Betwixt and Between: A Treatise on Madness in Literature, Film, and Art

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Betwixt and Between: A Treatise on Madness in Literature, Film, and Art
by
Edward Koslin

A thesis presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Liberal Arts

May, 2021
St. Louis, Missouri
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Acknowledgments

I want to express my gratitude to my thesis director, Professor Nina Davis, and to my thesis committee members, Professors Stephanie Kirk, Allen Schwab, and Willow Mullins.

As my teacher and mentor, Professor Davis has accepted my curiosity and has allowed me to exercise my imagination beyond limits. She has also taught me about writing discipline, a skill set that has been very difficult for me. I’m surprised that I have welcomed the limits.

I also want to thank Professors Stamos Metzadikis, Allen Schwab, and Willow Mullins for their support and encouragement in my studies, as well as my classmate Bob Wells, who has been my intellectual companion, advisor, and teacher. Steve Ehrlich, PhD demanded that I enroll in the DLA Program. I hope I have been worthy of his faith.

Fran, my wife and best friend, has always had more faith in me than I have. She has witnessed my kicking and screaming through this whole process and has always provided safe space for my rants. She has truly been my faith healer.

I want to thank my Aunt Shirley, whom I visited as a child at Manteno State Hospital in Illinois, and the unresponsive gentleman I spoke to on a mental ward in Chicago during a fourteen week high-school project. As I was leaving for the last time, he looked at me and thanked me for my interest in talking to him. I learned that he had not spoken in twelve years.

Finally, Hilary Sandel, MD, a British psychiatrist at St. Louis State Hospital, taught me the only proper diagnosis for mental patients: adjustment reaction to life.

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May 2021
For Fran, who provides most of my mental health, and Dylan, our grandson: may you learn that kindness, resiliency, and relationships are all that really matter.
Western history, through science and philosophy, has suggested that mental illness is an objective fact, a disease. Through an examination of selected literature from antiquity through the twentieth century, films depicting mental illness from World War I into the twenty-first century, and nineteenth-century paintings, this study examines how representations over time in literary fiction and works of visual art reveal what institutional formulations of madness have long preferred to overlook. Madness portrayed in the arts expresses itself and is perceived as such between subjects within a given context, one depicted as having community norms, cultural authorities, and individuals perceived as different, non-normative or aberrant. The reality that the works of this study represent is one of perspective, existing between those with institutional authority, the power to define, and that of social control, and individuals subject to that control. The artistic strategies of these works focus on the agency through which institutions and communities define and restrict the behavior of individuals perceived and judged non-normative
or aberrant, but they also give names, faces, and words to the agency of those individuals subject
to such control, revealing that the "mad" have their own stories and reality.
Introduction

The thesis of this study is that intra-psychic formulations of madness, which characterize it as an affliction within the individual, are incorrect because they are based solely on standards for rationality and the authority of their proponents—philosophers; political, religious, and medical institutions; as well as on the norms that define a rational approach to human behavior. This is not to suggest that rationality is of no value; however, it does not succeed in explaining madness because of what is omitted: feelings, perceptions outside what is considered normative, different perceptions of the same events perceived as valid. Many forms of human creativity in literature, art, and film, as well as contemporary theories of social psychology, support the thesis of this study, that madness is inter-psychic, between people, in the context of tripartite threads—institutional authority, social community, and traumatic relationships. Madness exists in a context. It exists betwixt and between those whose perceptions and perspectives differ; between those with institutional authority and those subject to these authorities.

Representations over time in literary fiction and works of visual art reveal what the formulations of madness discussed above have long preferred to overlook: madness expresses itself and is perceived as such between subjects within a given context. It is the behavior of one person perceived and judged by others. This study examines this dynamic as it is depicted in selections from the following literary works: *Ajax* by Sophocles (antiquity); *Don Quixote* by Cervantes (seventeenth century); *Therese Raquin* by Zola; ”The Yellow Wallpaper” by Gilman; *The Awakening* by Chopin; “Ward No. 6” by Chekov (second half of nineteenth century); and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Jackson (mid-twentieth century). Representations of madness as an inter-psychic phenomenon in the modern films *The King of Hearts* (the time
frame is World War I) directed by De Broca; One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest directed by Forman (second half of twentieth century); The Fisher King directed by Gilliam (late twentieth century); and Library of Dust: The Documentary directed by Ondi and James (twenty-first century) will be examined. Finally, this study will consider several paintings, including Bosch’s fifteenth-century Cutting the Stone and the nineteenth-century paintings Artist with Bandaged Ear (Van Gogh); The Scream (Munch); and Ward of the Madwomen of San Bonifazio (Signorini). This study will analyze the representations of madness in the drama Ajax and novel Don Quixote in Chapter 1; of how it is expressed in three nineteenth-century narratives and a twentieth-century narrative (primarily focused on women judged mad) in Chapter 2; of how madness and its social dynamic is depicted in the films in Chapter 3; and ways it is visually evoked in selected paintings in Chapter 4.
Chapter 1

Representations of Madness in Ancient and Early Modern Literary Classics: *Ajax* and *Don Quixote*

Ajax, as all the protagonists considered in this study, has agency in the form of virtues and vices. These character and thought traits are internal yet they inform his social behavior. As Aristotle states, “Virtue, then is twofold, intellectual and moral…. intellectual virtue results mostly from teaching—hence it requires experience and time—whereas moral virtue is a result of habit … in a word, the characteristics come into being as a result of the activities akin to them” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book Two, 26-27).¹ That is, we note virtues in characters’ actions. As Ajax is portrayed in Sophocles’ drama, a person’s life is a concatenation, a negotiation at the intersection of the moment, the culture, history, and those in authority (in his case, the gods) who define the moment. Trauma can change a fundamentally virtuous character’s relationship to others in the moment. Ajax is deemed mad by the goddess Athena, and he perceives himself with shame for his behavior.² Throughout this study, it will be the character’s perceptions of self and others that guide the analysis of madness.

Although the label “insanity” does not appear initially, the circumstances of his madness are evidenced in the dialogue between Odysseus and the goddess Athena. Odysseus finds cattle and herdsmen slain and proclaims “All men lay the guilt for this upon this very man [Ajax]....” (Sophocles, *Ajax*, lines 25-28). Odysseus observes that Ajax’s violence is without sense and Athena explains that Ajax was consumed with rage. Rage is introduced before she says, “I will
show you the evidence of his insanity” (66). As if daring Odysseus, she doubts Odysseus’s
courage to witness Ajax’s insanity. Yet Odysseus responds to Ajax’s plight with human feeling:

But now I feel an all
embracing pity for him, although my enemy,
because he has been yoked to infatuation dire,
and think of my own case no less than his.
_For I see that we are nothing real, but mere:
illusions and insubstantial shades._ (italics added, 121-126)

It is doubtful that Sophocles intends the reader to believe that Odysseus, too, is mad
because he says “we are nothing real.” Odysseus’s virtuousness, his empathy, foreshadows his
role after Ajax commits suicide (Cohen, 24-36). The warrior’s empathy and feelings are real, as
is their relationship. Odysseus’s virtues of greatness of soul, gentleness, and friendliness are
evident early in the text.³ If Ajax’s shame and dishonor are goaded on by Athena, then, perhaps
rage, shame, and dishonor might define madness. His own soldiers, as Chorus, also goad him to
seek revenge, encourage his hubris:

_Odysseus feeds each eager ear,
and convinces too many. For plausible lies
he repeats about your present condition
and every man hears and rejoices at what
he has said, exulting in this your disaster._ (148-153)

