²⁸ Thiher, Allen *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, p.78.

Insanity, involved a perversion of the emotions – perhaps violence or rage – but left the sufferer otherwise unscathed. Monomania, a coetaneous diagnosis, also generated only partial illness – obsessive behaviour or an *idée fixe* that was merely incapacitating. This differed from other contemporary concepts of insanity: that of innate idiocy; or unsoundness of mind, which rendered the victim incapable of ‘managing himself or his affairs’.²⁹ Partial insanity gave new latitude to novelists. Characters could move in and out of mad states, they could inhabit conventional lives. They made ideal subjects for unmasking. Symptoms need never manifest but could remain internal, and influential to later writers. Above all, normality was retrievable, and this meant that plots need not result in either suicide or death. A character could affirm in lucid retrospect – as Collins’ Basil does – that an overpowering nervous malady has ‘yielded to the affectionate devotion of my family’.³⁰

Coeval to, but contrasting with, the Moral Insanity that inflamed and perverted the emotions, was the assumption that some forms of madness had a physical causation. This might be the result of encephalopathy, but could also include insanity brought on by ‘drink, fever, masturbation, injury to the head and even over-study’.³¹ The madman metamorphosed into a cautionary device, as in Marie Corelli’s novel of 1890, *Wormwood*, where the narrator becomes ‘mad with the madness of absinthe’.³² A different kind of cautionary tale, but one equally embedded in the medical history of its time, underpins *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Charlotte Perkins Gilman fires off a salvo at the doctor, Silas Weir Mitchell, who treated her with the nineteenth century’s

²⁹ John Haslam, 19th century apothecary, cited in Pedlar, Valerie *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction*, p.2.

³⁰ Collins, *Basil*, p.267.

³¹ Pedlar, Valerie *The Representations of Madness in Victorian Fiction*. PhD. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1993, p. 17.

³² Corelli, Marie *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris*. Chicago: E.A. Weeks & Company, 2004, p.3.

answer to female depression: a month's rest cure. 'I wrote it to preach', Gilman said.³³ Mitchell's prescription was not to touch pen nor paper: 'he hates to have me write a word', the character protests of the husband who enforces her traumatic incarceration.³⁴ The narrator's madness is not engendered by over-study, but by a punishing absence of mental stimulation, and the withdrawal, implicit in that, of the ability to communicate with an outside world. The malicious Pan, Sam's guardian in my novel, fills the house they co-inhabit with the sort of cacophonous wallpaper that entraps the narrator of Gilman's story. However Sam, under 'psychiatric supervision', seeks out the 'plain white ceiling' where the only distractions are 'the voices murmuring and broken threads of spider webs'. The spider webs are real, the voices are in his head (210).

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the history of madness and its fictional representations were revolutionised by the writings of Freud and the development of psychoanalytic theory. Freud's revelations of interiority transformed characterisation, and gave a new language – the murmurings of the eternally dissenting subconscious – to literature. It now seemed that nobody was ever completely rational. The capacity to delimit madness had been compromised, since all human life was subject to neuroses, sublimated and repressed perhaps, but latent, ready to deteriorate into psychosis without warning. The Literary Modernism movement was greatly influenced by Freud. His proposal of the unconscious, and the way it functioned through symbol and signifier, opened new territory for the creative writer. Sartre admired the early works of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf; he particularly valued their utilisation of interior monologue – that language of interiority that Freud had made plausible.³⁵ Sartre's *Nausea*, which explores existential angst through a Modernist stream of

³³ Cited in Wiesenthal, Chris, *Figuring Madness in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.30.

³⁴ Gilman, Charlotte Perkins 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. In *The Yellow Wallpaper and other Stories*. New York: Dover Publications, 1997, p.3.

³⁵ Seymour-Jones, Carole *A Dangerous Liaison*. London: Century, 2008, p.105.

consciousness, sets madness in the literary and historical perspective of its time. It was written after the devastation of one World War, with another war looming. It took for its subject the absurdity of existence. Humankind was in despair, Sartre believed, as it struggled to impose meaning on a random and godless world. These were issues that arose out of philosophy, politics and scientific discovery as much as psychoanalytic theory. But that theory offered a way of exploring man and his madness, his fractured nature, his loss of identity, and the 'human condition' as it was perceived. When Roquentin exclaims, 'Existence is what I am afraid of', he speaks of a *Weltschmerz* characteristic of its time.³⁶ Nevertheless, specific symbols of madness within Sartre's novel are not unique, but are echoes, and will reverberate.

The twentieth century brought in new names for old maladies. One of the most popular terms, frequently misused, was that of schizophrenia. Developing out of the term *dementia praecox*, although not synonymous with that disease, it is now commonly recognised as a problematic designation. R.D. Laing described the schizoid individual as one who suffers from a 'rent in his relation with his world', and spoke of a 'mythological journey from which one can return with a special knowledge and ability'.³⁷ It is easy to deride this description of the descent into madness, but the notion had a certain cachet for the creative writer. Madness, once again, could be a blessing as well as a curse. Doris Lessing was a friend and a patient of Laing's. She shared his view of breakdown as potential *break-through*, and of schizophrenia as the victim's way of 'protecting himself from life's assaults, much as we all try to do'.³⁸ Together, using LSD, they explored the psychotic experience, in much the same way as Sartre had

³⁶ Sartre, *Nausea*, p.227.

³⁷ Laing, p. 17 & Rigney, Barbara Hill *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980, p.56.

³⁸ Klein, Carole *Doris Lessing*. London: Duckworth, 2000, p.195.

experimented with mescaline.³⁹ In *The Golden Notebook*, Anna Wulf exhibits many of the signs of the schizoid personality: disaffection; disintegration; and wanting, she says, ‘to split myself up’; and yet, during her ‘weeks of craziness’, she has moments of ‘knowing’; illuminations that are reminiscent of the revelations of Cassandra.⁴⁰ These revelatory powers are, without doubt, a realisation of what Laing described as *special knowledge*, and are repeated in countless other modern literary texts.

In this century, as Leader affirms, the *DSM* accepts only two causes of madness, these being ‘biological and stress-related’.⁴¹ Yet, the madness proliferating in contemporary texts bears many echoes of its predecessors. Motivations to – and marks of – madness repeat themselves throughout literary eras. Fiction retains its independence, at least with regard to the representations of madness. It does not congruently map over current medical thought. Even genres that are assumed to be polarized and characteristic of different historical periods are actually not always separable but share similar characterisations. The act of repetition is not constrained by documented symptomatology, or even verifiable fact.

What I am searching for, in the chapters that follow, are similarities in the representations of madness throughout history. Culture, specifically the culture of the literary text, evidently plays a greater part in depictions of madness than historical context. As an example of literature’s failure to connect with history, I would cite Elaine Showalter’s report of the young patient at the Salpêtrière, Augustine, who ‘began to see everything in black and white’.⁴² As a *representation*, rather than a symptom, of madness this presents an effective literary device – it is one that I have chosen to use in my own novel (221). Nevertheless, the only instance of hysterical achromatopsia, either

³⁹ Seymour-Jones, p.145.

⁴⁰ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.521, 549.

⁴¹ Leader, p.32.

⁴² Showalter, p.154.

literal or metaphorical, that I could find in my research was in the recent *Dracula* spin-off, *The Book of Renfield*, where the narrator announces that he ‘actually willed [himself] to become colour-blind’.⁴³

The Gender, Geography and Genre of Madness

Male writers have frequently situated women as the locus of psychosis. Lovelace assures Belford in Richardson’s *Clarissa* that: ‘*women have more watery heads than men*’.⁴⁴ Showalter claims that madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: ‘a female malady’.⁴⁵ Collins’ Basil is paradigmatic. The *feminine failing* of this victim of a doomed romance – an illicit love affair that would alienate a domineering father – is illustrated through Basil’s excessive timidity: ‘the slightest accidental noise in the house’ brings on ‘a fit of trembling’.⁴⁶

Psychosis also functions, however, as a site of escape and defiance to patriarchal oppression. Literary tradition often allies madness with divinity, or possession. In such cases the mad become noticeable not for their deficiencies, but for their powers. The fictional madwoman can embody that dangerous *other* that is both venerated and feared. This is arguably a characteristic of texts from all historical periods. In Atwood’s *Surfacing* the female narrator finds in her madness a position of supremacy over her male companion: she claims, ‘the power flowed into my eyes, I could see into him’.⁴⁷ Myra Breckinridge, the eponymous transsexual heroine of Gore Vidal’s 1968 novel, announces that she is ‘Woman Triumphant, exercising total power over men’.⁴⁸ And

⁴³ Lucas, Tim *The Book of Renfield*. New York: Touchstone, 2005, p.87.

⁴⁴ Richardson, Samuel *Clarissa*, p.932 (Richardson’s italics).

⁴⁵ Showalter, p.4.

⁴⁶ Collins, *Basil*, p.259.

⁴⁷ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.146.

⁴⁸ Vidal, Gore *Myra Breckinridge*. London: Anthony Blond, 1968, p.184.

other Cassandra-type representations, such as the narrator of Angela Green's 2002 novel *Cassandra's Disk*, have a communicatory authority that confers status, although this authority is often enigmatic or clandestine – a shared secret between author and reader. This nexus of madness and power is not necessarily gender specific. Male and female characters are capable of finding, in their madness, a level of potency both terrifying and liberating. The male narrators in Gogol's 1835 story, *Diary of a Madman*, and Dostoyevsky's *Bobok* (1873), resemble each other in 'beginning to see and hear certain strange things'; and 'seeing and hearing things such as no one has seen or heard before'; and Myra, in multiple ways, straddles the gender divide when she asserts her matchless supremacy: 'If there is a god in the human scale, I am she'.⁴⁹ Whereas gender bias has been customary in the identification of genuine madness in society – as Felman notes, it is not insignificant that 'folie' in French is feminine – *signifiers* of madness cross gender boundaries, as well as those of geography, and genre.⁵⁰ I attribute this, once again, to the inter-textuality of fiction.

Harold Bloom stressed the indebtedness of one writer to another in the English- and German-speaking countries.⁵¹ The texts I examine are from within this European literary inheritance – although it is one that stretches far beyond Europe. Borges describes it as 'handed down to me by blood – voices of Shakespeare, language of the Scriptures –'.⁵² This heritage is true even of works such as *The White Tiger*, whose Indian author, Aravind Adiga, studied English at Columbia University. Geographical derivation is arguably less important than cultural bequest.

⁴⁹ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor 'Bobok'. In *The Gambler and Other Stories*. Translated and introduced by Ronald Meyer. London: Penguin, 2010, p.276; Gogol, Nikolai 'Diary of a Madman'. In *Diary of a Madman and other Stories*. New York: Dover Publications, 2006, p.3 & Vidal, Gore *Myra Breckinridge*, p.182.

⁵⁰ Felman, p.52.

⁵¹ Bloom, p.194.

⁵² Borges, Jorge Luis 'To the German Language', in *The Book of Sand*. London: Penguin, 1979, p.121.

To speak of genre is more complicated, in that I will address political texts without the politics, and philosophical texts without the philosophy. My remit is to diagnose signifiers of literary madness; thus, the political or philosophical rationale of the novel is not an imperative. There are genres of literary madness that are, nevertheless, inappropriate to my research – for example, case-history, and autobiography. Despite my eschewing of the factual discourse of these latter, my concern is with realism, but I also draw from realist aspects of only marginally realistic texts. Madness is, as Pedlar says, ‘the locus of the sensational in the real world’.⁵³ As a narrative device, psychosis lends itself to the melodramatic (as in Wilkie Collins) or to the allegorical (as in Günter Grass). Exceptional psychic states necessitate extremes of writing. In the context of madness, I find, the constraints of genre – equally history, geography, or gender – are not immutable or dependable.

⁵³ Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction*, p.17.

MOTIVATIONS AND MASKS OF MADNESS: THE CRACK-STORY

My initial exploration of fictional madness afforded me two lessons: *one*, that authors repeatedly rationalised the onset of madness by layering motivation upon motivation; and *two*, that characters were frequently resistant to psychosis in spite of this. In Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, the narrator – despite losing her husband, daughter, freedom, even her real name; and being reduced to a 'two-legged womb' – hoards sanity 'the way people once hoarded money'.⁵⁴ Despite Atwood's predilection for erratic characters, this character endures, stubbornly rational. Some may disagree with the characters I do identify as mad. In my defence I quote Andrew Scull's remark that identifying the mad is not 'an activity governed by some objective, uniform, and unchanging standard' – or, as Marie Corelli maintained, 'Who is mad, and who is sane? It is not easy to decide'.⁵⁵

In the Introduction, I documented an accusation levelled against the protagonist of *American Psycho* – he failed to convince because no motivation elucidated his madness. Kate Reeves suggests that Ellis dismantled 'the cultural rules concerning appropriate content' by creating this groundless psychopathy, and also 'the literary rules that enable the reader to orientate his- or herself with respect to that content'.⁵⁶ Reeves assumes the necessity for a provocation to madness – a *crack story*. However, in the case of the psychopath, this is not a congruent reflection of reality. Kevin Dutton maintains that psychopathy requires no motivation and could be classified by Pinel's

⁵⁴ Atwood, Margaret *The Handmaid's Tale*. London: Virago, 1986, p.146, 119.

⁵⁵ Scull, Andrew *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900*. London: Yale University Press, 1993, p.344 & Corelli, Marie *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris*. Chicago: E.A. Weeks & Company, 2004, p.3.

⁵⁶ Reeves, Kate *Laughter and Madness in Post-War American Fiction*. PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2000, p.199.

term ‘*manie sans delire*’, or ‘mad without being mad’.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, to speak of fictional motivation is not to speak of aetiology. The expectations of the reader are culturally led, and motivation need not refer to a clinical episode or medical disorder, but to a signifying incident, or a development of the narrative. What I intend to analyse are literary *devices* that direct the reader to the onset of madness, or reflect, retrospectively, upon the crack-story. These pointers, and motifs, may be concurrent with factual evidence, but this is by no means a given. Similarly, where in turn I survey *masks* of madness, by which I mean devices used to discipline or disguise psychosis, they may include coping strategies that manifest in actual case-histories; others, however, are specific literary devices that have no provenance in clinical fact.

In 1810, the London physician William Black tabulated the causes of insanity amongst admissions to Bethlem; among them he named misfortunes, religion, love, grief, study, fright, intoxication, childbed, heredity, and fevers.⁵⁸ Such categories of aetiology are discernible provocations to madness in certain literary narrators, but there are also motivations that speak of narrative convention, rather than medical diagnosis. One notable stratagem is that of the *dead mother*. Although it might be categorised under grief or misfortune, it has developed through continued usage into an emblematic narrative symbol.

Dead Mothers

As killing off parents – or at the very least sending them away for a long time – is a requirement of the more adventurous children’s literature, so a dead mother seems almost a prerequisite in the field of monologic fictional madness. A veiled warning lies

⁵⁷ Dutton, Kevin *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* London: Heinemann, 2012, p.48.