In the cultural beliefs about madness during the time Sophocles wrote _Ajax_ (450-430
BCE), the only explanation for Ajax’s killings of the cattle and the herdsmen is expressed as
madness “sent by the gods” (185). This explanation is of great import, not only for the
protagonist of _Ajax_, but for all of the texts, films, and art to be discussed. Madness has an origin
that is specific to context. In this instance, it is a disease fomented by the gods, in their
relationship with humans.
But this does not, in and of itself, explain Ajax’s madness. It simply suggests an origin. It is his hubris, his need for honor after having been dishonored that drives his behavior. Indeed, this character trait becomes his madness, limiting options to behave differently in the world:

… both of Ajax’s sicknesses (his madness and his suicidal shame) are tied to fundamental traits of his character, namely his desire for due honor (which he feels has been denied him) and his refusal to yield or change his mind. When Ajax makes his great speech about change and alteration (lines 646-683), the audience knows that he would have to change his very nature to continue living. In other words, Ajax is his sickness, and the tragedy resides in his inability to be anyone else. (Allen 267)

The reader comprehends Ajax’s behavior as “the smallness of soul.” It will be seen that Odysseus exhibits the opposite: “greatness of soul.” (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 37)

For Sophocles to use the language of illness, of insanity, at the beginning of the drama not only suggests origin, it also suggests that his behavior is caused by insanity. This is only true or accurate in a very limited context. As the drama unfolds, and as William Allen makes clear in “The Body in Mind: Medical Imagery in Sophocles,” Ajax is his illness. His illness is hubris, a term Aristotle would label “vanity.”

Tecmessa asks and answers a crucial question about Ajax’s behavior when she observes that he does not act differently when he is no longer insane. She grants him insanity when he kills the cattle and herdsmen but “now that he has respite from the disease, / he is completely overwhelmed with shock …” (174-175). He has been traumatized and his inability to act rationally or normatively post ‘disease’ must be caused by a “visitation from god” (178-179).

As Tecmessa continues her summary of Ajax’s behavior after the killings, she notes that he is aware enough to be devastated by his behavior, his fury: “At once [he] gave vent to shrill cries of lament, / such as I have never heard from him before” (317-318). For a brief moment, he is “like the bellowing bull [who] roars [his] grief” (322). Here is a clear indication of loss,
whether from his actions or his feelings of having been aggrieved. He can only avenge his grief, his loss, his failure through his own death.

Madness is not an object in the same way that a grape or a rock is an object. A grape has certain chemical properties; it has a taste profile. Similarly, a rock has certain properties that are measurable, density, for example. Yet even in the instance of objects that may be considered definitive—absolute, dispositive, limited in time and space, subject to Newton’s Laws, etc.—they are also subjective in context. As Berger and Luckmann point out in The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge:

The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is ‘real’ for the members of society. Since this is so, the sociology of knowledge must first concern itself with what people ‘know’ as ‘reality’ in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. In other words common sense ‘knowledge’ rather than ‘ideas’ must be the central focus … It is precisely this ‘knowledge’ that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist.6

They are subject to the perception and perspective of the observer, to “the fabric of meanings” the observer brings to the present “reality.”

Objects may, in a cultural context, be symbolic, as a grape might conjure Bacchus; or a rock might suggest Sisyphus. They may be metaphorical, as Lakoff and Johnson make clear in Metaphors We Live By, suggesting, foundationally, that everything is metaphor, in that words are representations and therefore do not designate objective entities.7 An object such as a grape might stand in for ripeness or spring or wine. A rock may be used as a simile for stability. All objects become subjective in their contextuality, in their relationship to an observer. No matter how physically or chemically or quantitatively an object may be measured, it is subject to the perceptions of an observer. And in this process of observation meanings may be confused, conflated. Meanings may be paradoxical, ironic, or contradictory, dependent on the observers
and their relationship to the observed. Behaviors often suggest ambivalence. Everything may be considered symbolic or representative of something else. For Ajax, the objective facts are symbols for hubris and rage. Symbols suggest, they do not define. Behaviors may suggest madness, they do not define it.

Like Ajax, Cervantes’s protagonist, Don Quixote, is labeled mad within the first two pages of the text. Ajax is an outsider, that is, outside of acceptable cultural norms in his behavior, in his reactions to defeat, to humiliation. Don Quixote is mad because of his thinking, his beliefs. His non-normative behavior follows, as he begins and proceeds on his anachronistic epic journey. The reader is correct to ask, from the beginning, where does he journey to, where does his journey begin, where does it end? Ajax believes that he has been wronged by Menelaus and Agamemnon. For Don Quixote, there is no definitive object, no clearly identifiable oppressor or enemy causing him to behave non-rationally (non-rational is not synonymous with irrational), to act outside cultural and community norms. The authority of Athena, in Cervantes’s seventeenth-century novel, is replaced by the authority of chivalric texts.

The reader, located outside the drama, gets to judge the characters’ behaviors, behaviors that are based on the character’s beliefs, motivations, and history. Ajax’s behavior arises from his history as a warrior, as a leader of men. The reader of Don Quixote cannot quite place the origin of Don Quixote’s mad behavior beyond the simple act of reading detailed in the narrative. S/he may only make sense of the genesis of Don Quixote’s behavior by his or her own reading of the character’s three trips from and to his village after being knighted by the innkeeper early in the text and other social interactions of differing perceptions that follow in the extensive narrative. Whereas Sophocles describes Ajax’s actions, Cervantes describes Alonso Quijana’s person. Whereas the reader observes Ajax’s behavior from the viewpoint of the audience, as it
were, the reader goes along with, rides with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza through their adventures. This is crucially important. Through the tragedy of Ajax, Sophocles shows his audience the cost of hubris in the normative culture of Greek antiquity; for Cervantes, reader participation is required, in a meandering road-trip dialogue about human perceptions and desire. Perhaps this is a reason Don Quixote resonates five hundred years after it was created by Cervantes.

Alonso Quijana is “approximately fifty years old; his complexion was weathered, his flesh scrawny, his face gaunt, and he was a very early riser and a great lover of the hunt” (Cervantes 19). Here the description contains both an image of a person and suggests, at least, two of his behaviors—early rising and hunting. The generality of his age is combined with the specificity of his appearance. The character is also described as a country gentleman of reduced circumstances without wife or offspring, who has accomplished little of note other than the sale of inherited property to buy the chivalric fictions he reads night after night. The narrator is not even sure of his correct name, which may be “Quixada,” “Quesada,” “Quejana” or something else (19, 20, 935). He has not yet morphed into Don Quixote: “His name does not matter much to our story: in its telling, there is no deviation from the truth” (20). The reader has not yet been introduced to “The reason for the unreason in which my reason turns so weakens my reason …” (20). The irony of Alonso Quijana is presented before the madness of Don Quixote. A man of indeterminate age, name, and features (unless “weathered,” “scrawny,” and “gaunt” are determinative) is an early riser and a hunter. Weakness and a withering away are juxtaposed with a “very early riser” and hunter; two images contradictory, paradoxical. They suggest ambivalence on Cervantes’s narrator’s part in describing his hero, the protagonist. Alonso
Quijana is the author of Don Quixote. Alonso Quijana, a man of failing agency, creates Don Quixote a man of action, nobility, Aristotelian virtues.⁸

Ambivalence—the ability to hold two contradictory thoughts, feelings, or beliefs at the same time — is the underlying plot line, motif in Don Quixote. Indeed, this is the underlying concept and device in all the texts, films, and art in this study. With ambivalence as a primary axis of representation, madness cannot be defined as an illness, a scientific fact, or an objective truth.

Madness is a cultural artifact that has been expressed in different historical and social contexts as humoral theory, witchcraft, scientific nosology, the work of the gods, “the envy and fraud of evil enchanters” (Cervantes 409), the penalty for being poor, etc. What underlies the ambivalence about madness is a clear fact. Underneath madness, whether comic or tragic, is sadness, melancholy, And, most often, under the rubric melancholy dwell grief, loss, and trauma. As Pérez-Álvarez in his study of the psychology of Don Quixote points out, “melancholy corresponds to aesthetics, and thus to artifice—which does not mean, of course, that it is not a real experience, only that there is no experience without aesthetics (regardless of culture), nor subjective reality that is not constructed (even though it be by the name it is given)” (4). Melancholy, in his sense, is cultural and relies on the history brought into the present moment. Melancholy, as diagnosis, dates back to Hippocrates and Galen.⁹ It is found with their diagnoses of hallucinations, delusions, mania, dementia, and hysteria. These diagnoses have come through history as scientific fact, not as cultural contrivances, concoctions. They have come through history as authoritative mandate whether through the church, state, or science. Underlying it all is the human ability to feel and express sadness.
Pérez-Álvarez defines mimesis “... as the very condition, through which the experience of life is constituted” (4). How infants learn speech is through mimesis. Filmmakers and artists imitate their predecessors until they find their own vision, their own aesthetic. And novelists tell their readers what life is or could be through their characters, the characters’ actions and the consequences of their actions. Not all actions, of course, result from sadness; but all sadness, all melancholy results from actions, from behavior, from interactions with other characters—fictional or not. Therefore, the answer to the question about whether sadness, melancholy is mimetic or real is “yes”:

... mimetic melancholy, while it may involve imitation, is all the same a true melancholy, but indeed the prototype of all melancholy, since melancholy would be a learned experience (as all experiences are learned). The difference is in the fact that bad novels, like bad clinical manuals, would have us believe that melancholy is a natural experience (as though it came directly from humours or neurons). But melancholy does not emerge as teeth do ... because it requires a culture that includes it as a model. (Pérez Álvarez 4)

The reader of Don Quixote or the reader of this study need look no further than the writings of Thomas Szasz, Andrew Scull, and Louis A. Sass. In his study, The Manufacture of Madness: A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement, Szasz, especially, contextualizes madness and suggests that madness defined is about power, not some inherent personal defect. It is the contextualization of madness that is of import in this study. 10

The phenomenology of madness can be extracted from philosophy. As Merleau-Ponty defines embodied experience:

... I have ‘sense organs’, a ‘body,’ and psychical functions’ comparable to those of others, each moment of my experience ceases to be an integrated or rigorously unique totality (where details would only exist in relation to the whole) and I become the place where a multitude of ‘causalities’ intertwine. 11

All phenomena are embodied in one’s person: reason, truth, knowledge, and mind are embodied. Phenomenology requires a culture, an observer—writer, painter, or (very recently in
history) filmmaker. Madness and melancholy are creations in time and place and are real, imagined, and momentary. Because the church or state or a given profession dictate an objective definition of madness, this is no guarantee of objectivity. Hence the confusion, the paradox for characters in novels and for characters in life.

In her study, *Don Quixote in the Archives: Madness and Literature in Early Modern Spain*, Shuger invites these confusions, contradictions, and ambivalences in a straightforward manner, both in *Don Quixote* and for the protagonist, Don Quixote. As she points out, we can only know others by their actions, their behaviors. We make inferences, we draw conclusions, we judge. Generally, we perceive, infer, conclude, and make judgments based on what Shuger deems:

> external signs and internal states … we note physical appearance, actions, speech and biographical information, and, using past experience and reason, fit them into patterns we know and recognize. Based on these assumptions we anticipate future actions and we make moral judgments and, based on these, we shape our own actions. (italics added, 151)

The conclusions reached are not quite as simple as her analysis suggests because perceptions and perspectives—the concatenation of past and present, the interweaving (and contamination) of memories, the power of authority in shaping what one sees, what one believes, the degree to which another’s perceptions are synced with or are divergent from one’s own—as Shuger rightfully points out, are interactive. It is not only Don Quixote who is getting feedback on his perceptions, the reader must regard the perceptions of the society of those around him, represented in the priest, the barber, his niece, and his housekeeper, the innkeepers, the duke and duchess, etc.

In his first pre-knighted adventure, the ritual of knighthood demanded of the “castle” keeper by the protagonist to legitimate his new identity is complicated by the perceptions of the
innkeeper, who knows that this half-dressed character is mad, or not normal by his society’s standards, and yet also perceives his own need for income and is fearful of, inadvertently, triggering greater mad behavior which “would anticipate future actions and… make moral judgments, and, based on these, … shape … actions,” as Shuger has argued (151). He responds to his unusual lodger by confirming the latter’s chosen identity and conducting a ceremonial knightling using a parody of Latin, a language he doesn’t know, in hopes of soon ridding himself of this guest, who will leave seeking adventure. Interactions are circular. It is only when the circles overlap like a Venn diagram that we have consonant, agreed upon, reality. But as has been pointed out and will be again, it is in the dissonance within and betwixt and between the interactions that the judgment of madness resides.

Madness has no fundamental reality like a rock, which may be considered a thing. Even here there may be disagreement (except among geological physicists and geologists) about the definitions for gravel, pebble, rock, boulder, geological formation. Shuger is correct about assumptions, moral judgments, actions, and interactions. The definition of madness is dependent on these ever-changing dynamics and who the definers are. Shall the reader ask the protagonist’s neighbor and man of letters, Bachelor Carrasco, who in the guise of the Knight of the White Moon challenges Don Quixote to combat in order to subdue him and bring him home as Alonso Quijana? Or should the reader seek answers in the narrative’s series of illiterate innkeepers, who participate in embellishing the stories that enable “Don Quixote”? Or should they look to other characters of the nobility whose words and actions raise questions about their own sanity, such as the lovesick Grisóstomo, or the sadistic Duke and Duchess, who submit Don Quixote and other victims to a theater of humiliation and real pain? Shall the reader ask Anselmo, the obsessive husband who recruits his best friend, Lotario, to test his wife’s virtue inviting his own
cuckholdry and misery, for example?\textsuperscript{12} All of these and other characters exhibit behavior and commit actions that could by norms of their culture be perceived as mad, as they interact with Don Quixote and their society. At times it appears that madness is location-specific, as in the Cave of Montesinos (Second Part, Chapters XXII-XXIII) or in the enchanted boat (Second Part, Chapter XXIX), as Gloria Fry suggests in “Symbolic Action in the Cave of Montesinos from ‘Don Quijote’” (468-474).

Unless an author (or filmmaker) uses time distortion, life appears to move chronologically. But to the characters time is momentary, like individual frames of film. Shuger offers past experience and reason as explanations of present, and it may be assumed, future behavior. It is in the titration of past experience as it is brought into the present that one—be s/he character or, presumably, reader—defines (or attempts to explain) actions. An element that is left out of Shuger’s formulation is grief and loss resulting from trauma. Grief and loss are traumatic. That is not to suggest that grief, loss, mourning define all traumatic experiences. Melancholy, as residue, is inherent in all traumatic experiences. And it is the attempt to escape melancholy, to escape grief and loss that defines most characters’ lives, most peoples’ lives. As the critic points out, “Melancholy was originally not considered a definite state of mind,… but rather one of the four humours that coexist in the human body” (152).\textsuperscript{13} In the First Part, Cervantes presents grief and loss in a straightforward manner in Chapter XIV, in which Grisótomo sings “a mournful song to my grieving breast” (94), and in Chapter XIX, where Don Quixote confronts a funeral procession.