⁵⁸ Porter, Roy *Madmen: A Social History of Madhouses, Mad-doctors & Lunatics*. Stroud: Tempus, 2004, p.43.

behind the statement ‘mother was dead’.⁵⁹ It is as though there is a literary equation (dead mother = troubled individual) that has been passed down through novelistic tradition. It has gained authority as a form of fictional shorthand through this constant repetition. Basil’s mother died in childbirth, long before the time frame of Collins’ novel; and in Nabokov’s *Lolita*, first published in Paris in 1955, Humbert Humbert’s ‘very photogenic mother died in a freak accident’, sometime before he became a murderer and a paedophile.⁶⁰ Anna Wulf, who admits to being ‘very likely mad’ in Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*, has a mother who is not only dead but has been replaced by a psychoanalyst, known significantly as ‘Mother Sugar’.⁶¹ The association of dead mothers with damaged individuals is familiar from earlier novels. Goethe’s suicidal protagonist, Werther, had a mother who outlived him; but he arguably displaced this maternal personality in his mourning for another older woman: ‘a friend who meant everything to me’.⁶² Suzanne in *The Nun* lost both ‘my Mother Superior and my own mother’; and Gaston Beauvais, the frenzied absintheur in Corelli’s *Wormwood*, lost his mother ‘seventeen years previously, when she died giving birth to a girl’ – ‘It is odd,’ he says, ‘that I should recollect every detail of that scene so well at this distance of time’.⁶³

In a diverse range of modern texts the dead-mother motif persists and is again explicitly associated with demented characters. Gardam’s Eliza, whose ‘mind has no abiding place’, had a mother who died in France. Eliza’s amnesia is as expressive in context as is Gaston’s power of recollection: ‘I ought to remember something of my

⁵⁹ Sayer, Paul *The Comforts of Madness*. London: Sceptre, 1992, p.94.

⁶⁰ Nabokov, Vladimir *Lolita*. London: Penguin, 1997, p.10.

⁶¹ Lessing, Doris *The Golden Notebook*. London: Harper Collins, 2007, p.445, 26.

⁶² Goethe, Johan Wolfgang von *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Trans. by M. Hulse. London: Penguin, 1989, p.127.

⁶³ Diderot, Denis *The Nun*, trans be R. Goulbourne. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, p.30 & Corelli, Marie *Wormwood*, p.20-21.

mother. Six is not so young,' she protests.⁶⁴ Balram, in Aravind Adiga's 2008 novel *The White Tiger*, attends the sacred rite of immolation for his dead mother and notes that 'this was the first time in life I fainted'; it is a defining event in a narrative that will see him transformed into 'a madman with thoughts of blood'.⁶⁵ In Green's novel, *Cassandra's Disk*, the narrator – characterised as 'a swaying wooden footbridge with too many missing slats' – has a mother whose murder comes midway through the narrative; but even before this death Cassandra rationalises her 'bad behaviour' as 'a lifelong reaction to my mother's lack of love'; and Spider, the eponymous narrator of Patrick McGrath's 1990 novel, a young man who battles against the creatures in the back reaches of his own 'sick mind', records that he is 'changed' after his mother's death – without her, he declares himself 'adrift'.⁶⁶

There is an exception to every rule, and in Sarah Water's 1999 novel *Affinity*, Margaret Prior is suicidal and ailing after the death of her *father*. It is possible that this variation is linked to her homosexuality; or to the fact that she has no sympathy with her mother, and models herself on her father: 'I resemble Pa,' she says. Her father has been her primary influence: it is the loss of him, and estrangement from the woman she loves that alienates her. There was no one to unburden to: 'there was only myself'.⁶⁷

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe that, in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, not only are Walton, Victor Frankenstein and the monster orphans, so too are 'all the major and almost all the minor characters'.⁶⁸ Although *Frankenstein*, one of the most canonical of Gothic novels, inspired widespread imitation, my research did not uncover an excess of orphans in later texts of literary madness. The corpses of dead fathers did

⁶⁴ Gardam, Jane *The Queen of the Tambourine*, London: Abacus, 2006, p. 45, 198.

⁶⁵ Adiga, Aravind *The White Tiger*. London: Atlantic Books, 2008, p.18, 257.

⁶⁶ Green, Angela *Cassandra's Disk*. London: Peter Owen, 2002, p.183, 132 & McGrath, Patrick *Spider*. London: Penguin, 1992, p.158, 95-6.

⁶⁷ Waters, Sarah *Affinity*. London: Virago, 2008, p.209, 202.

⁶⁸ Gilbert, Sandra & Susan Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic*. London: Yale University Press, 1984, p.227.

not pile up as conspicuously as their female counterparts. The question must be raised, therefore, as to why so many dead mothers populate the fictions of madness. Colm Tóibín claims that ‘Mothers get in the way in fiction’; in his view they ‘take up space that is better occupied by indecision, by hope, by the slow growth of a personality, and – as the novel itself develops – by the idea of solitude’.⁶⁹ I dispute that this is the case in the mother-cull of literary madness, where there is an entirely different factor at work. Freud posited the ubiquity of mourning for a maternal object; and Atwood’s *Surfacing* – described as a ‘courageously sustained quest for the [dead] mother’ – is paradigmatic.⁷⁰ The dead-mother motif functions, in the literature of madness, not to open up a space for solitude, but as a justification of insanity. The above examples of motherless psychotics are testament to the symbolic function of this elimination of maternal influence. Barbara Hill Rigney, noting that both Clarissa Dalloway and Jane Eyre are motherless, conjectures that to ‘find a mother within the self’ is to ‘begin the return from psychosis’.⁷¹ It seems plausible, then, that to lose a mother, or a mother-figure, is to begin the journey into psychosis. Or, at least, that this is what a creative writer might endeavour to suggest.

If the mothers of literary psychotics are not dead then they are characteristically estranged or unstable.⁷² This principle reaffirms the often anachronistic misogyny of degenerationist theories, since early psychiatry championed the view that women were the prime carriers of lunacy. Madness, by this account, is an inherited flaw, passed down, inevitably, through the mother. Eva Khatchadourian’s mother ‘was afraid to

⁶⁹ Tóibín, Colm ‘The Importance of Aunts’. *London Review of Books*, Volume 33 Number 6, 17 March 2011, pp.13-19, p.13.

⁷⁰ Cited in Kristeva, Julia *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Trans. by L. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.9 & Showalter, Elaine ‘Towards a Feminist Poetics’, in Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh, eds. *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. 3rd edn. London: Arnold, 1997, pp.99-108, p.105-6.

⁷¹ Rigney, Barbara Hill *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980, p.11-12.

⁷² Perhaps a ‘dead mother’ in André Green’s formulation: one who remains alive but is ‘psychically dead in the eyes of the young child.’ Green, André *On Private Madness*. London: Karnac Books, 2005, p.142.

leave the house’, and she managed, Eva tells us, ‘to reproduce in me the same disproportionate anguish about minor interactions with the outside world’.⁷³ Tarquin Winot, the narrator of John Lanchester’s 1996 novel, *The Debt to Pleasure*, has a mother who is frequently removed to a ‘clinic’ to contain her ‘histrionic impulses’; she shows an unfeeling ‘lack of interest’ in her son, which he compensates for on the ‘solitary but profitable weekend’ on which he murders both his parents.⁷⁴ The psychopathic child who narrates Iain Bank’s *The Wasp Factory* (1984) also had a mother who ‘didn’t like children’, and who flees, Frank says, ‘immediately after my birth’ – ‘I can’t remember my mother,’ he announces, ‘if I did I’d hate her’.⁷⁵ Myra Breckinridge welcomes hatred of her mother, pronouncing that it ‘must have had some *positive* element in it’; while in the asylum portrayed in Paul Sayer’s 1988 novel, *The Comforts of Madness*: inmates scream for their mothers ‘their voices seeming to come from crazed souls’.⁷⁶ Sayer worked as a staff nurse in a psychiatric hospital before becoming a novelist. One may assume he made a calculated decision in killing off the mother of his catatonic narrator. My own narrator, Sam, tries ‘hard to forget’ bearing witness to the death of his mother, but he is unsuccessful (55). The incident is tactically situated in the character’s early youth to suggest maximum trauma, since evidence suggested that a dead mother could function in fictional terms as a provocation to psychosis.

Important as the motif of the dead or mentally unstable mother was to the fiction of madness, however, it soon became evident that female iconography aligned itself to another more active role.

⁷³ Shriver, Lionel *We need to Talk about Kevin*. London: Serpents Tail, 2006, p.35-6.

⁷⁴ Lanchester, John *The Debt to Pleasure*. London: Picador, 1996, p.60, 20, 91.

⁷⁵ Banks, Iain *The Wasp Factory*. London: Abacus, 2011, p.82.

⁷⁶ Vidal, Gore *Myra Breckinridge*. London: Anthony Blond, 1968, p.151 (Vidal’s italics) & Sayer, *The Comforts of Madness*, p.128.

The Artist/ The Seer

Jung gave voice to a widespread observation when he asserted that ‘the creative process has feminine quality’; and Julia Kristeva confirms this, stating that a ‘creator necessarily moves through an identification with the maternal’.⁷⁷ Creativity is not only linked to women, however, it also has associations with insanity. Freud likened the artist to the neurotic: ‘oppressed by unusually powerful instinctual needs which lead him to turn away from reality to fantasy’; and the writer Cervantes acknowledged that literature might ‘originate in the same sources as some forms of madness’.⁷⁸ The relationship between madness, creativity, and the feminine was endorsed by Porter, who announced that ‘women, the mad and, frequently, artists too could all be seen as kindred spirits; blessed with exquisite sensibilities’.⁷⁹ I see these connections anticipated by, and repeated in, the literary adaptations of the Cassandra character. This is a figure reflective of public opinion, which, as Foucault said, attributed clairvoyance to the speech of the mad: ‘the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naivety what the others’ wisdom cannot perceive’.⁸⁰

One of the most recent reincarnations uncovered in my research was the eponymous narrator of *Cassandra’s Disk*, who was ‘born with the ability to scale the walls of other minds and peer in at their thoughts’. Green’s novel has a narrator who is not only telepathic, but who sometimes claims to be oracular: ‘I’ve always believed that my best shots were a sort of clairvoyance,’ she says. Inevitably, like the original Cassandra, she is frequently misunderstood. A minor character, for example, warns of

⁷⁷ Jung, C.G. ‘Psychology and Literature’ in Lodge, David ed. *20th Century Literary Criticism*. Harlow: Longman, 1972, pp.175-190. p.186 & Kristeva, Julia ‘A Question of Subjectivity – an Interview’, in Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh, pp.131-137, p.136.

⁷⁸ Cited in Eagleton, Terry *Literary Theory*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p.156; & Cervantes cited in Thiher, Allen *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, p.92.

⁷⁹ Porter, p.115.

⁸⁰ Foucault, Michel ‘The Order of Discourse’, in Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh, pp.239-251, p.240.

her capriciousness with the words: ‘don’t listen to Cassie Byrd, Miss, she’s barmy’.⁸¹ Cassandra is a narrative that is persistently misread, and this is partly due to her own misdirection. Recovering from ‘what had probably been’ her ‘first breakdown’; she claims that the process of remembering is ‘therapeutic’; nevertheless she admits that she lies, ‘a little. Sometimes a lot’.⁸² Cassandra Byrd is not an author, but a photographer, narrating her story on computer disks; but she is emblematic of the alliance of artist, psychic and lunatic, in the same way as the writer protagonist in Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*. A photographer, an author, an artist – they all share an idiosyncratic vision and the urge to revelation, like the mythical Cassandra. It is not enough for them to visualise the world; it must be interpreted and *realized*.

Lessing connected the artist, the seer, and the madwoman to a common denominator. She was a writer with ‘a lifelong interest in madness’, and saw psychosis everywhere.⁸³ *The Golden Notebook* is practically founded on the claim that ‘this country’s full of women going mad’; and the interconnection of creativity and clairvoyance is personified in the character of Anna, who claims to have ‘some awful second sight’.⁸⁴ Acute imaginative powers can be alarming. They impose almost transcendental experiences, which allow the creative artist to *inhabit* alternative personalities – and these personalities can dominate. Lessing, as one of her biographers noted, ‘spent her life in a Sisyphean search for a solid sense of self’; as if the reification of her characters uprooted her from ontological certitude.⁸⁵ Many authors have a healthy fear of the connection between insight and insanity, and of the loss of autonomous identity that inhabiting other perspectives can necessitate. Roland Barthes

⁸¹ Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.10, 225, 57.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.107, 180, 10.

⁸³ Cited in Showalter, Elaine *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*. London: Virago, 1987, p.238.

⁸⁴ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.161, 500.

⁸⁵ Klein, Carole Doris *Lessing*. London: Duckworth, 2000, p.237.

acknowledged the writer's predicament when he claimed that an authorial maxim should read: '*mad I cannot be, sane I do not deign to be, neurotic I am*'.⁸⁶ The figure of the artist in literature is often characterised as the victim of both demonic possession and divine afflatus, in recognition of this sense of failing autonomy.

Charley Baker has noted that since antiquity 'the notion that creative writers or creative individuals appear prone to depression, suicide, and other kinds of madness, has provided a rich seam of compelling images'.⁸⁷ In the texts I researched, an inordinate amount of the narrators were artists, writers, or had other creative vocations. One of the trials of the artist, as of the lunatic, is that their sensibilities set them apart. As Tarquin grouses – albeit ironically – in *The Debt to Pleasure*: 'my artist's nature isolated and separated me from my alleged fellow men'.⁸⁸ Just as the nexus of literary madness and power discussed in the previous chapter was not gender specific, clairvoyant powers of a Cassandra-type nature are not bestowed solely on female characters. Roquentin, for example, could 'see the future'.⁸⁹ Oskar, the drum-playing narrator of Günter Grass's 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*, claimed to be 'clairaudient'.⁹⁰ The predilection to orate or create is an authentic, un-gendered aspect of medical psychosis, and can be seen within the walls of any asylum. Allan Ingram, writing of madness in the eighteenth century, confirms that many *genuine* lunatics insisted on 'talking or writing about their experiences', as if speaking from a position of psychosis held a particular visionary charge.⁹¹ If artistry and insanity spring from a shared source, to some extent the one counterbalances the other. For if, as it seems, the creative figure is prone to madness, the pursuit of disclosure is almost always represented as beneficial. Solipsism,

⁸⁶ Sontag, Susan ed. *A Barthes Reader*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1982, p.405.

⁸⁷ Baker, Charley et al. *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p.131.

⁸⁸ Lanchester, *The Debt to Pleasure*, p.12.

⁸⁹ Sartre, Jean-Paul *Nausea*. Trans. by R. Baldick. London: Penguin, 1965, p.50.

⁹⁰ Grass, Günter *The Tin Drum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p.42.

⁹¹ Ingram, Allan ed. *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998, p.6.

the curse of the alienated world view, can be breached by communication. This is why art, music and literature feature frequently in mental health projects. By means of creative expression, the isolation of the psychotic mind can be overcome. Through painting or writing, through photography or sculpture – even through drumming – one may feel conjured ‘into life and substance’.⁹² This evidence is already manifest in the early literature of madness. Clarissa, as James How observes, ‘draws solace from the act of representation’: ‘when I can do nothing else, constant use has made me able to write,’ she asserts, ‘very long, has that been all my amusement and pleasure’.⁹³ ‘I write in this notebook as therapy’, Myra Breckinridge later declares; and Eva’s obsessive letter-writing, in *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, has a similarly reassuring quality: ‘I may need too badly to tell myself a story,’ she says.⁹⁴ Basil thinks of himself as a writer: ‘my real ambition’, he announces, is to make a name ‘in literature’.⁹⁵ ‘I must write, while I still breathe,’ exclaims Margaret in *Affinity* – recklessly, as it turns out – scribbling down her every deliberation; and Anna Wulf speculates that ‘changing everything into fiction is simply a means of concealing something from myself’; which in her case serves to protect.⁹⁶

In the nineteenth century, allowing the imagination free reign was considered hazardous to one’s health, and ‘over-study’ was catalogued as a trigger for psychosis.⁹⁷ *The Yellow Wallpaper* turned this on its head by suggesting that denying the creative urge was equally dangerous, but this only confirmed that it was the urge to revelation in

⁹² Waters, *Affinity*, p.112.