Although Aladro, in “A Study of Melancholy in \textit{Don Quixote},” claims that “[t]he melancholy of the Knight of the Sad Countenance is false, because it is imitative in nature” (175), it underlies Alonso Quijano’s attempt to escape the life of a man of fifty who has a
weathered complexion, scrawny flesh and “his face gaunt” (19). Adventures are his attempt to escape grief and loss—aging—an escape from a meaningless life as he envisioned his own future. The reader does not know if there was meaning in his past, but does know from the opening page of the novel that his narrator can’t even recall his correct name. The traumatic event in Alonso Quijano’s life is not adventure. It is larger and deeper than a moment in time. His traumatic event is his life. His attempt to escape a meaningless life, his existential attempt to find a worthy self, a self of Aristotelian virtues, (which require action as Shuger makes clear) fuels his adventures. It is not the content of any one adventure that has value; it is not his mistaking herds of sheep for competing armies, or the virtue of freeing prisoners who are, by definition, being held against their will, and who will haunt and mistreat him later in the novel, it is the process of the adventures. Although many adventures will often have disastrous conclusions, it is the next or continuing adventure that has value. To stop his adventures is to stop the existential meaning of his life. As Lalonde points out in “Don Quixote’s Trauma Therapy: A Reassessment of Cervantes’s Canonical Novel and Trauma Studies,” “Don Quixote’s traumatic experience of ageing consists of an existential crisis, as he struggles to comprehend the meaning of existence in the autumn of his life” (245). Indeed, as Lalonde notes, when Don Quixote is returned home at the end of Part One imprisoned in a cage, the novel’s hero “…confesses to his squire Sancho that he ‘was born to live dying’” (247). It is Don Quixote who gives the protagonist’s life meaning, it is Don Quixote who wanders the world. In the world, he can experience grief and loss and trauma one step removed from the life of Alonso Quijano. He creates this distance “in order to give the traumatized [Alonso Quijano] room to write his own script, not so much as a story, but as an embodied experience of growth” (Lalonde 246). She explains that:
… Quijano uses his own physiology—the part of his brain altered by reading—to prepare his body for the attack of the trauma of ageing and dying. It is by engaging in reading that he is able to grasp better and in turn mourn his own impending death…. (250)

This is the embodied self, the self that is shaped by life and shapes life by experience and emotion (or the avoidance of emotion). The books on chivalry allow him to invent a life of meaning. Lalonde argues that “… in Cervantes’ opinion the great inventive possibility in the books on chivalry is their only virtue” (244). The adventures are not “inventive possibility” they are “inventive avoidance.” Inventive avoidance is not insanity. Following de Riquer, Arellano argues in “Quixote’s Insanity and Sancho Panza’s Wisdom” that if the reader uses the term “insanity” to describe Don Quixote’s behavior, the reader must accept that Don Quixote believes that chivalric novels present historical events and that chivalry could be restored as a way of life in the seventeenth century. He concludes that Don Quixote “observes the world from a dislocated perspective through his chivalric obsession” (73-74). Cervantes’s protagonist does not believe there will be a return of the chivalric profession.

If the reader interprets from a mental health/mental illness perspective, s/he will see Don Quixote as a character sometimes insane and sometimes brilliant. Sancho confronts his master’s insanity directly, retorting at one point, “You are a jackass, and will end your days as a jackass, for in my opinion, your life will run its course before you accept and realize that you are an animal” (Cervantes 646). This is a naturalistic notion. Don Quixote wants to avoid living in nature. To live in nature is simply to be born and die. For Don Quixote, living is to avoid the existential crisis, the traumatic crisis, of his own death; the in-between birth/death time. It is to find (if he had it in the past) meaning; meaning that can only exist in relationship and virtue.
It is Sancho, on the precipice of becoming the “Governor” of the “island Barataria,” invented through the machinations of the malicious ducal couple, who gets advice about the importance of virtue from his master:

… if you take virtue as your means, and pride in performing virtuous deeds, there is no reason to envy the means of princes and lords, because blood is inherited, and virtue is acquired, and virtue in and of itself has value that blood does not (731).… Be a father to virtue and a stepfather to vices. (794)

Arellano argues that, for the most part, while Don Quixote is the keeper of insanity, Sancho is the keeper of wisdom. As the peasant Sancho leaves Barataria, having been tormented with invented challenges to his authority and intelligence during his governorship, he offers the following wisdom:

I’m full of grief. At least I won’t be as lucky as my master, Don Quixote of La Mancha, when he went down and descended into the cave of the enchanted Montesinos, where he found somebody who treated him better than they do in his own house… There he saw beautiful and peaceful visions, and here, it seems, I see frogs and snakes. Woe is me just look where my madness and fantasy has brought me. (818)

This is the price Don Quixote does not want to pay. If the only “reality” available is frogs and snakes, grief and loss, the revisiting of a life without meaning, then perhaps Don Quixote ought to stay mad. He will leave Alonso Quijano twice. The first time he comes home, he sneaks out a short time later for more adventure as Don Quixote. The second time he is brought home in a cage as a madman, yet he manages to elude the vigilance of the priest and barber responsible for his cure and departs again as Don Quixote. It is only while returning from his third sally, defeated in a jousting match with his neighbor Sansón Carrasco posing as a knight, that Alonso Quijano will leave his chivalric quest and reinvent himself as the “shepherd Quixotiz” in his last days. There is virtue in being a shepherd, considering the Christian symbolism of the culture in which the Quixote was written, although the role lacks the active virtues and pursuit of justice associated with the knight-errant. It does not have the possibility of elevating prostitutes into
damsels, nor of Alonso Quijano’s peasant neighbor, Aldonzo Lorenzo, into the lady Dulcinea del Toboso. As a peaceful pursuit it does not have the possibility of seeking justice, even against rogues who will return to hurt the protagonist and mock him. But this transformation into “Quijotiz” the shepherd allows his time preceeding death to still be an adventure with friends who value him and explain him to others, allowing him dignity: Sancho and his neighbors Carrasco and the priest agree to accompany him in this final new way of life as “Panzino,” “Carrascon,” and “Curambro” (931).

In Ajax the reader/audience is made to consider virtue in the face of mortality, as s/he sees the consequences of Ajax’s actions, and is made to ponder his madness. The drama poses the question of what worth all the adventures and misadventures in life would have if, as Don Quixote observes, describing the balm of Fierabrás:

> [O]ne need not fear death, nor think that one will die of any wound…when you see in some battle that they have cut my body in two (as is wont to happen) is to pick up the part of my body that has fallen to the ground … place it on top of the other half still in the saddle, being careful to fit them together precisely and exactly. (72)

It is Odysseus’s virtue that allows Ajax a proper burial. It is Ajax’s vice of vanity that makes his death inevitable. It is not simply Athena who devised for him an episode of madness. It is not simply his soldiers who encourage vengeance. It is hubris, pride. He has to kill himself to avoid the humiliation of not being granted Achilles’s armor. The only vengeance would be to kill Menelaus and Agamemnon. For Sophocles, in this play, there are winners and losers. More important than losing a battle or a war, Ajax has lost status. His madness is equating his self with his status. His agency is taken by Athena, Menelaus, Agamemnon, and Odysseus. Rage precedes first mention of his insanity. Grief appears briefly early in the play and it is transformed into humiliation, his loss of status and rage at the perpetrators of that loss.
Life, old age, and loss of abilities set Alonzo Quijano on his adventures. His life was drifting away into meaninglessness. From his perspective, the adventures offer him a life of meaning, of vibrancy, of love and loss, of wisdom, knowledge, and virtue, even if other characters perceive him to be mad and at times a social menace.

Ajax is in this either/or situation much like the history of madness itself. It is Cervantes’s ability to combine madness and wisdom, to thrust the self-created Don Quixote into a world without death, without grief and loss, that is the real paradoxical and ambivalent honor of knowing him and Sancho Panza, even though death, grief, and loss follow them everywhere. Characters throughout Don Quixote note both Don Quixote’s knowledge and his madness. Regardless of the other characters’ perceptions, the reader is invited, over and over, to participate in his virtues (as he perceives them) of courage, ambition, truthfulness, friendliness, and, most important, justice.