⁹³ How, James *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson’s Clarissa*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988, p.171 & Richardson, Samuel *Clarissa*. London: Penguin, 2004, p371.

⁹⁴ Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge*, p.8 & Shriver, *We need to Talk about Kevin*, p.453.

⁹⁵ Collins, Wilkie *Basil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.9.

⁹⁶ Waters, *Affinity*, p.348 & Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.211.

⁹⁷ Pedlar, Valerie *The Representations of Madness in Victorian Fiction*. PhD. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1993, p. 17.

itself, whether permitted or denied, that was precarious. There is a little of both the salutary and the injurious positions in the figure of the artist/seer.

If being an *artist*, as a literary motif, *positions* a character as susceptible to insanity, it also bestows the advantage of escape and transformation. It confers special powers. These set the character outside the norms of society. It is a condition that some seek to control, just as they seek to control madness. The Cassandra figure, male or female, invites persecution, which in turn leads to paranoia and other forms of psychosis. 'Insane women of today,' writes Lessing, 'are like the witches of former centuries, tortured because they have superior capacities'.⁹⁸ Had she substituted the word artistic for insane the sentence would have been equally expressive of her opinion. She spoke for the outsider everywhere.

The Outsider

The position of outsider, whether artist or not, is a position which embodies, above all others, a *motivation* to madness. Suzanne in *The Nun* describes herself, during her enforced seclusion, as 'physically alienated', it is this that prompts her to howl 'like a wild animal'; Gaston Beauvais is 'cast out and spurned', and in his isolation abandoned to hallucinations of 'flying phantasmagoria'; and Sartre's Roquentin has 'no friends' and bemoans the fact that even surrounded by 'happy, reasonable voices' he feels alone.⁹⁹ In modern novels the motif of the alienated individual persists: the demented Spider also has 'no friends'; Balram assures us that 'A White Tiger keeps no friends. It's too dangerous'; while Tarquin speaks of 'a quality of absolute melancholy, of isolation'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Cited in Rigney, p.82.

⁹⁹ Diderot, Denis *The Nun*, p.30, 42; Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.237, 151 & Sartre, *Nausea*, p. 32, 15.

¹⁰⁰ McGrath, *Spider*, p.24; Adiga, *The White Tiger*, p.302 & Lanchester, *The Debt to Pleasure*, p.220.

Such symptoms of isolation forewarn the reader that a character inhabits hazardous territory. ‘The drip drip of long-haul, no-end-in sight solitude’, as described by Barbara, the narrator of Zoë Heller’s 2003 novel, *Notes on a Scandal*, is not credibly countered by the thought that ‘being alone is not the most awful thing in the world’ – this retraction is unlikely to convince the reader, who may ask what sort of person has friends who ‘always fall out with me’? It will take another character to inform us that Barbara is ‘insane’, but the clues are already there.¹⁰¹ Isolation might be deemed consequent to madness, rather than symptomatic, but it can function as either, sometimes both, in fictional terms. Gardam’s Eliza bemoans her ‘lonely situation’; it is initially the fact that she has ‘nobody to consult’ that engenders her ‘broken soul’, then, when her behaviour becomes erratic and unstable, her few remaining associates depart – ‘you are frightening us’, they say.¹⁰² In the first instance the alienation is causal, and in the second, evidential. Depicting a character as socially alienated is a form of fictional shorthand – as potent as depriving them of maternal influence – and it can signify either the approach or presence of dangerous psychological territory. The image of Sam preparing to post his single, solitary Christmas card, is one of many pointers in my novel to this character’s isolated, and therefore perilous, state (12).

‘I wonder what God was about, putting me in this lonely situation,’ writes Eliza.¹⁰³ Her letter is addressed, it transpires, to an imaginary friend. She has ‘nobody to consult, only the nuns and the Dying’; so she speaks to God, and God ‘tells me what to do. Or He did’.¹⁰⁴ Speaking to God is not consistent with a robust literary persona; except in overtly religious texts, or through the conventionally sanctioned obeisance of acts of prayer. It sometimes results in thinking you are God – a perplexity which I will

¹⁰¹ Heller, *Zoë Notes on a Scandal*. London: Penguin, 2007, p.187, 178, 237.

¹⁰² Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.36, 13, 179, 139.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.13, 31.

deal with in the next chapter. Letters addressed to God, to imaginary friends, or dead husbands, are equally indicative of an insecure mental health – as is being forced to address the reader in the absence of anybody else. ‘I lost all of my new friends and almost all of my old ones (which is partly why at this late stage I find myself talking to you, my reader,’ admits Cassandra; she describes herself as: ‘a solitary person who was born a twin’, and allows that this situation – ‘creates a certain tension’ – ‘perhaps the laptop and I will amuse ourselves by playing solitaire,’ she says.¹⁰⁵ It becomes apparent that the laptop is Cassandra’s confidante, almost the alter-ego that her twin sister has failed to be. The disks she records on the computer are the only remaining link with a world outside her solipsistic state.

The loneliness and depression that reduce a character to solitary amusements are often brought on by loss: ‘we love, we lose those we love, we suffer’ – again Cassandra’s words.¹⁰⁶ I have already spoken of the *motif* of the dead mother, but there are many categories of loss than can move a character outside the main stream of sanity. Loss often provides the trauma, the *inciting incident*. The loss of a baby, for example, features repeatedly in the bruised psyches of female characters. Eliza, in *The Queen of the Tambourine*, reflects upon her ‘broken soul’; the reason for this becomes apparent when she divulges that she ‘began to lose the baby after four months of pregnancy. It was over twenty years ago’.¹⁰⁷ The loss of a child can be compounded by a level of guilt: ‘I never managed a child for him,’ she says, speaking of her estranged husband.¹⁰⁸ If a miscarried baby can carry such a weight of guilt, how much more so an aborted child? Initially the narrator of Atwood’s *Surfacing*, a graphic artist, describes her abandoned child as: ‘better off with my husband’; later she admits she got rid of this, in

¹⁰⁵ Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.235, 184, 66.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.123.

¹⁰⁷ Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.179, 220.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.32.

fact, illegitimate baby. ‘I’d carried that death around inside me, layering it over, a cyst, a tumour, a black pearl’. She lies to herself because the culpability is too much for her: ‘I couldn’t accept it, that mutilation, ruin I’d made, I needed a different version’.¹⁰⁹ Even a surviving child can initiate episodes of despair. The narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is bereft in spite of delivering: ‘such a dear baby’ – ‘I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time,’ she says.¹¹⁰ Although it is not post-natal depression that Gilman serves up as a culprit for the ensuing delirium, it is still a factor in the *crack-story*. But anguish does not demand an origin: ‘though Dr Rhinestein offered us *postnatal depression* like a present,’ says Shriver’s Eva, ‘I was depressed after Kevin’s birth because I was depressed’.¹¹¹

Despondency in all its forms features regularly in the narratives of madness. The narrator of *Wormwood*, for example, is ‘conscious of a heavy depression’; ‘I have been very depressed,’ echoes Lessing’s Anna.¹¹² Sartre admitted that many of his characters suffered from the same ‘cosmic sadness’ as he did; and indeed Roquentin’s depression manifests as a form of nebulous fear – ‘if only I knew what I was frightened of,’ he exclaims.¹¹³ He is alienated from society, and fear, however nebulous, that is not shared can lead to depression and insanity. ‘I cannot escape from myself,’ he says – it is a predicament echoed by Margaret in *Affinity*: ‘there was only myself’.¹¹⁴

It must be stated here that alienation and depression are not always the result of loneliness and loss. Characters, like people, can be innately depressed. In this case it is their *temperament* which provides the motivation to fictional psychosis. Werther is a character who might be described as depressed both by circumstance and by birth.

¹⁰⁹ Atwood, Margaret *Surfacing*. London: Virago, 2006, p.17, 139, 137.

¹¹⁰ Gilman, Charlotte Perkins ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’. In *The Yellow Wallpaper and other Stories*. New York: Dover Publications, 1997, p.3, 6.

¹¹¹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, p.101 (Shriver’s italics).

¹¹² Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.243 & Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.435.

¹¹³ Seymour-Jones, Carole *A Dangerous Liaison*. London: Century, 2008, p.106 & Sartre, *Nausea*, p.10.

¹¹⁴ Sartre, *Nausea*, p. 20, 53 & Waters, *Affinity*, p.202.

Goethe claimed that Werther was forced to shoot himself 'after allowing sensuality to become his master'.¹¹⁵ Michael Hulse informs us, however, that Goethe also insisted upon his hero's 'fatal and tragic flaw'.¹¹⁶ Henry Maudsley, a prominent voice in nineteenth-century psychiatry, described Werther as 'morbidly sensitive', and declared that suicide was his 'natural end'.¹¹⁷ Werther is afflicted both by suicidal ideation and overwhelming sorrow, this intensifies his position as a loner. The fact that both kinds of depression come together in his character may be explained by a morbid infatuation with death: a notable theme of German writing of the time. 'Adieu!' says Werther, 'I see no end to my misery but the grave'.¹¹⁸

Coping Strategies (Masks)

In contrast to Werther's headlong rush towards death, characters may be endowed with traits or techniques that enable them to stabilise and mask their affliction. Leader implores us to have respect for these coping strategies, for in reality as well as in fiction, psychosis can be managed and disguised in this way – hence his term 'quiet madness'. 'Many people diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome,' according to Leader, 'are in fact psychotics who have managed to find a solution along these lines, limiting their interests to a single, usually symbolic, activity'.¹¹⁹ As a literary device, the manifestations of these stabilising techniques, these *masks* of madness, are sometimes the only clues the reader has to a psychological flaw.

From a fictional perspective, coping strategies allow tension to accumulate in the narrative. (My narrator's predilection for getting drunk and setting fire to aeroplanes

¹¹⁵ Friedenthal, Richard *Goethe: His Life and Times*. London: Wiedenthal and Nicolson, 1989, p.416.

¹¹⁶ Michael Hulse, Introduction to Goethe, Johan Wolfgang von *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p.17.

¹¹⁷ Cited in Shuttleworth, S 'The Psychology of Childhood in Victorian Literature and Medicine'. In Small, H. and T. Tate eds. *Literature, Science, Psychoanalysis, 1830-1970*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 86-101, p.99.

¹¹⁸ Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p.69.

¹¹⁹ Leader, Darian *What is Madness?* London: Penguin 2011, p.207.

is, perversely, his preferred survival technique.) In actuality, these attempts to regulate mental illness may be all that counter chaos. Freud contended ‘that most aspects of human suffering were linked to how we defend ourselves against disturbing thoughts or images’.¹²⁰ The human brain is proficient at protecting itself, building intra-psychic worlds that stave off depression or psychosis – at least temporarily – and this translates well into fiction. Letter-writing is often a literary manifestation of this process. It functions to create a space where the loner *connects* – if only to a make-believe world. Perhaps this explains why epistolary fiction and the mad narrator are so well suited.¹²¹ An extraordinary amount of first-person texts on madness take the form of letters, or a journal, written by a solitary individual. It is a method appropriate to the struggling outsider, since even the most tenuous connections give the suggestion of assuaging loneliness. The act of writing has a pacifying function for the psychotic: it ‘offers a way of repair, of knotting, of binding words and the libido together’.¹²² The artist, as noted earlier, often benefits from this creative power. Writing curbs the madness, but, as Thomas Beebee says, ‘separation must always be an implicit theme of epistolary fiction’.¹²³ The letter writer writes alone.

In *The Wasp Factory*, the coping strategy that allows the narrator to mask a murdering psychosis is a complicated arrangement of ritual and ceremony. ‘The strong make their own patterns,’ Frank claims; and his ‘collection of skulls’ and ‘secret catechisms’ are all part of the pattern, as is the Wasp Factory itself – ‘I try to keep balanced,’ he says.¹²⁴ In Ken Kesey’s 1962 novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, set in a psychiatric hospital, Big Chief Bromden’s coping strategy is to allow the nurses to

¹²⁰ Leader, p.35.

¹²¹ The first draft of *Headlong* was in epistolary form.

¹²² Leader, p.210.

¹²³ Beebee, Thomas O. *Epistolary Fiction in Europe 1500-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.149.

¹²⁴ Banks, *The Wasp Factory*, p.153, 57, 157, 113.

believe he is deaf and dumb. Once he discloses that he is able to hear and talk, the question arises of whether or not he can adjust to his new societal role – as a speaking man he ‘leaves himself wide open’; another inmate, McMurphy, attempts to rip the mask away, but this horrifies Big Chief, who balks at the ‘dangers we let ourselves in for when we let McMurphy lure us out of the fog’.¹²⁵

As a fictional device the mask functions both to veil madness, offering the character a quiet way of being in the world, and to protect the psychotic from the full force of lunacy, thereby allowing them to narrate. Crucially, it establishes uncertainty about what will happen when the mask disintegrates. In *The Comforts of Madness*, catatonia is the mask the narrator assumes; neither the doctors nor the readers can tell – is he psychotic, traumatised, or simply ‘an old fraud’?¹²⁶ When medics try to cure Peter, ‘to galvanise me, metamorphose me into something fulsome’, they are ‘insatiable’ in pursuit of improvement, but Peter is unconvinced; for one thing, he doesn’t consider himself unwell: ‘often I wish I were ill, genuinely sick’; for another, he is only ‘too happy’ with his lot – he has fulfilled his ancient wish of becoming invisible.¹²⁷ Without his mask, can he continue? The plot balances upon the fulcrum of this dilemma.

‘I do, after all, have strategies, ways of coping’, announces Spider; in fact, Dennis, his real name – ‘my mother always called me Spider’ – has developed a number of stabilising techniques that allow him to survive outside a ‘hard-bench ward’.¹²⁸ ‘I developed in time my two-head system,’ Spider claims, ‘The front of my head was what I used with other people in the house, the back of my head was for when I was alone’; when plagued by imaginary voices, he learns to ‘block out the clamour’ with a constant

¹²⁵ Kesey, Ken *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. London: Penguin, 2005, p.118, 130.

¹²⁶ Sayer, *The Comforts of Madness*, p.24-5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.47, 48, 131.

¹²⁸ McGrath, *Spider*, p.135, 20, 139. A hard-bench ward, is the harshest ward in the asylum, where the men are ‘mute, incontinent, hallucinated’, p.139.

stream of his own words.¹²⁹ Spider admits to a constant fear of catastrophe. This anxiety reflects the response of the reader, aware that a mask can disintegrate at any given moment. A metaphorical question mark always hangs over a coping strategy: will the mask hold? What will happen when the mask is gone? Who is the character without the mask? This is a useful stratagem in a novel, where the faces of characters can be concealed as effectively as actors in a Greek tragedy.

Fear/ Culpability/ Trauma

I have recorded various motivations of madness in fiction. There are, of course, many. Some that occur frequently in prose, also conform to those aetiological categories described in medical practice – fear, for example. ‘Where fear is too much excited,’ Samuel Tuke wrote, ‘it certainly tends to contract the understanding, to weaken the benevolent affections, and to debase the mind’; ‘oppression,’ he added, ‘makes a *wise* man mad’.¹³⁰ Excessive or irrational fear can act as instigation to fictional madness, a symptom of madness, or as a trigger for a stabilising stratagem that can stave off madness (however temporarily) – even, on occasion, a nebulous fear is the coping mechanism that conceals the madness beneath. As traits that adhere to mad characters, fear and coping strategies, and sometimes the intertwining of the two, have early origins. The narrator of *Wormwood* is ‘perfectly paralyzed with fear’, it is this that transforms him into a ‘howling maniac’; Gaston drinks, he thinks, to cope with the terrors that engulf him, but the ‘green fairy’ only intensifies the horror and will induce total collapse.¹³¹ The absinthe produces hallucinations that trigger fear, the fear creates the need for more absinthe, and the vicious cycle of the two creates psychosis, and the need to hide behind other illusory fears. It is not always possible to distinguish in fiction

¹²⁹ McGrath, *Spider*, p.98, 150.

¹³⁰ Cited in Ingram, p.237.

¹³¹ Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.289-290, 111.

which comes first, fear or psychosis. Roquentin, in his nebulous way, is afraid ‘of what is going to be born and take hold of me and carry me off’; and Basil confesses that the faintest noise from the street ‘literally terrified me’.¹³² These trepidations might be causal or symptomatic, and certain characters seem to favour irrational fear over the terror of real madness. This could be described as ‘fear of fear’, a coping strategy rather than anything genuine.¹³³ ‘I’m frightened. I don’t know why,’ says Eliza, an indication that nebulous fear still flourishes in modern fiction; Cassandra crawls around her room ‘whimpering with fear’; and Spider is given to fits of ‘trembling violently’.¹³⁴ As a concealment of madness, fear of the mundane often masks an underlying terror that the protagonist cannot countenance – a complexity which can be obscured. As a symptom of madness, the clue to psychosis is often in the incongruity of what is feared. Fear and madness have a symbiotic relationship in the fictional text that can be manipulated in numerous effective ways. Edgar Allan Poe, no stranger to the fiction of horror, uses fear as a motivating factor in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) – ‘It is hardly possible to conceive the extremity of my terror,’ announces the narrator.¹³⁵ Pym embarks on a sequence of ever more appalling occurrences, and undergoes ‘the most abject and pitiable terror’; he has dreams where ‘every species of calamity and horror’ befall him, and in his waking life, incidents that apparently provoke a ‘triple horror’.¹³⁶

Anna Wulf is ‘invaded by terror’, but perhaps more importantly she is tormented by ‘inadequacy’, and ‘self-disgust’.¹³⁷ Rigney claims that Lessing thought of the self-hater as ‘that evil in the schizophrenic self which balances or sometimes annihilates the

¹³² Sartre, *Nausea*, p.15 & Collins, *Basil*, p. 83.

¹³³ Margaret, the lonely diarist in *Affinity* assures us that she holds a ‘terror of terror itself’. Waters, *Affinity*, p.308.

¹³⁴ Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.12; Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.103 & McGrath, *Spider*, p.165.

¹³⁵ Poe, Edgar Allan *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.7.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.93, 21, 81.

¹³⁷ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.513, 123, 260.

good'.¹³⁸ Shame and self-loathing are verifiable motivations to, and marks of, madness. In an eighteenth century case-history, recorded by Ingram, a patient described herself as: 'a thousand times worse than the Devil, for the Devil had never committed such Sins as I'.¹³⁹ Similarly extravagant confessions of blameworthiness feature regularly in the fiction of madness. 'I must have begun to feel a deep need to be brought to book,' Eva relates, as she asks her dead husband to 'forgive' *her*, after the murders committed by their son.¹⁴⁰ The apotheosis of guilt, however, belongs to Balram in *The White Tiger*, who offers us a modern adaptation of the Lady Macbeth theme: 'all the skin-whitening creams sold in the markets of India won't clean my hands again'.¹⁴¹ 'I could have stopped it, you see. I knew it was wrong', the child Cassandra says of a grandparent's iniquity.¹⁴² She demands ownership of every misdemeanour. This sort of unwarranted culpability is a sentiment found in several texts of madness. 'These were psychosomatic responses to stress,' Barbara says in *Notes on a Scandal*, but 'I was convinced that they were the wages of sin'.¹⁴³ Sam's unwarranted perception of culpability centres upon his family's deaths, and on Pan's abuse that he feels he has called upon himself. This is revealed in the penultimate chapter when Sam discloses his conviction of his own accountability. 'I killed them,' he says, 'It was my fault' (241-2). It is partly the need to recompense for his perceived blameworthiness that spurs Sam in his inept search for a compensatory heroism.

Possibly the most motivating factor in fictional madness is trauma, and I have made much use of this in my novel with 'the amount of death' Sam has to endure (224). Trauma often provides the *inciting incident* that pushes a character over the brink. The

¹³⁸ Rigney, p.85.

¹³⁹ Hannah Allen cited in Ingram, p.35.

¹⁴⁰ Shriver, *We need to Talk about Kevin*, p.451, 81.

¹⁴¹ Adiga, *The White Tiger*, p.318.

¹⁴² Green, *Cassandra's Disk*, p.68.

¹⁴³ Heller, *Notes on a Scandal*, p.198, 171.

character may be flawed, fearful, guilt ridden, motherless, an artist, an outsider and running out of stabilising strategies, and yet there is still the need to press the button that makes the whole thing implode. What makes trauma problematic to review is that it allows for such diversity. The inciting incident for Myra probably occurred during gender-reassignment, when surgeons ‘allowed me, at my request, to remain conscious during all stages of my transformation, even though I was warned that I might be seriously traumatized’.¹⁴⁴ For Basil, the inciting incident was ‘some great fright’; although his doomed love affair, apparently, also sent him over the edge.¹⁴⁵ The experience Foucault describes as ‘*desperate passion*’, or ‘love disappointed in its excess’, is a widespread trigger for fictional psychosis.¹⁴⁶ Laing claims that even hate is ‘less engulfing’ than love: less ‘threatening to the sense of self’.¹⁴⁷ But whatever the ordeal – be it love, loss, transformation, or trans-gender formation – trauma manifests as a tipping point from sanity to insanity, and leads us from stimulus to symptoms, and so to the next chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge*, p.183.

¹⁴⁵ Collins, *Basil*, p.263.

¹⁴⁶ Foucault, Michel *Madness and Civilization*. Trans. by R. Howard. London: Routledge, 1997, p.30 (Foucault’s italics).

¹⁴⁷ Cited in Rigney, p.30.

MARKS OF MADNESS: THE CRACKS

A character in David Lodge's novel *Deaf Sentence* poses the question: 'did anyone ever use a semicolon in a suicide note?'¹⁴⁸ The projected rejoinder is 'No', because a semicolon, in this situation, would suggest a mental alertness that disputes the sort of depression or despair associated with self-annihilation. Punctuation would be problematic to analyse in the medical world, if used as an indicative marker of mental illness, but it can prove enlightening in mimetic representations of madness in literature. In fact, evidence suggests that accepted rules of punctuation, style and syntax have all been usefully subverted to enrich and intensify monologues of madness.

Nathalie Cooke relates the story of an industrious copy-editor who endeavoured to cull the abundant commas in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. The author put them back. The over-use of punctuation was an intentional ploy, used to suggest an irrational 'state of mind'.¹⁴⁹ In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, no fewer than eighty-five exclamation marks are crowded into a text of under 4,500 words. Chris Wiesenthal, whose reckoning this is, describes them as indicative of Gilman's 'righteous rhetorical passion'; but also, crucially, as a manifestation of the narrator's 'hysterical hyperbole'.¹⁵⁰ By endeavouring to make writing *strange*, rather than *stylish*, an author is able to reinforce the movement away from consensus reality and to successfully evoke a world 'in utter confusion'.¹⁵¹ Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, known for its emphatically jolting style, is mirrored by Dostoyevsky's later choppy narrative *Bobok*. It is one of several correspondences

¹⁴⁸ Lodge, David *Deaf Sentence*. London: Penguin, 2008, p.159.

¹⁴⁹ Cooke, Nathalie *Margaret Atwood: A Biography*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1998, p.177.

¹⁵⁰ Wiesenthal, Chris *Figuring Madness in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p.32.

¹⁵¹ Collins, Wilkie *Basil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.31.

between the two texts that literary critics have commented upon.¹⁵² It might be plausibly suggested that Dostoyevsky mirrored the technique because he recognised in it an effective representation of the erratic mind. Lanchester's narrator in *The Debt to Pleasure* exhibits an adjectival excess that is exemplary of the tortured sentence as an indicator of insanity. Tarquin describes his method of discourse as 'twinkly-donnish-but-with-an-edge-of-sexual-danger'; and he regales us with his 'gastro-historico-psycho-autobiographico-anthropico-philosophic lucubrations'.¹⁵³ The advice manual for writers, *The Elements of Style*, describes this type of ornate prose as 'generally unwholesome, and sometimes nauseating'.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, such writing can be expedient when it is symptomatic of an *unwholesome* mind. One sentence in *The Debt to Pleasure* runs to half a page – eighteen lines – and involves two sets of parenthesis, and four languages. 'Vigorous writing is concise,' Strunk and White insist, 'a sentence should contain no unnecessary words.'¹⁵⁵ Effective writing typically demands clarity and succinctness – the continued commercial success of Strunk and White's manual supports this – but a psychotic mind might more plausibly be suggested by a language that 'spews in a stream, like vomit'.¹⁵⁶ When my narrator starts to write about his past, 'the words pour onto the page like a sickness' (213). The intention is to suggest that his emotional response to these memories is unpleasant and out of control. The language is reduced to short *choppy* sentences in Sam's periods of instability, breaking with formal tradition in order to echo his failure to reason in a protracted linear fashion. It is at this point that he admits he can no longer 'catch the language of the words' (228).

¹⁵² Vinitzky, Ilya 'Where Bobok is Buried: The Theosophical Roots of Dostoevskii's 'Fantastic Realism'. *Slavic Review*, Vol 65, No. 3, Autumn 2006, p.542 & Meyer, Ronald in the Introduction to Dostoyevsky, Fyodor *The Gambler and Other Stories*. Translated and introduced by Ronald Meyer. London: Penguin, 2010, p.xxv.

¹⁵³ Lanchester, John *The Debt to Pleasure*. London: Picador, 1996, p. 68, 224.

¹⁵⁴ Strunk, William and E.B. White *The Elements of Style*, 4th edition. New York: Longman, 2000, p.72.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.23.

¹⁵⁶ Shriver, Lionel *We need to Talk about Kevin*. London: Serpents Tail, 2006, p.192.

The most straightforward way for an author to indicate that their narrator is mad is to have the character confess to it – although this will inevitably beg the question of diagnostic capability. Atwood is one of the few authors to confront, and then dismiss, this dilemma: ‘From any rational point of view I am absurd,’ proclaims the narrator of *Surfacing*, ‘but there are no longer any rational points of view’.¹⁵⁷ Werther admitted to passions that were never ‘far off insanity’; Corelli’s Gaston claimed to revel in ‘madness’; and Collins’ Basil acknowledged an ‘awful struggle’ to master his own mind.¹⁵⁸ These narrative proclamations of madness are also prevalent in modern texts. Nabokov’s Humbert records ‘another bout with insanity’; ‘I think I’m losing it,’ announces Bateman in *American Psycho*; while Margaret, the principle narrator of *Affinity* is, ‘perhaps, as mad as I have ever been’.¹⁵⁹ Since declarations of insanity by the insane inevitably carry a taint of unreliability, some authors choose to offset the diagnoses onto other characters. ‘I expect the girl must have taken me for a madman,’ recounts the narrator of *Diary of a Madman*; and Dostoyevsky, who evidently read Gogol with care, has the speaker in *Bobok* divulge that they’ve ‘made me out to be a madman’.¹⁶⁰ Once again, these early texts have their parallels in later culture. ‘You’re mad! How did I never see it before,’ Sheba tells Barbara in *Notes on a Scandal*; while Adiga’s Balram puts an unusual spin on this authorial staple when he accuses the reader of calling him ‘a cold-blooded monster’.¹⁶¹ Subsidiary characters can also contribute to these opinions. Lenny Lennox announces that the heroine of *Cassandra’s Disk* is

¹⁵⁷ Atwood, Margaret *Surfacing*. London: Virago, 2006, p.163.

¹⁵⁸ Goethe, Johan Wolfgang von *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Trans. by M. Hulse. London: Penguin, 1989, p.61; Corelli, Marie *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris*. Chicago: E.A. Weeks & Company, 2004, p.156 & Collins, *Basil*, p.134.

¹⁵⁹ Nabokov, Vladimir *Lolita*. London: Penguin, 1997, p.34; Ellis, Bret Easton *American Psycho*. London: Picador, 1991, p.214 & Waters, Sarah *Affinity*. London: Virago, 2008, p. 256.

¹⁶⁰ Gogol, Nikolai ‘Diary of a Madman’. In *Diary of a Madman and other Stories*. New York: Dover Publications, 2006, p.7 & Dostoyevsky, Fyodor ‘Bobok’, In *The Gambler and Other Stories*, p.274.

¹⁶¹ Heller, Zoë *Notes on a Scandal*. London: Penguin, 2007, p.236 & Adiga, Aravind *The White Tiger*. London: Atlantic Books, 2008, p.315.

‘barmy’; and Shriver’s Eva quotes the help: ‘I was, as our nanny would say, *mental*’.¹⁶²

The reader is left in little doubt of the narrator’s fallibility when such indications accumulate in a text, and when, inevitably, other markers are enlisted to reinforce their suspicions.

Another fictional strategy for indicating insanity whilst circumventing debate about the reliability of the narrator, is the device of displacement. Madness can be deflected onto a scapegoat character, or even on an object. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Gilman displaces the madness of the narrator onto the wall coverings. As Wiesenthal notes, the wallpaper operates as a ‘solution to the problems of unintelligibility raised by the prospect of signifying psychosis from a subjective perspective’.¹⁶³ Günter Grass revisits Gilman’s method in *The Tin Drum*, as his narrator surrenders himself to ‘the madness of the wallpaper, the vertical, horizontal, diagonal madness’.¹⁶⁴ Just as crazy wallpaper can alert the reader to crazy behaviour, another mad character may be introduced to symbolise the path the narrator approaches. Werther passes a fellow on the road who is ‘raving’: ‘they kept him in chains in the madhouse’; Collins’ Basil detected Mrs Sherwin’s mind ‘beginning to give way’; and Frank in *The Wasp Factory* insisted that his brother ‘was crazy’.¹⁶⁵ Whilst the narrators of these texts may appear impervious to their own psychosis, the mad character is a useful tool for foreshadowing the danger.

Oskar, Grass’s narrator, begins his story: ‘I am the inmate of a mental hospital’.¹⁶⁶ This is a logical and pervasive literary device. Cassandra records her disks from ‘Aghios Georghios mental asylum’; *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is set in an

¹⁶² Green, Angela *Cassandra’s Disk*. London: Peter Owen, 2002, p.57; & Shriver, *We need to Talk about Kevin*, p.119.

¹⁶³ Wiesenthal, p.9.

¹⁶⁴ Grass, Günter *The Tin Drum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p.478.

¹⁶⁵ Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p103; Collins, *Basil*, p.121 & Banks, *The Wasp Factory*. London: Abacus, 2011, p.134.

¹⁶⁶ Grass, *The Tin Drum*, p.11.

asylum; and Spider has only recently been released from ‘a hard-bench ward’.¹⁶⁷ Situating the narrative in a psychiatric establishment locates the narrator in a ‘mad environment’, it also allows the author to introduce characters who possess authoritative intelligence. Patrick McGrath, for instance finds opportunity in *Spider* for the physician’s verdict: ‘you were displaying most of the classic symptoms of schizophrenia,’ the doctor informs Spider, ‘hallucinating floridly in the visual, auditory and olfactory spheres’.¹⁶⁸ As evidence, hallucinatory symptoms necessarily rely upon patient testimony, but the reader may conclude that medical opinion authenticates them. By situating a character in an asylum and exposing them to professional scrutiny, the author can at least *suggest* an objective assessment of insanity, however cynical the reader may be of the efficacy of medical opinion.