At the end of Ajax, the reader might feel sadness and grief for Tecmessa and Teucer. They have the experience of grief and loss. Ajax dies to avoid humiliation. This is madness because humiliation kills him. Madness need not fuel disconnection. Vice does the reverse. It suggests what Aristotle labeled “Smallness of Soul” (303).

Self is a social construct of mirroring. It is developed by authority, values, beliefs of the people around a person. One’s personality and temperament are created by the mirrors of others. They are not inherent in a person, a character in a drama, novel, painting, or film. They are not even inherent in the roles one plays in life because roles are fluid, unless and until they become inelastic, rigid. Family constructs the self of the individuals within it. The social community, on a larger scale, develops the self of the individuals within it. Finally, the self is the creation of authorities beyond family, beyond social community. This is the authority of institutions such as
the church and state, as well as the discourses of philosophy, religion, science, academics, and the *polis*. It is these final authorities that define virtue and vice, norms and madness.

Sophocles places Ajax in the role of commander, warrior, leader. He also has familial roles. In most of history, persons are adjudicated, hypothesized about, labeled by the roles they play. Most get mired in roles provided by all the authorities suggested above. It is the role of warrior that prevents Ajax from navigating loss. It is not only status that he loses by not receiving Achilles’s armor. Specifically, it is the status conferred by Agamemnon and Menelaus, his authorities. His suicide is an act of self-humiliation and vanity. It is the virtue of Odysseus that calms, nullifies the enmity of Ajax’s soldiers. It is the virtue of Odysseus that gives the rites of burial to Ajax’s family. Persons, characters can be impaled by their roles.

One of the reasons Don Quixote’s adventures continue to impress (as impress upon) the reader is his ability to develop his own role, his own identity, “as he wore his armor, his helmet, his gorget …” (28). The mirror he uses is, for most of the novel, knight-errantry. It is the role he uses to find meaning. It is an expanding and expansive role. It is a platform to fight for justice, to fight for love, to exhibit courage, to reap the best in others. Knight-errantry for him is a vehicle that allows him to find meaning in the world. At the end, he exchanges it, as he is approaching his mortality. He becomes the shepherd “Quijotiz” who finds meaning in the peaceful community of close friends and family. Shepherding is an adventure of the spirit. It is as quiet as his adventures as Don Quixote are loud. It is an inward adventure. Alonso Quixano continues to create adventure. Adventure wards off the existential trauma of meaninglessness; of life without virtue or vice.

The trauma of meaninglessness is existential. The trauma of humiliation and hubris need not be meaningless, if one can learn. Humiliation and hubris are neither intellectual nor moral.
They are not actions. They are not interactive. Ajax, through Odysseus, is buried virtuously; it is Odysseus’s virtue, not Ajax’s, not that of Ajax’s soldiers, that provides resolution.

To be a knight-errant or a shepherd is virtuous. They are both intellectual and moral stances. They both interact with other characters as mirrors, as tautological participants in life, each affecting others. The reader of Don Quixote might argue that the Duke and Duchess were not virtuous, nor the convicts in an early adventure. They stand in opposition to Don Quixote, to the barber, priest, niece, housekeeper, and Sancho Panza. Over time, the reader loses connection with the Duke and Duchess (if there was any to be had). The reader remembers Alonso Quixano as a self-perceived knight-errant, then a self-imagined shepherd, and ultimately, on his deathbed, as self-proclaimed “Alonso Quixano the Good,” a character whose life had meaning. Given the enduring importance in Western culture of Cervantes’s self-creating protagonist, it still does. If he is mad, madness should be remembered for its intentions of courage, greatness of soul, and justice.
Notes to Chapter 1

1 Aristotle’s virtues and vices are found in Book 2, Chapter 7 (summarized on 303-304). Aristotle divides virtues into two categories: virtues of character and virtues of thought. Virtues make a character a human being. Virtues are of being (character), of acting (behavior). An example of the former may be Greatness of Soul (1100b32, p. 20). The latter includes courage (1094b19, p. 3). Virtues may be evident or remain in the background at any given moment, and may be enlarged or diminished dependent on the exigencies of a given moment. Trauma affects virtue but does not negate it.

2 See Lewis, especially Chapter 3, “The Self and Its Development.”

3 It is worth noting that Aristotle devotes two chapters of Nicomachean Ethics to Friendliness (Books 8 and 9; 163-209). See also: Lawrence, “Ancient Ethics,” 18-33.

4 Aristotle states: “Concerning honor and dishonor, the mean is greatness of soul; the excess, what is said to be a certain vanity; the deficiency, smallness of soul” (Book 2, Chapter 7, 1107b, lines 22-23).

5 See also: O’Brien-Moore 101-113.

6 See II. “Society as Objective Reality” and III “Society as Subjective Reality.” For a more general understanding of madness, in the context of reality, see: Becker 177-208.

7 Also, for a brilliant philosophical analysis of reality, see, by the same authors: Philosophy in the Flesh, especially Part IV, 551-568. For neuroscience and the embodied self, see: Varela, et al.; and Hogan.

8 For a deeper understanding of the confusion in the narration of Don Quixote see: Mancing 117-140. Indeed, in the Prologue, the narrator’s friend suggests ironically: “…this book of yours has no need of the things you say it lacks, because all of it is an invective against books of chivalry, which Aristotle never thought of, and St. Basil never mentioned and Cicero never saw” (Don Quixote 8). In short, Cervantes is more authoritative than Aristotle, St. Basil, and Cicero who, apparently, never wrote about chivalric texts.

9 See Porter 16; Scull, Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity, 28 and 86-121. Also see Aladro’s discussion of the Hypocratic-Galenic system in “A Study of Melancholy in Don Quixote,” 164; and Ahonen, “Ancient Philosophers on Mental Illness.”

10 See also by the same author: The Myth of Mental Illness; and Ideology and Insanity. Also see Sass, Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought.


12 Virtue is an underlying theme throughout Don Quixote. As Anselmo tells Lotario, the only way he can be sure of his wife’s virtue is “by testing her so that the test reveals the worth of her virtue, as fire shows the worth of gold” (275). Acting with or without virtue is not a test of madness, it is a test of one’s humanity, one’s ability to make moral judgments about one’s self and others. Perhaps, ethics (as Aristotle) would define it, is a more proper usage than morals. The ethics of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza have been erected upon Aristotle’s virtues and
Ajax’s vice of vanity is the cause of his aberrant behavior and leads, according to Sophocles, to his inevitable suicide.

Shuger hints at these concepts as she proposes: “A writer who sets out to portray the existence of a mad individual in early modern Spanish society had two options: either choose one of the available narratives of disordered interiority—one which neatly defined and united cause, symptoms and implications—or to rethink concepts of consciousness, language, the self and truth” (152). Somewhere hidden (in plain sight) within consciousness, the self, and truth lie grief, loss, melancholy, and trauma. Unfortunately, Shuger makes the same error as did Plato, Hippocrates, Galen, and more recent theorists. Mental disorders are not a definitive condition, they are an interaction. See Winner, Invented Worlds: The Psychology of the Arts, especially Part Five, 331-382.
Chapter 2