Symptoms from the Asylum

The initial stages of psychosis, Leader tells us, may be perceptible only through a sense that ‘things have changed’; leaving the victim feeling ‘bewildered’.¹⁶⁹ Literary texts frequently lead into impending madness through a stage of quiet adjustments. ‘My head aches,’ announces the narrator of *Bobok*, ‘something strange is happening to me’; ‘I begin to fear I have grown ill,’ Margaret says in *Affinity*; whilst Eliza Peabody notices only that she doesn’t ‘feel awfully well’.¹⁷⁰ Foucault advises that mania is ‘related to an excessive mobility,’ and fictional psychosis sometimes commences with a leisurely motion that markedly increases in pace.¹⁷¹ ‘I go wandering,’ admits Werther, who progresses to striding ‘agitatedly up and down’; ‘I frequently roamed my flat until three

¹⁶⁷ Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.260; Kesey, Ken *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. London: Penguin, 2005; & McGrath, Patrick *Spider*. London: Penguin, 1992, p.139.

¹⁶⁸ McGrath, *Spider*, p.187.

¹⁶⁹ Leader, Darian *What is Madness?* London: Penguin 2011, p.170-171.

¹⁷⁰ Dostoyevsky, ‘Bobok’, p.276; Waters, *Affinity*, p.90 & Gardam, Jane *The Queen of the Tambourine*. London: Abacus, 2006, p.21.

¹⁷¹ Foucault, Michel *Madness and Civilization*. Trans. by R. Howard. London: Routledge, 1997, p.141.

or even four in the morning,' remarks Barbara, in *Notes on a Scandal*; 'still I paced,' says Margaret Prior.¹⁷² Itinerant behaviour can become a metaphor for the rapid development of insanity, as roaming gives way to a fervid activity that is inconsistent with an untroubled mind: 'I had no resource against the oppression that now overcame me. I could only endeavour to alleviate it by keeping incessantly in action,' Basil says.¹⁷³ Incessant activity, while symptomatic of the depressed mind struggling for diversion, also functions as a potent symbol of the agitated psyche, consequently, my protagonist is often to be found pacing the streets of foreign cities. He embarks upon one particularly long trek over the hills of San Francisco – 'Up and down. Up and down' – to the Golden Gate Bridge, where he intends to kill himself (218).

The more that any activity becomes bizarre or recurrent, the more manic a character can seem. An innocuous action can appear quite abnormal merely through emphasised repetition. Barbara, in *Notes on a Scandal*, smacks the 'steering wheel repeatedly', and with the word *repeatedly*, an expression of annoyance is transformed into an exemplary failure of impulse control.¹⁷⁴ The unnamed narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, whose incarceration and treatment regime afford minimal activity, starts 'creeping', in an echo of the wallpaper image creeping – 'I always lock the door when I creep by daylight,' she says.¹⁷⁵ The verb carries a suggestion of abnormality, but repetition makes the action outlandish. Numerous innocent activities can start in a routine manner and evolve into obsession. 'I began to rock backwards and forwards on the bench (a thing I couldn't control),' remarks Spider; and Cassandra, regresses to

¹⁷² Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p.111, 116; Heller, *Notes on a Scandal*, p.178 & Waters, *Affinity*, p. 257.

¹⁷³ Collins, *Basil*, p.63.

¹⁷⁴ Heller, *Notes on a Scandal*, p.164.

¹⁷⁵ Gilman, Charlotte Perkins 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. In *The Yellow Wallpaper and other Stories*. New York: Dover Publications, 1997, p.14, 12.

‘rocking like a crazy chair that cannot stop’.¹⁷⁶ Self-discipline is at issue here. Manic activity is not necessarily frenzied, but it is often repetitive and compulsive. Indeed, something as innocuous as laughter can be indicative of psychosis if it is delirious or unrestrained, as in Corelli’s *Wormwood*, where it borders ‘on weeping, on frenzy, on madness’.¹⁷⁷ ‘In traditional gothic tales,’ Kate Reeves tells us, ‘laughter typically acts as a mark of madness’.¹⁷⁸ The device may indeed stem from the Gothic, but other genres have since participated in the use of this effective indicator: ‘I can’t hold it back,’ the narrator of *Surfacing* reveals, ‘the laughter extrudes’.¹⁷⁹

Emotional responses do not need to be unrestrained or disaffected, in order to appear manic – they may simply be incongruous. This is the case in *American Psycho*, where Bateman is ‘on the verge of tears by the time we arrive at Pastel’s since I’m positive we won’t get seated’.¹⁸⁰ A grossly disproportionate emotional reaction (in clinical terms, ‘inappropriate affect’) is one of the distinguishing features of madness in Ellis’ novel; that, and the psychopathic sadism.¹⁸¹ The narrator, who ‘can’t help but start laughing’, after attacking a ‘street bum’ with a knife; perversely ‘started to sob’ after watching talking animals on the television.¹⁸² Tarquin Winot exhibits similar levels of incongruous thinking. He confesses to murder but will not divulge his best mushrooming sites; he is also hungry at inappropriate moments: ‘There’s something about inquests and funerals that never fails to sharpen the appetite,’ he says.¹⁸³ He has a mania for lists which verges on the autistic spectrum, describing a ‘large-patterned check suit’, worn with a cerise shirt and ‘a bow tie with yellow polka dots against a

¹⁷⁶ McGrath, *Spider*, p.165 & Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.81.

¹⁷⁷ Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.248.

¹⁷⁸ Reeves, Kate *Laughter and Madness in Post-War American Fiction*. PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2000, p.106.

¹⁷⁹ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.178.

¹⁸⁰ Ellis, *American Psycho*, p.39.

¹⁸¹ DSM-5, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th edn. Washington: American Psychiatric Association Press, 2013, p.817.

¹⁸² Ellis, *American Psycho*, p.132, 250.

¹⁸³ Lanchester, *The Debt to Pleasure*, p.166.

light blue background'.¹⁸⁴ It is not so much the outlandish ensemble – mixing spots, checks and clashing colours – that signifies insanity, it is the incongruity of detail at a time when he is plotting murder. Bateman, in *American Psycho*, has a similar avidity for cataloguing his wardrobe, especially when a description of clothing is inapt: 'I put on a new suit (by Cerruti 1881), gave myself a pedicure and tortured to death a small dog.'¹⁸⁵ Irregular value judgements predominate in these narratives, and they epitomise irregular mental states. In my own novel, Sam's pyromania – deployed as a method for attracting heroic opportunity – is a calculated ruse to illustrate how completely he has lost control of his life.¹⁸⁶ There is historical precedent for 'inappropriate affect' even though the clinical term is modern. Gilman's narrator, in an effort to eliminate a bad smell, 'thought seriously of burning the house'.¹⁸⁷ It is another case of problem-solving that might be described as *insanely* disproportionate.

Cavalier acceptance of violence can also be used to suggest psychosis. 'I might thrust my sword through his body,' Werther muses, 'the sight of blood might afford me some relief.'¹⁸⁸ Myra Breckinridge claims to personify the credo that 'death and destruction, hate and rage,' are the 'most characteristic of human attributes'; and the narrator of *The Wasp Factory* announces that 'a death is always exciting'.¹⁸⁹ Self-inflicted violence further enforces the presence of insanity. Werther, when not imagining thrusting his sword into another, deliberates plunging a knife into himself: 'I am tempted to open a vein and so find eternal freedom,' he says.¹⁹⁰ 'Self-mutilation,' as

¹⁸⁴ Lanchester, *The Debt to Pleasure*, p.163.

¹⁸⁵ Ellis, *American Psycho*, p.139.

¹⁸⁶ For pyromania as a form of impulse control disorder see Davison, Gerald C. & John M. Neale *Abnormal Psychology*. 8th edn. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2001, p.66.

¹⁸⁷ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, p.11.

¹⁸⁸ Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p.83.

¹⁸⁹ Vidal, Gore *Myra Breckinridge*. London: Anthony Blond, 1968, p.117 & Banks, *The Wasp Factory*, p.48.

¹⁹⁰ Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p.83. Roquentin also distracts himself 'from thinking' by jabbing a knife into the palm of his hand. Sartre, Jean-Paul *Nausea*. Trans. by R. Baldick. London: Penguin, 1965, p.145.

Leader notes, ‘may be one way of trying to remove libido from the body in schizophrenia.’¹⁹¹ In fiction, abusive behaviour of all types successfully betrays diverse psychotic disorders by establishing the detrimental absence of impulse control. Sexual deviation and abuse, for example, are also common: ‘The things I could do to this girl’s body with a hammer,’ Bateman announces, ‘the words I could carve into her with an ice pick’; and Eva admits to ‘sordid sexual fantasies, in such disturbing violation of heterosexual norms’.¹⁹² Cassandra runs the gamut of excess: ‘(a) promiscuity, (b) real, contributory or imagined manslaughter, (c) incestuous desires, (d) assault and (e) adultery.’¹⁹³ Sexual deviation and abuse, as Roy Porter remarks, were considered by Victorian psychiatry to well up ‘from subterranean psychopathologies’.¹⁹⁴ As a fictional indicator of insanity, sexual deviancy has never gone out of date.

Psychoactive substances offer further opportunity for revealing dissipation. Werther regrets the ‘excess’ that led him to empty the bottle when on occasion he drank ‘a glass of wine’.¹⁹⁵ Humbert, nearly two centuries later, swallowed ‘pony upon pony of gin’; Myra confessed to a hangover from ‘mixing gin and marijuana’; and Eva, on top of her ‘recreational drugs’, was ‘the family booze hound’.¹⁹⁶ My Sam is addicted to psychoactive substances – alcohol and stolen prescription drugs. None of this may strike the modern reader as *madly* excessive, but when weighed up alongside other symptoms, it has a cumulative effect. Tarquin announces that ‘the end-of-day drink functions as the point at which one exchanges personae’.¹⁹⁷ This change of personality signals a switch,

¹⁹¹ Leader, p.135.

¹⁹² Ellis, *American Psycho*, p.112 & Shriver, *We need to Talk about Kevin*, p.76.

¹⁹³ Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.162-3.

¹⁹⁴ Porter, *Roy Madmen: A Social History of Madhouses, Mad-doctors & Lunatics*. Stroud: Tempus, 2004, p.205.

¹⁹⁵ Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p.99.

¹⁹⁶ Nabokov, *Lolita*, p.236; Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge*, p.48 & Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, p.378, 403.

¹⁹⁷ Lanchester, *The Debt to Pleasure*, p.123.

a ‘Jekyll-and-Hyde’ moment that allows the author to unleash an almost entirely new character.

Disassociation, Disconnect, Doubles

The Doppelgänger has a strong pedigree in fiction, and the attraction of the Double as a literary device is that it can be used in both subtle and shocking ways. I alluded earlier to the scapegoat – often a minor character in the plot – who functions as a symbolic displacement of the madness of the protagonist. However, doubling does not necessitate another character. It can be the assumption made when an individual loses, or confuses, their sense of self. A character might express a sense of *otherness*, as Basil does when he reveals that he ‘seemed to be speaking as the mere mouthpiece of some other voice’.¹⁹⁸ Laing describes the phenomena of the ‘unembodied self’ as a position in which ‘the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body’.¹⁹⁹ This phenomena manifests in various ways in literature. It may be merely a sensation of morphological change – as when Margaret in *Affinity* announces: ‘my lips, my tongue, my eyes felt quite unlike my own’.²⁰⁰ At the other end of the spectrum the character undergoes an experience of psychic depersonalization – described by Louis Sass as the point where the mind and body appear to exist ‘apart’.²⁰¹

In fiction a sense of disassociation is often characterised by a slippage of perspective. It was a ruse that Atwood used in her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, where the disaffected narrator slipped into the third person for more than half of the novel and returned, saying pointedly: ‘now that I was thinking of myself in the first person

¹⁹⁸ Collins, *Basil*, p.128.

¹⁹⁹ Laing, R.D. *The Divided Self*. London: Penguin, 1969, p.69.

²⁰⁰ Waters, *Affinity*, p.258.

²⁰¹ Sass, Louis, et al ‘Anomalous self-experience in depersonalization and schizophrenia: A comparative investigation’ in *Consciousness and Cognition* 22 (2013) pp.430–441, p. 435.

singular again'.²⁰² The latter part of *American Psycho* is notable for sudden shifts from first person to third. 'You shouldn't fawn over him,' Bateman says, referring to himself.²⁰³ It is a familiar trick for an author who, as Blanchot observed in *The Space of Literature*, inevitably moves 'from the first to the third person' whenever they write.²⁰⁴ Grass employed a particularly unusual slant on this effect when he moved the dialogue of *The Tin Drum* into dramatic form within a chapter of first-person narration. The dislocation of first-person perspective suggests a type of dissociative disorder or *ipseity disturbance*.²⁰⁵ Changing pronominals without changing focalization is an established fictional mechanism for representing the breakdown of logic and identity; and it is a phenomenon with a medical, as well as a literary, history. Ingram records the case-history of Hannah Allen, who moved 'disconcertingly between a first and third person narrative'; and Louis Sass and his colleagues document cases of depersonalization with symptoms including 'identity confusion', 'ontological anxiety', and a 'distorted first-person perspective'.²⁰⁶

In two highly charged scenes in my own novel, I have implemented a pronounced pronominal switch. Sam's appropriation of the second-person pronoun in these passages, exploits a device that, as Monika Fludernik says, 'sticks out', and attracts to itself an interest in its 'significance'.²⁰⁷ The referent 'you' not only suggests acute detachment, but, through its lack of familiarity to readers is empowering to a *mad text*. Changing pronominals without changing focalization is an established fictional mechanism for representing the breakdown of logic and identity. "'Who am I?' I said to

²⁰² Atwood, Margaret *The Edible Woman*. London: Virago, 1983, p.278.

²⁰³ Ellis, *American Psycho*, p.372-3.

²⁰⁴ Blanchot, Maurice *The Space of Literature*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1982, p133.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Sass, L. & J. Parnas 'Schizophrenia, consciousness, and the self.' *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2003. pp. 427-444, p. 428.

²⁰⁶ Ingram, Allan ed. *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998, p.29 & Sass, 'Anomalous self-experience in depersonalization and schizophrenia: A comparative investigation', p. 435.

²⁰⁷ Fludernik, Monika 'Second-person narrative as a test case for narratology: The limits of realism' in *Style*. Fall94. Vol. 28 Issue 3. pp. 445-480.

myself as I walked up the stairs. ‘Who are you? What do you want?’” (227). The second-person narrative intensifies the sense of doubling of Sam’s character, and is an affirmation of the relationship he still has with his dead brother. ‘The shadow of David, my older brother but my twin in spirit, fell across my thought. If he had lived he would have been the better man; and I wished I could offer him my life. Instead’ (224).

If speaking of oneself in the third person, or referring to oneself by name is one signifier of disassociation, another is abandoning one’s name entirely. It is noteworthy that several texts of madness obscure the narrator’s name. *The Yellow Wallpaper* has an unnamed narrator, as does *Surfacing*. One of Lessing’s heroines reflected that names were ‘meaningless for women, since they are all male-derived’; but this is not sufficient vindication for the concealment of names in fictions of madness.²⁰⁸ A nameless character is emblematic of depersonalization, as is a character who hides behind multiple identities. In *The Tin Drum*, Oskar admits that he uses ‘all sorts of names’; Humbert assures us that his name is a fabrication; and the narrator of *Affinity* is divided between two names and two identities – ‘Now when I tried to be *Margaret* again, I couldn’t. It seemed to me that she had dwindled, like a suit of clothes’.²⁰⁹

Leader claims that ‘the disintegration of the body is common in psychosis,’ and several literary texts employ a symbolic level of fragmentation to represent psychic alienation.²¹⁰ ‘It doesn’t feel quite *real*,’ says Eva, ‘and neither do I’; ‘I examine my fingernails,’ Eliza announces, ‘they have begun to look unfamiliar’; and Spider also has fingers that seem ‘not to belong to me at all’.²¹¹ Cognitive disintegration reaches its apotheosis in *Surfacing* where the narrator is physically alienated in entirety: ‘when I

²⁰⁸ Martha Quest Hesse, cited in Rigney, Barbara Hill *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980, p.121.

²⁰⁹ Grass, *The Tin Drum*, p.319 & Waters, *Affinity*, p.242.

²¹⁰ Leader, p.45.

²¹¹ Shriver, *We need to Talk about Kevin*, p.6 (Shriver’s italics); Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.109 & McGrath, *Spider*, p.13.

am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface'.²¹² Her sense of unreality is such that she can say: 'I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place.'²¹³ It is a sentiment echoed by the narrator of *The Wasp Factory*: 'often I've thought of myself as a state; a country or, at the very least, a city'.²¹⁴

The idea of self/other is frequently played out in fiction in the liminal space of the mirror. A reflection, like a double, is simultaneously alike and altered. 'I'd take a look at my own self in the mirror,' says Big Chief, 'and I'd think. That ain't me, that ain't my face'.²¹⁵ For many literary psychotics the mirror is a thing of danger, 'it is a trap'; 'I reverse the mirror so it's toward the wall,' says the narrator of *Surfacing*, 'it no longer traps me'.²¹⁶ The mirror can provoke feelings of uncertainty about identity, but it can also have a reassuring role. Psychosis sometimes manifests itself as narcissistic scopophilia, which Julia Kristeva describes as 'the need for a mirror or an identifying addressee'.²¹⁷ The mirror can enable the psychotic mind to *realise* itself from a place where nothing seems whole. My character, Sam, searches for himself in the mirror, as a sign of reassurance, but it is as hard to find himself there as it was to apprehend the language of the words. In an earlier stage of the narrative, he suffers a momentary psychic split, in that the mirror image reveals a stranger: he can 'hardly recognise' himself (116). Rigney reads the recurring mirror image in Atwood's novels as 'a symbol of the split self', a customary interpretation, but the symbolic functions of the

²¹² Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.172.

²¹³ *Ibid*, p.175.

²¹⁴ Banks, *The Wasp Factory*, p.76.

²¹⁵ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, p.140. Big Chief also experiences a physically split: 'I feel like I'm floating in the dusty yellow air,' -'I could look down and see myself. 'p.155, 215.

²¹⁶ Sartre, *Nausea*, p.30 & Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.169.

²¹⁷ Kristeva, in Oliver, Kelly *The Portable Kristeva*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p.50. Compare also Sass, Louis A. *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*. London: Harvard Press, 1994, p.44, with regard to the schizoid individual and the *signe du miroir*. 'He may also stare at himself in a glass as if transfixed by the strangeness of his own reflection.'

mirror are numerous.²¹⁸ The mirror is a space of ‘you or me’, Leader claims, ‘that’s why mirror situations can be of great danger both for the psychotic subject and to those around them’.²¹⁹ ‘I must stop being in the mirror,’ the narrator of *Surfacing* announces, personifying her fragmented ego.²²⁰

‘Sometimes I wonder how I can live with myself,’ protests Cassandra, exposing a similar ontological rupture.²²¹ Madness, as we have seen, is a lonely place, and nobody wants to be alone with a lunatic, not even the lunatic. One solution, as Cassandra found, is to imaginatively double yourself up: ‘the Big Bad Baby and I clasped heartening, blood-sister hands’.²²² This isn’t always a successful operation. The narrator of *Surfacing* allowed herself to be ‘cut in two,’ but then found that ‘the other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live: I was the wrong half, detached, terminal’.²²³ Frank, in *The Wasp Factory*, decides he is not two individuals but ‘lots of different people’; moreover, he has a character double who prefigures and emphasises his psychosis: his brother Eric. ‘Whatever it was that disintegrated in Eric then, it was a weakness, a fundamental flaw.’²²⁴ Freud maintained that the double was a manifestation of ‘the archaic, narcissistic self’, who ‘projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant’.²²⁵ This outsourcing of psychic angst can manifest in fiction either as an internal fracture; or as a projection onto a mirror image or another character. Freud associated the double with the *unheimlich*, or uncanny, something fearful and inexplicable; however Jung favoured the less threatening term ‘shadow’.²²⁶ If negative characteristics could be displaced, then doubles could

²¹⁸ Rigney, p.94.

²¹⁹ Leader, p.313.

²²⁰ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.169.

²²¹ Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.231.

²²² *Ibid*, p.218.

²²³ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.102.

²²⁴ Banks, *The Wasp Factory*, p.76, 195.

²²⁵ Cited in Oliver, p.283.

²²⁶ Stevens, Anthony *On Jung*. London: Routledge, 1990, p.43.

potentially be palliative as well as fearsome. ‘The false self,’ as Laing says, ‘is one way of not being oneself’; it is also one way of being somebody else that one would rather be.²²⁷ In *The Queen of the Tambourine*, Eliza lives at number 43 with an imaginary Doppelgänger in number 34. Joan, her Double, is the image of ‘the busy, happy woman’ Eliza used to be.²²⁸ She sets off around the world into adventures Eliza can only covet. Anna Wulf has a series of doubles. She claims she has ‘two personalities’, but in a sense each of her five notebooks contains a different version of herself. ‘Why do you write things in different kinds of handwriting?’ she is asked, and the answer is that she is ‘afraid of being chaotic’, and this splitting and reworking her life in fiction is a way of ‘concealing something’ from herself.²²⁹ Gilbert and Gubar observed that the fictional madwoman was a ‘double’ of the female author, through which they acknowledge ‘the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be’.²³⁰ Although this formula is too out-dated a generalisation to be used effectively, in Lessing’s case it is probably true. Anna’s fragmentation does seem to mirror that of the author, and it takes many forms. In particular there is a rupture of words and meaning which suggests the frustration of writer’s block. ‘I find myself listening to a sentence, a phrase, a group of words, as if they are in a foreign language,’ Anna exclaims, ‘the gap between what they are supposed to mean, and what in fact they say seems unbridgeable’.²³¹ This failure in communication is, like fragmentation, an important feature of many *mad* texts.

²²⁷ Laing, p.94.

²²⁸ Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.218, 197.

²²⁹ Lessing, Doris *The Golden Notebook*. London: Harper Collins, 2007p.156, 246-247, 211.

²³⁰ Gilbert, Sandra & Susan Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic*. London: Yale University Press, 1984, p.78.

²³¹ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.272.

Discourse Failures

The breakdown of discourse is a challenging process for a writer to convey. If a psychotic character reaches a point, as in *Nausea*, where words ‘have disappeared, and with them the meaning of things’, how can a first-person narrative articulate this experience?²³² Anna Wulf grapples with her native vocabulary as if with a ‘foreign language’ – ‘I am increasingly afflicted by vertigo where words mean nothing,’ she says.²³³ In *Surfacing*, the narrator expresses a similar alienation from her known languages: ‘It must be either English or French but I can’t recognize it as any language I’ve ever heard’.²³⁴ There is the sense that the words mean something – they are recognizable as language – but the conceit is that they no longer mean anything *to the character*. The author and narrator are reliant upon words, but the character professes a rupture with meaning, and so with reality itself. ‘Words are form, and if I am at a pitch where shape, form, expression are nothing, then I am nothing’, Anna Wulf relates.²³⁵ Language is both communication and comprehension – we realize our world through the words we use to describe it. As Saussure said, ‘without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula’.²³⁶ Madness can involve a rupture with both language and reason, but in fiction it must be portrayed both logically and linguistically. The author of a mad narrator may need to access an alternative form of language to elucidate the mad experience. ‘Language divides us into fragments,’ the narrator of *Surfacing* says, ‘I wanted to be whole’ – but ‘first I had to immerse myself in the other language.’²³⁷

²³² Sartre, *Nausea*, p.182.

²³³ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.272, 418.

²³⁴ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.178.

²³⁵ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.419.

²³⁶ (sic) Saussure, Ferdinand de ‘Course in General Linguistics’ in Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh, eds. *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. 3rd edn. London: Arnold, 1997, pp.8-15, p.9.

²³⁷ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.139, 152.

Julia Kristeva proposed the notion of a ‘semiotic chora’ – the source of a pre-oedipal language, which could modify ‘banal, logical order by linguistic distortions’.²³⁸ Semiotic discourse offers an insight into the kinds of speech sometimes used to characterise madness in monologic fiction. Kristeva made a study of ‘the moments where language breaks up in psychosis’; allowing that creativity as well as suffering could inhabit such ‘moments of instability’.²³⁹ The semiotic has elements of ‘Magic, shamanism, esotericism, the carnival’; it is ‘fluid and plural, a kind of pleasurable creative excess over precise meaning’; it is the double of social and cultural speech and yet an alternative modality within ‘the same signifying process’.²⁴⁰ Authors rightly use metaphor, metonymy, rhythm, repetition, and other complex idioms in pursuit of originality. This condensation and displacement of logical order offers a route into language that can be appropriated and exaggerated in the pursuit of monologic madness. Psychotics, for example, may be captivated, as writers sometimes are, by the *sound* of words rather than their meaning. Patrick McGrath alternates rhythmic and repetitive forms of speech in *Spider*, as his narrator learns ‘to give them a good lunatic’: ‘bloody nerve, nerve, nervous disease’; ‘Horace – Horrors! Horrors Cleg!’; ‘ragged, jagged tears’.²⁴¹ Repetitive speech such as this signals a dislocation between sign and signified. It is typical of the genera of psychoses where words either become disconnected from meanings, or, as Leader says, ‘too connected’.²⁴² The repetition of the word ‘bobok’, the Russian for ‘bean’, in Dostoyevsky’s story of the same name exemplifies the former; as does the narrator of *Surfacing* remonstrating over the ‘mirages raised by words’, while reciting to herself the nonsense mantra ‘love conquers all, conquerors

²³⁸ Kristeva, Julia ‘A Question of Subjectivity – An Interview’, in Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh, pp. 131-137, p.134.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, p.134, 132.

²⁴⁰ Kristeva, Julia in Oliver, p.30, 34 & Eagleton, Terry *Literary Theory*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p.163.

²⁴¹ McGrath, *Spider*, p.175, 172.

²⁴² Leader, p.73.

love all'.²⁴³ Both acts of repetition give a sense of disengagement between sign and signifier, where the repeated word vainly chases after its essence. An example of a word being too literally connected to meaning can be found in *The Queen of the Tambourine*, where Eliza dismembers the word judgemental: 'So judgemental? Judge – mental? Judges are mental.'²⁴⁴ Nonsense speech, clanging (where sound takes precedent over meaning), perseveration and echolalia (repetition) are typical of severe psychosis and easy to replicate in fictional madness; as is the sort of choppy speech (cluttering) exemplified in *Bobok* and *Diary of a Madman*.²⁴⁵ Prolixity is another symptom readily introduced on the written page, as noted vis-à-vis Tarquin Winot's adjectival extravagances. 'You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style,' Humbert exclaims.²⁴⁶ I experimented with clanging and glossomania in *Headlong*. Sam manifests a predilection for rhyme and alliteration – 'storks stalking'; 'timber-limbed'; and 'love tales over cocktails' are among his more obvious word games (162, 146, 141).²⁴⁷ 'Call me Dolores like they do in the stories,' he says, aping Dylan Thomas (141).

Laing asserted that 'one of the greatest barriers against getting to know a schizophrenic is his sheer incomprehensibility', the same can be true of the fictional psychotic; if the language descends too far into 'nonsense, red-herring speech, prolonged filibustering', how can the character be comprehensible?²⁴⁸ Or, as Charley Baker says: 'what of the need for coherency in narratives of incoherency?'²⁴⁹ It appears that some readers struggled, for instance, to follow the confused reasoning in Quentin Compson's section of *The Sound and the Fury* that signified the disintegration of logic

²⁴³ Dostoyevsky, 'Bobok', p.276 & Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.158.

²⁴⁴ Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.193.

²⁴⁵ Bentall, *Richard Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature*. London: Penguin, 2004, p.385.

²⁴⁶ Nabokov, *Lolita*, p.9.

²⁴⁷ Sass speaks of *glossomania* in which 'the flow of speech will be channelled largely by acoustic qualities'. Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p.178.

²⁴⁸ Laing, p.163-164.

²⁴⁹ Baker, Charley *et al. Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p.26.

and identity: 'i you dont believe i am serious and he i think you are too serious'.²⁵⁰

Faulkner conveyed the confused mind of his character through a breakdown in common patterns of logical thought and communication, but the sense of the writing became obscured, and the readership demanded an elucidatory appendix.²⁵¹ One way of indicating the incoherence of mad dialogue without actually writing it, is to displace it from the linguistic to the visual sphere, as in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The madness of the wallpaper combines both a duality with the narrator and a metaphor for her psychosis. As Wiesenthal states, 'Gilman effectively teaches us, without ever having to tell us, that the "language" of madness presupposes a semiotic mode that is in part visual.'²⁵² 'It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight,' the narrator announces, and yet her speech does not falter in its logic.²⁵³

As well as displacing madness in fiction out of the dialogic sphere, breakdown and incoherency can be symbolized in the physical representation of the words on the page. In *Notes on a Scandal*, this is achieved with a passage of scored writing: '~~Damn her Damn her~~'.²⁵⁴ The battle between passion and restraint is played out in the combined statement and retraction. In *Clarissa* the narrator's musings become as materially disjointed as their owner is perceived to be mentally: 'what she writes, she tears, and throws the paper in fragments under the table, either as not knowing what she does, or disliking it.'²⁵⁵ Clarissa describes herself 'tearing what I scribbled as fast as I wrote it'; and scraps of her disintegrating dialogue are inserted into the prose: 'Paper I', described as 'Torn in two pieces'; 'Paper II', 'Scatched through, and thrown under the

²⁵⁰ Faulkner, William *The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Vintage, 1990, p.176.

²⁵¹ Ousby, Ian ed. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.890. The novel was published in 1929, and Faulkner capitulated to readers' demands, and added an appendix in 1946.

²⁵² Wiesenthal, p.26.

²⁵³ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, p.7.

²⁵⁴ Heller, *Notes on a Scandal*, p.238.

²⁵⁵ Richardson, *Clarissa*, p.889.

table'.²⁵⁶ Fragments of writing become a metaphor for the fragmented mental state of the writer. This is a ruse I developed for my own novel, where Sam, in a state of breakdown that leaves him unable to articulate the words he wants to say, assembles 'cuttings' from the *Times of India*: 'mouthfuls of words, sound bites, gobs' (223).