Literature on Madness:
Two Centuries of Alternative Narratives

The definition of madness rests with the authorities that define madness. The authorities, most often, include the church and the state but extend to discourses that define knowledge and cultural norms in given historical contexts. While definitions of madness have changed through the centuries, its conceptualization has consistently been in opposition to cultural norms. Whether being poor, for example, is considered criminal or represents madness has been subject to change in different contexts. Yet the entities adjudicating these decisions for the most part have not changed. What the “deciders” have in common is that madness (or criminality) is posited as existing outside the norms they set. Real people and their reflection in the represented characters of this study so defined are not privy to the decisions regarding the labels placed on them. The context, interactions between characters, and the history each character brings to the “present” circumstances depicted in the works of this thesis are of little or no consideration in defining and operationalizing madness’s meanings. This normative process does not consider the consequences to those so defined. If contextual variables are absent, then what meaning is there to the label? It is this question that confronts the reader of Chekov’s “Ward No. 6”; Zola’s Thérèse Raquin; Kate Chopin’s Edna Pontellier in The Awakening; Charlotte Gilman’s unnamed narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper”; and Mary Katherine Blackwood’s family in Shirley Jackson’s We Have Always Lived in the Castle. These fictive narratives of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries represent poignantly not only characters perceived as mad but also the contextual circumstances of their thoughts and actions.
People and characters deemed insane have their agency taken from them. More than losing status or power, the adjudicated mad person loses worth. In society, generally, a doctor is perceived as having worth, agency, while a mental patient does not, the patient is clearly deemed Other. There is a subtle circularity between doctor and patient because both have to agree that the latter is insane, mad. There is clear disagreement in the narratives to be discussed, where “patients” show resistance to their diagnosis through their words or actions, or when medical authorities are questioned. What might happen if the doctor was unhappy, if the doctor felt diminished by hospital administration and larger state structures, if the doctor had an alcohol problem? What if the doctor could only find intelligent conversation with a mental patient? This is the predicament of Dr. Andrey Yefimitch Ragin in Anton Chekhov’s “Ward No. 6,” a story that offers a quite different perspective of the doctor/patient relationship and institutional judgment of mental competency. As Dowsett points out, at the beginning of Chekhov’s story:

On the one hand there is the ward itself, with its inmates and their brutal guardian, the watchman Nikita. On the other hand is the milieu outside the ward—inhabited by Ragin, his medical colleagues and his friend Mixail Aver’janyč. This division between the insane and the sane, however, turns out to be somewhat illusory when one looks closely at the characters themselves, what is told about them and the manner in which it is told (Dowsett 162; italics added)

Chekhov introduces the reader to the physical setting of an insane asylum. The institution is infirm, decrepit, full of detritus. The first character to be introduced is also infirm and decrepit, and lives in detritus. His name is Nikita and he is the porter. It would be difficult for the reader not to conjure the Gates of Hell.1 Chekhov walks the reader through the gates as he defines Nikita’s role: “It is [his] duty to beat people” (Chekhov 130). In describing the inhabitants of Ward No. 6, the narrative names only two. The other three people housed on Ward No. 6 are not named. Readers cannot be surprised that nameless patients have no agency. The first character named, Moiseika, is “a quiet, harmless imbecile, the buffoon of the town …” (130). It is simple
to perceive him as the *traditional* lunatic, the *traditional* madman, as Don Quixote is often perceived. Whereas Don Quixote’s interactions are complex, Moiseika’s interactions are simple including, at times, being used as a punching bag for Nikita. Even this first named character appears to have little agency. As the reader continues on in Ward No. 6, it is Gromov, whose history of trauma is introduced as a diagnosis: He “suffers from a ‘mania of persecution’” (131).

He is defined, labeled, blocked in and out at the same time. He is blocked out by the diagnosis. He is blocked in by his history of trauma: “When he talks you recognize in him the lunatic and the man” (132). He is represented as both mentally ill and cognizant. To understand this apparent binary, the author and the reader must accept this contradiction, this split into both fiction and non-fiction. The reader has to be willing to get close to the experience of the characters; to approximate or be able to imagine for his or her own life the predicament of the person so defined. Diagnosis is not an explanation. It is merely a label, like “mania of persecution,” for example. It includes certain behaviors and excludes others. It appears, in reading literary critiques of these works, that how a character ends up with the label is of little note. This is the missing part, the bridge between label and behavior, that is, the context. The “how” is the context. The “how” is the relationship between characters.

That lunacy as a social construct is supported by the way Chekhov’s story traces the relationship between Ivan Demitritch Gromov and Dr. Andrey Yefimitch Ragin; between Dr. Ragin and the postmaster; with his superiors in hospital administration; between Dr. Ragin and the larger community’s administrative hierarchy. Institutional labeling of the Other shows that lunacy is about power, wielded by the definers of agency, in this instance, psychiatrists. Ironically, in the institutional healthcare of the narrative, understanding of the Other is not
necessary; any virtues of the Other are overlooked, while confining of the Other and then suggesting it is for the good of the Other is insanity (Furst 198).

Chekhov descends into Ivan Dmitritch’s trauma history. Ivan Dmitritch is forced “to make an abrupt change in his life” (132). The calamities in his life begin with the death of his brother. His father is sent to prison for fraud. His home and all the belongings in it are put up for auction. He and his mother find themselves destitute. Shortly thereafter, his mother dies.

Chekhov does not deny that Ivan Dmitritch Gromov, a mental patient diagnosed by Dr. Ragin, may be a difficult person to get along with: “He had always been thin, pale, and given to catching cold” (132). He appears with a physiognomy similar to Alonso Quijano in Don Quixote and Camille Raquin of Zola’s novel. Later, his connection to Zola’s Camille and Zola’s concept of temperament will become clear. For now, it is enough to quote Chekhov’s description of Gromov’s relationships. The quote ends with the irony that has been associated with Cervantes:

… Owing to his irritable temperament and suspiciousness, he never became very intimate with anyone, and had no friends. He always spoke with contempt of his fellow townsman, saying that their coarse ignorance and sleepy animal existence seemed to him loathsome and horrible. He spoke in a loud tenor, with heat, and invariably either with scorn and indignation or with wonder or enthusiasm, and always with perfect sincerity. (132-133)

Indeed, the townspeople thought of him as a person who “knew everything, and was in their eyes something like a walking encyclopedia” (133). While Don Quixote’s encyclopedic knowledge was obsessively focused on chivalric literature. Gromov’s is tiresomely broader.

Gromov was originally housed on a venereal ward when first admitted to the hospital. He so annoyed his fellow patients that Andrey Yefimitch Ragin had him transferred to Ward No. 6.

Both Gromov and Andrey Yefimitch are outsiders. They do not do well with people. As Chekov notes, Gromov “had a craving for society, but owing to his irritable temperament and suspiciousness, he never became very intimate with anyone, and had no friends” (132). Dr.
Ragin’s physical description makes his ability to develop relationships questionable: “His exterior is heavy—course like a peasant’s, his face, his beard, his flat hair, and his course, clumsy figure suggest an overfed, intemperate, and harsh innkeeper on the highroad” (138). His appearance places him outside the norms for relationships. He lives, basically, in a vertical world where he has power to diagnose and confine others and others have the power to confine him. His acquaintances include the postmaster, Mihail Averyanitch, Daryushka, who lives with the landlady, and her three children. The two outsiders have a relationship with each other. It is Andrey Yefimitch’s relationship with vodka that will fuel his slide into the label: “madness.”

Gromov’s narrated musings satirize the utility (and subversion by those in power) of the law:

[Gromov] did not know of any harm he had done, and could be certain that he would never be guilty of murder, arson, or theft in the future either; but it was not easy to commit a crime by accident, unconsciously, and was not false witness always possible, and, indeed, miscarriage of justice. It was not without good reason that the agelong experience of the simple people teaches that beggary and prison are ills none can be safe from. A judicial mistake is very possible as legal proceedings are conducted nowadays … People who have an official, professional relation to other men’s sufferings—for instance, judges, police officers, doctors, in course of time, through habit, grow so callous that they cannot, even if they wish, take any but a formal attitude towards their client … With this formal, soulless attitude to human personality, the judge needs but one thing—time in order to deprive an innocent man of all rights of property, and condemn him to penal servitude. Only the time spent in performing certain formalities for which the judge is paid his salary, and then—it is all over. Then you may look in vain for justice and protection in this dirty, wretched little town … (134; italics added)

Gromov is acutely aware of his status, the poverty of his status, and his dependence on the power of others over him. Both Gromov and, towards the end of the story, Andrey Yefimitich himself are deprived of their freedom. However, they cannot be deprived of their intellect—the variable that draws them together. The subversion or, perhaps, perversion, of those in power drives the story to its inevitable end, in which inmates find no justice. Without agency, justice is non-existent.
Religious practice and ritual also enter the story after the reader learns that Dr. Andrey Yefimitch Ragin “intended to enter a theological academy, but that his father, a surgeon and doctor of medicine, jeered at him and declared point-blank that he would disown him if he became a priest” (138). The narrator presents a treatise on suffering, religion, science, and philosophy in a few sentences:

If the aim of medicine is by drugs to alleviate suffering, the question forces itself on one: why alleviate it? In the first place, they say that suffering leads man to perfection; and in the second, if mankind really learns to alleviate suffering with pills and drops, it will completely abandon religion and philosophy, in which it has hitherto found not merely protection from all sorts of trouble, but even happiness. (140)

If irony can drip, then what remains? Intellect although “transient and not eternal” (144), gives meaning to life. And meaning can only be tested, argued, respected in relationship. Relationship, as it is understood by Andrey Yefimitch, is a mutual exchange between equals. It is not hierarchical, vertical, as is his relationship with his supervisor, the superintendent of the hospital, or the Zemstvo. Chekhov’s characters, who struggle to form relationships on their own terms, do not live in a pre-determined universe. At the same time, the narrator ironizes the cultural influence in their attitudes of late nineteenth-century Naturalism, which will be discussed next in analyzing the work of Zola, noting that Ivan Dmitritch “spoke with contempt of his fellow-townsmen, saying that their coarse ignorance and sleepy animal existence seemed to him loathsome and horrible” (133; italics added). Two men—the doctor and the patient—crave relationship and do not like people. Relationships that are mutual are horizontal. Power and authority make relationships vertical. Agency becomes relative because people with more power have more of this elusive quality, this elusive status, than people with less power. And no one has less power than one labeled mad.²
The vertical process of decision-making ultimately traps Dr. Ragin in his own institution, as its authorities define normative behavior—acceptable behavior, appropriate behavior. Ironically, neither Andrey Yefimitch nor Ivan Demitritch are able to live in the normative world. Ivan exits the normative world through trauma; Andrey exits through boredom, disconnection, and alcohol. The only connection, relationship he has towards the end of the story is with vodka. How can one be mad without living in the world? For Chekhov’s protagonists to live in the world is madness. It is punitive, destructive, demeaning, cruel. There cannot be an external definition, that is, a diagnosis of madness, as Leader notes:

Diagnosis cannot be made from an external classification of behavior, but only through listening to what the person has to say about what has happened in their lives, taking seriously the position they have in their own speech, the logic they have developed themselves. (Leader 34)

Madness is defined in the interactions between people. Emile Zola, Chekhov's contemporary, used the theory of Naturalism, in the guise of science and, at first appearance, seemed to plug characters into the theory. The author explains: “In Thérèse Raquin I set out to study temperament, not character … I freely admit that the soul is entirely absent, which is as I wanted it” (Zola 4). Zola devotes himself to “an analysis of the working of the human animal” (5). This is no different from the history of madness that attempts to enroll mad individuals into humours, nosology, witchcraft, poverty, mental illness, or organic predispositions. In his novel, the adulterous protagonist; Camille, her sickly husband; Laurent, her brutish lover; and Mme. Raquin, her mother-in-law, are relegated to stereotypes based on humoral temperament. It would be contradictory if his characters behaved through free will or if they had agency or virtues, much like Ivan Dimitrich’s allusion to the “sleepy animal existence” of the people around him. Zola states, in response to his critics: “Whatever their conclusions, they would accept my point
of departure: the study of temperament and the profound modifications of an organism through the influence of the environment and circumstances” (7).

To define a human being as an “organism” is to suggest that a human does not possess humanity, a quality particular to *homo sapiens*, any more than any other primate or vertebrate. It also suggests that the “organism” does not have agency, free choice. More importantly, the ideas of virtue, of integrity also have no value. Ostensibly, behavior is pre-determined “by the combination of heredity, milieu, and what Taine called “le moment,” that is, the pressure of immediate circumstances” (Furst, “Zola’s ‘Thérèse Raquin’: A Re-Evaluation,” 190)

It may be assumed that Zola would use the word *heredity* as a genetic marker. Milieu and the moment are synonymous with my use of *community*, both social (meaning immediate, nuclear Raquin family and the “Thursday night visitors” of friends who come weekly to play cards with them, for example) and the norms of the larger community. Bell makes clear that “[o]ne of the major characteristics of the presentation of Thérèse throughout the novel remains her isolation—she is in many ways utterly cut off from commerce with her peers …” (Bell 127). As Furst argues, the characters are “the passive product of heredity, milieu, and the pressure of momentary circumstances” (Furst 193). Thérèse is outside community.

The reader has to confront, simultaneously, what Zola says about his characters and the direct engagement between reader and text. Is it ironic that the opening pages are a description of the Passage du Pont-Neuf where the Raquins live and the two women have a milliner’s shop. There is nothing mechanistic about the milieu. On the first page, the Passage is one of “acrid dampness … mean, soiled shadows … dank air of cellars, repellent shade of brown” (Zola 9). The narrator observes: “The crisp, hurried sound of footsteps on stone rings out all day long with irritating irregularity” (10). The reader is assaulted with the sight and sounds of decay. It
compares with Gilman’s narrator’s description of the wallpaper (and the bars and rings in the
wall) in the room where she was housed, in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which will be analyzed
later in this chapter. Both for Gilman’s narrator and for Thérèse Raquin, their environments are
like a prison. Both characters are stifled. Indeed, most of the characters in the texts considered
are stifled, are limited by their beliefs, their fear, and their context’s expectations. At the end of
these narrative reflections of late nineteenth-century society, redemption is rare: madness or
death or both conclude the texts.

Thérèse’s husband Camille’s history is a secondary narrative to Zola’s novel, but with a
message. It is enough to point out that in/valid has two pronunciations. The first refers to one
who is sickly, the second refers to one with no agency, no validity. Despite this characterization,
Camille breaks out of his double invalidation by getting a job, gaining some agency through
work and his chosen wanderings along the quay, after work. Surprisingly, his agency persists in
the way he haunts both Thérèse and Laurent after they drown him.

The reader knows little of his mother Mme. Raquin’s history. After her husband dies, she
retires from the pastoral village of Vernon to eke out a living making hats with her daughter-in-
law Thérèse under the gritty Passage du Pont-Neuf in Paris (19). Zola claims that “[s]he lived a
reclusive life, knowing nothing of the agonizing joys and sorrows of this world. She had created
an existence of peace and happiness for herself” (13). It is of note that he uses “agonizing” in
describing both joy and sorrow. The death of her son, subsequently, plunges her into sorrow: “…
her grief was tragic. She heaved with sobs, great shudders threw her body backwards and she
suffered a mad seizure of horror and anguish” (66). The anguish disappears and the horror
remains as she comes to learn about the murder of her son by Thérèse and Laurent. Zola,
ironically, refutes his claim that she knew “nothing of the agonizing joys and sorrows of this world.”

Laurent’s history is not as clear as Thérèse’s. The reader cannot go backwards to guess at Laurent’s background, his milieu, other than to note that he gave up becoming an artist and instead, as he explains: “… I said to hell with art and looked for a job … My father’s sure to die one of these days, and I’m waiting until he does so I can live without working” (28). He is lazy with an animal quality: “His great, powerful body asked for nothing better than to lie idle, wallowing in constant indolence and gratification. He would have liked to eat well, sleep long and fully satisfy his desires, without moving …” (28). The reader must contend with his indolence and yet his violence upon reading of their sexual encounters: “Then, with a violent gesture, Laurent leaned down and pulled the young woman [Thérèse] against his chest. He bent her head back, crushing her lips with his. She recoiled wildly, furiously, then, suddenly, gave in. … The act was silent and brutal” (34). If temperament, according to Zola, is determinative, how can Laurent be both indolent and violent and brutal?