In *The Golden Notebook*, Anna begins four notebooks, each with long lucid passages which lapse into fragments and 'newspaper cuttings'.²⁵⁷ These repeated narrative disintegrations symbolise her collapse, and the consequent breakdown of meaning for her in the recorded word. The notebooks explore the many facets of Anna's divided personality, but they are all reduced to incomprehensible scraps. She is incapable, finally, of making sense of these 'bits of print'.²⁵⁸ In *Basil*, the journal entries become briefer, and the writing, we are told, becomes 'illegible' as 'the simplest forms of expression confused themselves'.²⁵⁹ This descent into illegibility, or incomprehensibility, mirrors the onset of incoherent thought; either into a place of semantic dislocation where words and meaning unravel, or into discourse failure in which logic is redefined and narrative voices must transform to portray this.

Illusions and Delusions

Hearing voices, as we know from the 'Rosenhan experiment' of 1973, may be the one symptom that by itself can merit a diagnosis of madness.²⁶⁰ Oliver Sacks assures us that 'most people who do hear voices are not schizophrenic'; but the phenomenon of auditory hallucination is, nevertheless, highly effective as a cypher for psychosis in fiction.²⁶¹ 'Wild voices sang, shouted, and yelled in my ears "Kill! Kill! Kill him!"',

²⁵⁶ Richardson, *Clarissa*, p.1011, 890.

²⁵⁷ Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.394.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.565.

²⁵⁹ Collins, *Basil*, p.260.

²⁶⁰ Rosenhan, D.L. 'On being Sane in Insane Places'. *Science*, 19 January 1973. Vol 179. no 4070.

²⁶¹ Sacks, Oliver *Hallucinations*. London: Picador, 2012, p.56.

reveals Gaston; ‘Satan whispered within me,’ Oskar claims; ‘the chant,’ Spider says, went ‘Kill her kill her’.²⁶² Voices run the gamut from disembodied and malicious, as these are, to mundane but originating from an unlikely source. Eliza perceives the dog speaking: “‘Oh well, OK”, says Toby, dubiously, going out’.²⁶³ In *Diary of a Madman*, dogs speak, conduct love affairs and even write letters: ‘Dogs are intelligent people, they understand all about politic relations.’²⁶⁴ In *Bobok*, the dead speak from their graves, and have quite commonplace conversations. One fellow, we are told, is almost completely decomposed, ‘but once every six weeks he’ll still suddenly mutter a word’.²⁶⁵ This *bizarre* delusion is sufficient to confirm the madness of the narrator, in that the voices of cadavers impugn all logical comprehension.²⁶⁶

Hallucinations of sight, smell and sound, have customarily been acknowledged as symptomatic of insanity – Sacks uses the terms ‘phantopsia’, ‘phantosmia’, and ‘phantacusic’ – but there are also ‘tactile hallucinations’.²⁶⁷ These illusions are useful fictionally both as instantly recognisable indicators of madness, and for their symbolic effect. One of the more subtle auditory hallucinations is ringing in the ears. ‘I still heard that sound my heart had knocked ringing in my head,’ exclaims Big Chief.²⁶⁸ In reality this sort of symptom could be tinnitus, but it is weighted in the context of the novel by the symbolism of the beating heart and the implied sense of alarm (or even *an* alarm). ‘Anyone can have a hallucination,’ Leader avers, ‘but for it to really count as a psychotic phenomenon it must have an effect of meaning for the person’.²⁶⁹ Essentially, anything can constitute delusion if it is situated as such for the character. The most

²⁶² Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.189; Grass, *The Tin Drum*, p.352 & McGrath, *Spider*, p.155.

²⁶³ Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.161.

²⁶⁴ Gogol, *Diary of a Madman*, p.7.

²⁶⁵ Dostoyevsky, ‘Bobok’, p.288.

²⁶⁶ ‘Delusions are deemed bizarre if they are clearly implausible and not understandable to same-culture peers’. DSM-5, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th edn. Washington: American Psychiatric Association Press, 2013, p.87.

²⁶⁷ Sacks, p.48, 82.

²⁶⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, p.168-9.

²⁶⁹ Leader, p.164.

customary phantasmia in fiction is an unidentifiable odour, it materializes in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and several other texts.²⁷⁰ ‘There came such a hellish stench from under every gateway,’ writes Gogol; and Dostoyevsky makes it clear in *Bobok* that this odour ‘is a moral stench!’²⁷¹ ‘Sometimes smells haunt me as much as voices,’ Sam reveals early in my novel: the smell of vomit, which he associates with his mother’s death, and later the smell of coffin flowers (55).

The greatest scope for extravagant hallucination in fiction lies, not in smell or sound, however, but with visions. Gaston in *Wormwood* endures nights ‘of wakeful visions’ as he chases the Absinthe fairy; these include ‘spectres’, and ‘voices’, and diverse ‘flying phantasmagoria’.²⁷² Basil also sees ‘visions of flying phantoms’.²⁷³ The visitations experienced by Eliza include people ‘suspended in the air’, and beds that ‘spin’ out of windows: ‘I suppose this is all true?’ Eliza says, ‘I’ve been having a bit of trouble with what is and what isn’t lately’.²⁷⁴ Bateman watches his friend’s head metamorphose into ‘a talking vagina’; Cassandra’s floor ‘is alive with grey scurrying bodies’, and Balram sees ‘a pyramid of motorbike helmets that resembles ‘a pile of severed heads’.²⁷⁵ Tempting as it was to plague my protagonist with outlandish visions, I concluded that auditory and olfactory hallucinations were sufficient torment, and Sam’s visions are restricted to re-lived memories of his brother’s fatal accident, and the sight of his dead father, in New York, ‘walking down the road’ (121).

Hallucinations may also manifest as delusions of perception. Big Chief is convinced that ‘Nurse is able to set the wall clock at whatever speed she wants’; and

²⁷⁰ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, p.11.

²⁷¹ Gogol, *Diary of a Madman*, p.7. & Dostoyevsky, ‘Bobok’, p.288.

²⁷² Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.117, 322, 151.

²⁷³ Collins, *Basil*, p.140.

²⁷⁴ Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.53, 36, 214.

²⁷⁵ Ellis, *American Psycho*, p.108; Green, *Cassandra’s Disk*, p.243; & Adiga, *The White Tiger*, p.268.

Eva fears that her new-born son is an ‘unusually cunning individual’.²⁷⁶ In *Nausea*, the narrator complains that ‘objects start existing’: ‘Objects ought not to *touch*,’ Roquentin says, ‘they are not alive’.²⁷⁷ Just as the subject of Sartre’s novel begins to disintegrate, and can find ‘nothing human’ in his reflection, objects form themselves in human ways – ‘clothes have become living things’.²⁷⁸ This confusion of object and subject was also experienced by Poe’s Pym, who dreamed of trees ‘endowed with a human vitality’.²⁷⁹ In a later text, *Surfacing*, the metamorphosis is from subject to object: ‘the others are already turning to metal’, the narrator exclaims, as her partner ‘unzips his human skin’.²⁸⁰ Paranoia is one of the strongest manifestations of psychotic *mis*-perception. In *Lolita*, Humbert’s paranoia manifests as a ‘persecution mania’.²⁸¹ Tarquin is fixated on the idea that he is being shadowed, although he is the one equipped with *The Mossad Manual of Surveillance Techniques*; Myra believes that her doctors are ‘with the CIA’; and Spider suspects that his father controls his ‘thoughts and movements’.²⁸²

Delusion in fiction, as in reality, has a history of influence from the animal world. Max Byrd states that ‘the identification of insanity with animality and excrement conveys perfectly the degradation that madness meant to the early eighteenth century’.²⁸³ Suzanne, in *The Nun*, tore at her clothes with her teeth like an animal, but a similar trope of animality occurs centuries later, when Margaret, in *Affinity*, rips her sheets with her teeth.²⁸⁴ The narrator of *Wormwood* was described as a ‘shuffling beast’ in 1890, and bestial motifs are still appearing in contemporary literature: ‘I leave my

²⁷⁶ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, p.68 & Shriver, *We need to talk about Kevin*, p.103.

²⁷⁷ Sartre, *Nausea*, p.176, 22.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.31, 226.

²⁷⁹ Poe, Edgar Allan *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.21.

²⁸⁰ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.153-154.

²⁸¹ Nabokov, *Lolita*, p.236

²⁸² Lanchester, *The Debt to Pleasure*, p.115; Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge*, p.189 & McGrath, *Spider*, p.215.

²⁸³ Byrd, Max *Visits to Bedlam*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1975, p.53-4.

²⁸⁴ Diderot, Denis *The Nun*, trans be R. Goulbourne. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, p.42 & Waters, *Affinity*, p.342.

ding, dropping on the ground and kick earth over,' announces the narrator of *Surfacing*, 'all animals with dens do that.'²⁸⁵

Myra announced that 'soon, I shall cease altogether to be human', but it was not the animal kingdom she coveted – she aimed to 'become legend like Jesus, Buddha, Cybele'.²⁸⁶ Delusion frequently takes the form of divine afflatus in fiction. 'I felt as if I had been made a god in that overwhelming abundance,' Werther declared, 'I was no longer a mere mortal'; and Oskar boasts 'with a snap of my fingers I can equal if not surpass God the father.'²⁸⁷ Carole Neely records that, 'In the Middle Ages, and also in Greek and Latin drama, for different reasons, madness was often seen as a point of intersection between the human, the divine, and the demonic'; and in *Surfacing*, the human baby envisaged by the narrator manages to unite the bestial with godhood and the satanic – it will be a 'fur god with tails and horns,' she says.²⁸⁸ Satan features in the literature of madness with almost as much regularity as God, if only as a relic from the days when madness allied itself with evil spirits. Gaston speaks of 'the demon' within him; Humbert accuses Lolita of being, 'some immortal daemon disguised as a female child'; Anna remarks that 'the devils had gone' as her madness ebbs; and Eliza notes that when the lights go on, 'Satan flits away'.²⁸⁹

When the lights go out, dreams may supersede consciousness, and Sacks notes that some would propose a 'continuum of dream states and hallucinations' rather than an absolute separation of waking and somnolent consciousness.²⁹⁰ In the fiction of madness, dreams and wakefulness are interchangeable arenas for the portrayal of psychotic interludes. The interpretation of dreams has, after all, been acknowledged by

²⁸⁵ Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.324 & Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.172.

²⁸⁶ Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge*, p.9.

²⁸⁷ Goethe, *The Sorrows of young Werther*, p.65, 41 & Grass, *The Tin Drum*, p.343.

²⁸⁸ Neely, Carol Thomas *Distracted Subjects*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2004, p.47 & Atwood, *Surfacing*, p.175.

²⁸⁹ Corelli, *Wormwood*, p.139, 283; Nabokov, *Lolita*, p.138; Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p.531 & Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.210.

²⁹⁰ Sacks, p.xiii.

Freud as ‘the via regia to a *knowledge of the unconscious*’; and Foucault remarked that ‘dreams and madness’ often appear to be of the same substance.²⁹¹ Pym complains of dreams ‘of the most terrific description’; and in a later text, Margaret experiences ‘a night of terrible dreams’.²⁹² Prevalent as these mad dreams are, more common still are sleep disorders, insomnia, hypersomnia and dysomnia, which leave the victim in a state fit for madness. ‘I was totally deprived of sleep,’ says Suzanne in *The Nun*, ‘they did all they could to weaken my health and derange my mind’.²⁹³ ‘Sleep and I have quarrelled,’ laments Clarissa; ‘I have lain awake all night,’ says Eliza, and later – ‘I haven’t needed sleep for months’.²⁹⁴ Basil can only manage ‘a restless, feverish slumber’; Barbara is ‘sleeping very badly’; and Eva is ‘trying to go cold turkey on sleeping pills’.²⁹⁵ Sleep deprivation or disturbance is a constant theme in the literature of madness and often alluded to as the medium in which madness manifests. ‘I do so want to sleep,’ observes Roquentin; and Margaret complains that there is ‘no-one and nothing so weary as I’.²⁹⁶ The hunger for sleep is an ideal backdrop for delusion, and dream images can be as effective, in literature, as hallucinations that arrive in the light of day. My own narrator suffers terrible insomnia, and dream imagery of ‘forbidden things and forbidden people’ taunt him when he does find sleep (165).

Illusions and delusions are amongst the most efficient methods of portraying insanity in monologic fiction. They can function symbolically, and they have conventional and historical associations with insanity. The most powerful conviction, which in the texts of madness is most often represented as a delusion, is the belief that one would be better off dead. Werther speaks of ‘the joyful prospect of ending my

²⁹¹ Freud, Sigmund *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1997, p.441 & Foucault, p.102.

²⁹² Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, p.21 & Waters, *Affinity*, p.89.

²⁹³ Diderot, *The Nun*, p.62.

²⁹⁴ Richardson, *Clarissa*, p.462 & Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.5, 138.

²⁹⁵ Collins, *Basil*, p.40 & Heller, *Notes on a Scandal*, p.178 & Shriver, *We need to talk about Kevin*, p.25.

²⁹⁶ Sartre, *Nausea*, p.11 & Waters, *Affinity*, p.350.

sufferings'; he repeats the words, 'I am resolved to die', three times in quick succession.²⁹⁷ 'My whole soul was pervaded with a *longing to fall*,' says Pym, dangling on the edge of an abyss.²⁹⁸ Eva wishes she 'were dead'; Spider acts upon the compulsion and opens his wrists; and Eliza contemplates the act with the sharp edges of a 'tin of anchovies'.²⁹⁹ In reality, a trip to Dignitas may present itself as a sincere and reasonable wish for the resolution of an impossible situation; in fiction, however, attempted or achieved suicide often functions to illustrate the nadir of despair and the crisis point of mental collapse. It is frequently seen and situated as an inevitable conclusion to unresolved psychological torment.

²⁹⁷ Goethe, *The Sorrows of young Werther*, p.112, 116.

²⁹⁸ Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, p.166 (Poe's italics).

²⁹⁹ Shriver, *We need to Talk about Kevin*, p.448 & McGrath, *Spider*, p.188 & Gardam, *The Queen of the Tambourine*, p.207.

CONCLUSION: THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Italo Calvino cautioned that ‘books often say something different from what they set out to say’.³⁰⁰ When I initiated this research journey in April 2011, I did not envisage the extent to which my novel, *Headlong*, would be indebted to the critical study presented in the preceding chapters. Motifs and mechanisms of literary madness, recovered from the works of other writers, have not only substantiated my conviction in the intertextuality of fiction, they have also significantly enriched my own creative process.

Headlong is the story of a psychotic pyromaniac – an air steward who sets fire to aeroplanes. Sam, the autodiegetic narrator, is, notably, an orphan. I earlier documented the importance of dead mothers to numerous texts, ancient and modern, that depict psychosis. This may be substantiated by Jung’s claim that ‘whoever sunders himself from the mother longs to get back to the mother,’ and his conviction that such longing may actuate a ‘consuming passion’.³⁰¹ Sam’s narrative journey became, in the light of my findings, as much a quest in search of a mother as it was an escape from the brutality of a sadistic guardian. The death of Sam’s father is a necessity of the plot but does not inform the narrative with a similar weight. Sam describes his mother’s death from a brain haemorrhage, and admits that this resulted in his transformation into a ‘still and silent child’, a traumatised witness to collapse and early death (59). When Sam meets Jenny, the mother of his prospective partner Charles, he dispatches a toy lion cub with the label ‘Adopt me’ (189). Although Jenny initially rejects this pointed invitation, it is the nurturing nurse Jenny, as much as the lover, Charles, who will implement Sam’s return to mental health. It is Jenny alone who can reconnect what Lisa

³⁰⁰ Italo Calvino ‘Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature’ in Walder, Dennis ed. *Literature in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp.99-102, p.102.

³⁰¹ Stevens, Anthony *On Jung*. London: Routledge, 1990, p.132.

Appignanesi calls the ‘the attachment-separation axis’ of mother and child.³⁰² Sam writes himself back into his own ‘untidy reality’ at Jenny’s behest (6). His narrative is founded upon the will to please her, and her introduction to the reader is intentionally positioned before that of either Pan or Charles, the other principal plot movers.

During the course of my research, other widespread and persistent themes of madness informed my fictional writing. One central motif identified was that of the artist, or creative individual, as a character susceptible to psychosis. Sam aspires to be a poet, although we the reader are never privilege to any poetry that he writes – ‘no poem I’ve written has travelled as far as I have. Nor is it likely to’ (16). In terms of plot structure, Sam’s abortive attempts at poetry are a further signifier of failure in his life. As a *mad motif*, however, Sam’s literary ambitions have a heightened impact. Poetry has an emotional register for him. He quotes from poems in times of anguish; Jenny reads poetry to him when he is recovering from a breakdown, and when he is suicidal, and language and meaning become disconnected, it is significant that poems are as lost to him as ‘those other meaningless words’ (226). Richard Bentall confirms that ‘the long-held association between madness and creativity seems to be a real one’.³⁰³ It is an association many authors have reinforced. I observed earlier that the creative mad character was often portrayed in the guise of a Cassandra figure: a character endowed with special knowledge and sensibilities. This interconnection between creativity and clairvoyance emerges in the ways in which Sam inhabits alternative personalities and narratives. He has hallucinatory episodes. He is out of step with reality, frequently misunderstood, and has a habit of misdirecting others through his incessant deceitfulness. Like Virginia Woolf, he ‘hears the voices of the dead’.³⁰⁴ In endowing my

³⁰² Appignanesi, *Lisa Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*. London: Virago, 2013. p.269, p.351

³⁰³ Bentall, Richard P. *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature*. London: Penguin, 2004, p.114.

³⁰⁴ Cited in Appignanesi, p.269.

narrator with traits that identify him as both artistic and somewhat emasculated, I have relied upon the tendency Roy Porter described to label women, the mad, and artists as ‘kindred spirits; blessed with exquisite sensibilities’; also from countless literary precedents that have reinforced these prejudices.³⁰⁵

Sam is incapable of relating in any conventionally acceptable way to people, and I have utilised another ubiquitous literary device, powerfully symptomatic of insipient madness, in positioning my narrator as an outsider. From the initial pages, Sam’s outsider status is implied through his slightly quaint speech and stilted social interactions. He speaks mockingly of ‘air-weather’ friends and comments, ‘small particles, we have contact for a moment and then rebound on to another elliptical path’, as if other people were some illusory phenomena that barely touched upon his solipsistic world (8). Sam is the subject of ongoing ridicule: ‘pansy’, ‘petal’, ‘drongo’ and ‘fruitloop’ are amongst the terms other characters employ for him (3, 20, 22). His alienation stems from depression – the result of losing his family and his inability to recover from the pain and guilt this has triggered. It is also an implied consequence of his poisonous relationship with Pan, who has not only abused him physically, but also bullied him, stifled his individuality, and kept him apart from his peers. Paris Williams confirms that research indicates ‘a strong correlation between childhood abuse/trauma and the later development of schizophrenia and related psychotic disorders’³⁰⁶ Sam’s isolated and abusive upbringing provides the rationale for his social ineptness and apprehension. He fails to connect with the one man who initially reaches out to him: he doesn’t ‘know the song’ (5). So insensitive is Sam towards this character, that he

³⁰⁵Porter, Roy *Madmen: A Social History of Madhouses, Mad-doctors & Lunatics*. Stroud: Tempus, 2004, p.115. Sam’s cowardice is an emasculating feature of his character, as it was for Collin’s Basil, even minor acts of bravery make him feel ‘more of a man’ (150). I don’t condone the view that women are less brave than men, or that bisexual men are more feminised than heterosexuals, but I contend that these views are widely held.

³⁰⁶ Williams, Paris *Rethinking Madness*. San Francisco: Sky’s Edge Publishing, 2012, p.30.

misinterprets friendship as sexual invitation and makes an awkwardly repulsed play for him. This misjudgement will have consequences. Peter becomes hostile and is implicated in Sam's eventual dismissal from the airline. Although Sam is unsuccessful socially, he is sexually promiscuous. Initially, sex seems to be the only form of collaboration he comprehends. As his psychosis deepens he becomes more alienated, and people avoid him: he gets into fights, he is rude and a liar – he doesn't know how to belong. As I noted earlier, isolation and alienation can be either causal or evidential, and Sam's social estrangement is both a contributory factor in his mental breakdown – a confidant might make him more resilient – and a symptomatic factor. People shun him because he is unstable and unpredictable.

Sam develops coping strategies, like so many other mad literary characters, in order to ease his fraught existence. His pyromania functions as a stabilising strategy, and is driven by his self-reproach for cowardice. He counteracts guilt and fear with an ambition for heroism: 'nobody ever called me brave. I always wished that they would' (7). For Sam, the airline job offers valiant prospects – 'if ever there was going to be an opportunity for heroics in my life, this was it' (10). The airline will teach him how to save lives, but valour is not so easily had. Sam is soon faced with an inconsolable attempted suicide on the aircraft, and later a cardiac arrest resulting in death. As the incidents multiply, Sam's fears worsen, and his attempts to stabilise himself become more extreme. When the occasion for heroism doesn't arise in the normal course of his work, he creates his own, by setting fires – fires that he misguidedly thinks he can contain. He lets the oxygen out of the on-board emergency oxygen bottles, because he finds the 'enriched air' restorative (9). He steals tranquilizers from the medical kits in order to calm himself, and life jackets from under the passenger seats. He is also a drunkard. All these behaviours initially enable Sam to cope. He feels out of control: he

wants to put himself in control. His life jacket collection has a 'bright reassuring magic'; it makes him feel safe, it helps him endure (10). These actions make Sam's life more stable – unfortunately they put him, and those around him, in danger and, ultimately, exacerbate his fear.

I have endeavoured to suggest that fear, trauma and culpability are pervasive in Sam's life, since these torments have notable precedent in the creation of the mad literary mind. All three are provocations to, and manifestations of, Sam's sickness. He will try to drown them out with drugs and alcohol, but they will nevertheless drive him to two suicide attempts. The post 9/11 skies make Sam fearful, his sadistic guardian makes him fearful, and his peripatetic lifestyle and lack of supportive connections aggravate these fears. Like Poe's seafaring Pym, Sam's working life is saturated with fear. Furthermore, he is preoccupied and sometimes terrorised by disembodied voices. Sometimes his anxiety is absurd – he is the only trainee afraid to go down an emergency evacuation chute – but that is because a nebulous sense of dread masks the things that truly frighten him, such as the uncovering of the incestuous relationship with his uncle and the circumstances of the family deaths. Trauma is introduced into Sam's back-story, firstly through the death of the mother, witnessed as a child, and secondly through the father's and brother's deaths in a harrowing accident which Sam has tried to blot from memory. 'That's how I remember it,' he says, 'I wasn't there' (59). Not only has he been abused by his guardian, but he has held out hope of rescue and been further traumatised when this was not forthcoming. It is problematic to define one inciting incident that leads to Sam's insanity, but meeting Charles, a potential rescuer, and the trauma of assuming that Charles would reject him if cognisant of Pan's threatened disclosures, is possibly the tipping point that moves Sam to the edge of irrationality and

suicidal ideation.³⁰⁷ ‘If he knew who I was beneath the tinsel, then how would it be? How would it be with this man, if he knew what I had done?’ (86). It seems Sam is always trying to keep secrets that are in danger of being exposed.

Sam’s *crack-story* is portrayed through a complex web of motivating factors, but his feelings of culpability are particularly important to his characterisation. I determined during the course of researching other *mad* narrators that I did not want my Sam to be misdiagnosed as a psychopath. Other fictional madmen, I realised, could be identified as high on the psychopathy scale rather than actually psychotic. They were characters who, in Dutton’s terms, are born with ‘the words but not the music of emotion’.³⁰⁸ When Balram, in *The White Tiger*, commits acts he is ‘ashamed to admit’, for example, he tells us – ‘instead of guilt, what did I feel? Rage’.³⁰⁹ A psychopath would require no aetiology and would feel no culpability or remorse, yet fiction seems to demand cause and effect. As noted earlier, even Balram evinced a desire for redemption that echoed that of Lady Macbeth. I wanted Sam free of the scourge of psychopathy because I intended his character to elicit sympathy. I did not want to suggest that he was fatally flawed or beyond recovery. His madness was of a particular genus (and genre), and it became apparent that not all of my research could prove suitable to that; although it did guide my evaluation of how much psychosis one character might credibly endure. Sam is not prone to gratuitous violence; although he does like to inflict pain on himself (199). He is not a melancholic in the traditional sense of the term. He does not mistake himself for God or the Devil, or laugh, or cry, hysterically, or descend into complete animality. His promiscuity is not disproportionate to his age and status.

³⁰⁷ Bentall speaks of ‘*retraumatization*’ in which ‘a person who has been traumatized in childhood becomes psychotic following a further trauma in adult life.’ Bentall, Richard P *Doctoring the Mind: Why Psychiatric Treatments Fail*. London: Allen Lane, 2009, p.132.

³⁰⁸ Dutton, Kevin *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* London: Heinemann, 2012, p.50.

³⁰⁹ Adiga, Aravind *The White Tiger*. London: Atlantic Books, 2008, p.250.

Sam suffers from hallucinations, as I noted earlier, both aural and olfactory; yet his madness is unquestionably trauma-led.³¹⁰ He feels fear, and suffers guilt. He has a heightened awareness of evil, and strives to rise above it. Pan is always telling him he is ‘a complete good-for-nothing’; while Charles sees the compassion in him – ‘Nobody who wants so much to be good could be bad’ (116, 132). The SYLB that Sam devises is, in a sense, his redemption: ‘The one good thing that I had done’ (241). He experiences panic attacks and a general wobbliness from the start of the novel; before the back-story is revealed, a signal that he is already suffering mental distress. In a phone call early in their relationship, Charles makes the assertion: ‘We all do bad stuff, it doesn’t make us bad people,’ and Sam bites back ‘You don’t know me,’ and hangs up (132). This is one of several signs of his sense of accountability. He is convinced that if Charles could see through him all would be lost. During his illness, Sam’s feelings of torment and guilt become more exaggerated. ‘I deserved Hell – not springtime, not cherry blossom,’ he says (222). There is an interplay throughout the novel on the themes of fear and equanimity; accountability and innocence; cowardice and bravery. It is only when Sam invents the SYLB, assisted by his lover’s skill as a jeweller, that he has the satisfaction of knowing, finally, that ‘somewhere lives might be saved’ (211). He is gratified to do something good, if not actively heroic. And in the penultimate scene, Sam’s assessment of himself as a coward is negated – ‘You’ve been very brave,’ Charles says, ‘It’s over now’ (248). Sam will find tranquillity, finally, when he leaves the airline and takes up professional gardening. ‘Landscaping might not be the thing for Charles,’ he says, ‘but I had a feeling it would suit me’ (235). By the final chapter he has reached a place where he doesn’t ‘worry’ and feels ‘no fear’ (251). Ultimately, Sam

³¹⁰ Fernyhough confirms that ‘Clinicians have known for a long time that some people’s voices are associated with trauma, and the scientific evidence for that association is now coming through. Fernyhough, Charles ‘Hearing the Voice’. *The Lancet*. Vol. 384. No. 9948. 20 September 2014, p.1090.

is capable of redemption. I send him optimistically into the future and envisage for him a peaceful life, at ‘work in the garden’, like the hero of the novel he is reading in one of the final chapters, *Candide*.

I have spoken of the pronominal switch that occurs in two crucial scenes of breakdown, where the equilibrium Sam has been struggling to maintain fails him entirely. Regardless of the dominating second-person voice, Sam remains an autodiegetic narrator. The referent ‘you’ is concentrated upon his flow of experience – it is primarily self-address. But it also plays with the multifunctionality of the second-person pronoun, creating, in Fludernik’s terms, ‘a complex field of potential deistic significance to the reader’.³¹¹ By this means, Sam’s ‘you’ reaches out to and encompasses David, the brother Sam continually, and despondently, compares himself to. Sam is plagued by the illusion that David would have managed the art of living more successfully than he has. In literary terms, David is a shadow character. Sam’s relationship with him is one of displaced characteristics, thoughts and speech; although David’s dialogue only ever materialises as a reported *spirit* voice. The slippage of perspective is indicative of a type of dissociative identity disorder, and this is consolidated in episodes of incorporeality such as the mirror scenes and the chapter set in Mumbai where Sam’s hands ‘had slipped their context’ and ‘moved as if constrained by an unfamiliar will’ (223). Nevertheless, I do not think it necessary to classify Sam’s illness since there is so much comorbidity in psychosis. I agree with Richard Bentall, who claims that patients meet the criteria for more than one diagnosis because ‘the diagnoses do not pick out discrete diseases after all.’³¹²

The notion of discourse failure, although often allied with schizophrenia, was another productive source of material for my novel. As the novel progresses, language

³¹¹ Fludernik, Monika ‘Second-person narrative as a test case for narratology: The limits of realism’ in *Style*. Fall94. Vol. 28 Issue 3. pp. 445-480.

³¹² Bentall, *Doctoring the Mind: Why Psychiatric Treatments Fail*, p.101.

becomes problematic for Sam. ‘Scissors, paper, stone, the words ran through your head. They used to signify something, and your fingers moved involuntarily, the words apparently still having meaning for them’ (227). In the suicide scene in Mumbai, Sam’s disconnect from language becomes manifest in a variety of ways. He explicitly misinterprets two words: the noun *brave*, as in Red Indian, he confuses for the adjective; and when he speaks of the naked feeling that loss of discourse brings him, he is prompted to take off all his clothes. It is in this chapter that Sam announces that words ‘no longer connect’, and he is reduced to cutting and pasting ‘gobs’ from a newspaper, trying to make some kind of sense (226, 223).

There are signs that Sam’s madness has a history that extends beyond the time scale of the novel. He compares being surrounded by life jackets to being confined in a ‘padded cell’, conceding his familiarity with the inside of a mental health asylum; at another point he speaks of the threat of being ‘locked up *again*’ (10, 210). He also discloses the fact that Pan would not deem him ‘in right mind’ (7). Even if readers give little credence to the viewpoint of the sadistic Pan, it should be apparent that Sam has suffered from previous episodes of mental distress. Almost the last act that Sam performs in the narrative is to pat the box of matches in his pocket, admitting that the ‘promise of exuberant conflagration’ still tempts him (254). The suggestion is that the madness continues, perhaps in a controlled form, into the future. I did not want to suggest that mental illness could be easily allayed.

In the end Sam’s psychosis had to have its limitations, in spite of the complex findings of my research. My journey, in search of a methodology for codifying madness into first-person fictional narratives, took me on a path through numerous texts and even more numerous manifestations of aberrant behaviour. It was a long and diverse path. Once you start looking for madness, it seems to be everywhere. Darian Leader claims

that ‘there is simply no such thing as mental health,’ and that ‘each of us faces problems that we tackle in our own unique ways’.³¹³ There is much evidence to support this view. Madness can be quiet and discrete, or it can implode into fevered lunacy. There is a wide spectrum and a great deal of variety. Sam’s aberrant mental behaviour moves up and down the spectrum, but it does not, could not, run the gamut of all the symptoms my research explored. I like to surmise that if Sam is still mad at the end of the novel, after all that he has been through, then he is no more mad than you or I.

³¹³ Leader, Darian *What is Madness?* London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011, p.7.

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