Thérèse’s temperament is attributed by Zola’s narrative to her colonial African background. Early descriptions of her place her in the plains and savannahs of Africa where she was born: “… there was a feline suppleness in her, a mass of energy and passion dormant within her torpid frame. One day, her cousin [Camille], had fallen over in a faint. She picked him up and carried him off brusquely …” (15). The image of a tiger or lioness carrying her young is inevitable, as is her description of their garden in Vernon. She describes the “pale river and the huge green slopes rising up on the horizon …” (16). After their brutal coupling, Laurent notes that he was “bound hand and foot, into the savage embraces of Thérèse” (46). If Zola’s idea was to conjure “The Dark Continent” under Thérèse’s torpid frame he succeeds, as he succeeds with
all the major characters, in showing both appearances and hidden, dark substance. Plotting Camille’s murder begins with Laurent threatening to end their relationship, which she vehemently rejects “with a mixture of fury and terror” (47). As Furst points out: “Suffice it to say that from her adventurous seafaring father and her mysterious, beautiful North African mother, Thérèse has inherited a passionate temperament that she had to stifle during her upbringing in the cloying, sick-room atmosphere of Camille’s nursery (Furst 198).

The major characters share the binary of appearance and temperament. Violence exists within each, underneath—hidden at times, manifest at other times. Their behavior becomes much more colorful than the early descriptions of each of them. For example, after their initial sexual encounter that was “silent and brutal” (34) “… she had a look at once mad and tender” (35). The relationship between appearance and temperament is shattered long before they murder Camille and the latter comes back to haunt them. It is more correct to point out, as Johnson does, that they become paralyzed with terror. The characters’ feelings are elemental, and do not suggest integrity—integration. Johnson uses value differently than would be suggested as synonyms for integrity or virtue in the Aristotelian sense. “… the notion of freedom Zola was moving toward has less to do with volition operating in a vacuum than in the capacity to change one’s values as a player in various exchange-systems” (Johnson 304). In Johnson’s analysis, exchange-systems “deal with economics, language, sexuality, energy, or narrative among others …” (302). Zola’s characters have choice only as “players” within different exchange systems.5 Naturalism is just one of the theories through which Johnson attempts to analyze what Zola’s narrative communicates.

Thérèse Raquin is terrified and terrorized by Laurent in life, in relationship, and by Camille as he appears to her after his death. The only character that has, at least, the virtue of
generosity is Mme. Raquin, although Zola suggests her generosity is self-serving, as if holding her family near her after her son’s death is somehow questionable. She wants the best for her son and Thérèse, and after his death the best for Thérèse and Laurent. Her willingness to move at the beginning of the text is an affectionate gesture as is the sum of money that the three of them could live on. There is integration between feelings and behavior. The either/or binary is the opposite of integration. Indeed, dis-integration is the terror and fury that eventually engulfs all of the protagonists, including Camille, who bites Laurent’s neck as he is being drowned. Laurent’s wound becomes the personification of terror and fury. Nobody is as they seem to be and when they are, as Zola would want the reader to believe, that they have no internal decency, no integrity, no humanness.

I could not find a commentator or critic who had read her history, who can see past her African heritage, to the trauma of Thérèse’s birth, although it is right in front of the reader and actually precedes her lineage:

One day … when Mme. Raquin was still a haberdasher, her brother, Captain Degans, brought a little girl to her in his arms. He was back from Algeria. “Here’s a child; you’re its aunt,” he told her, with a smile. “Her mother is dead … I don’t know what to do with her. I’m letting you have her.” (14-15)

Thérèse Raquin is traumatized in the first two years of her life. She is left as an object at her aunt’s doorstep. She is given away before she can form attachments, relationships. She knows how to survive. She knows how to observe. In this sense, she is as self-contained as François, the cat. She has to maintain the ability to be perfectly still, invisible, and the ability to pounce.

Besides integrity, relationship requires vulnerability. Animals in the wild are capable of attachments to mates and offspring. They are able to be vulnerable within a community, a pride, a herd. She lives with a sense of hyper-vigilance. Animals, in community, do not maintain hyper-
vigilance as she does. Feelings have to be heightened to terror, fury, and passion for her to experience them. She was condemned to live “in this dank darkness, in this dreary, depressing silence …” (22). Thérèse and Laurent have to kill to experience “agonizing” feelings.

For Zola, terror is evidence of madness, it is hallucinatory, and can only be erased by suicide. And, in the end, Mme. Raquin is filled with emotion although her body is motionless: “Mme. Raquin was gradually overtaken by paralysis and they could foresee the day when she would be tied to her chair, physically and mentally incapable” (137). The narrator explains in further detail “When she tried to cry out, to call for help, she could make only harsh, croaking noises. Her tongue had been turned to stone, her hands and feet had stiffened. She was rendered dumb and immobile” (147). Thérèse and Laurent could not contain their anguish and “forgot that she was there, that she could see and hear, madness overcame them … They would stammer, let slip confessions without meaning to, remarks that revealed everything to Mme. Raquin” (151). Her emotions become clear as “a frightful grimace crossed her face” (151). She, like Thérèse at the beginning of the text, “was forced to remain motionless and silent, keeping the explosion of her pain inside her” (152). As she witnesses their final agony, “Mme. Raquin, silent and unmoving, stared at them where they lay at her feet, unable to have enough of the spectacle, crushing them with her merciless gaze” (194).

Zola’s characters are more complex than he, himself, explains. As Furst suggested above, “according to Naturalistic doctrine man was determined by the combination of heredity, milieu, and what Taine called “le moment,” that is, the pressure of immediate circumstance” (190). While heredity is assumed to be biological, it can also allude to learned behavior. The milieu is the same as the social community and the norms, rules for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. The notion of “le moment” is even more complex because it assumes that if one, a
character, had the same heredity and lived in the same milieu, then “le moment” would be the same for both, that is, one would respond in exactly the same way as the other person or character. This is patently untrue and explains the importance of what I will call “granularity.” That is, each character (or person in non-fiction) experiences the moment in time uniquely, unlike Zola’s assumption that “the study of temperament and of the profound modifications of an organism through the influence of environment and circumstances” (7) is a basis for truth or is paradigmatic of an individual’s behavior.

All of the characters analyzed so far are represented as intensely human. They feel. They strategize. They have goals. They form judgments. And what they share in common is the community in which they live, the norms of the community that they transgress, and the label of “Other” put upon them by the cultural authorities of their specific contexts, whether defined as institutions or family. They are non-normative.

This is Edna Pontellier’s problem in the novella by Kate Chopin, The Awakening. She can’t not be Other. She appears to choose Otherness. Although water and flying as metaphors run through The Awakening, Edna could not choose herself, could not fit into the life she was supposed to lead. Supposed to is a term that often defines norms, expectations of behavior, rules, and custom. Custom refers to rules for acceptable behavior that include the role of mother as nurturer, the late nineteenth-century class role of a wife’s dependency on her husband, and the taboo of sexual attraction of a married woman with a younger man. It is probable that whether Edna were married or single, this prohibition would hold. She has little interest in being a mother and, eventually, lives independently of her husband and children.

Trauma may be characterized as a response to a specific event or an accretion of events that overwhelm what may be labeled “normative functioning.” Normative functioning is always
defined by the powers, the authorities, the social constructs in a given historical context, a given class, a given milieu. Edna Pontellier is outside normative functioning. The reader apprehends Edna in, at least, three ways. Chopin describes Mr. Pontellier, Madame Lebrun, and the Pontellier children before turning to Edna herself. Her first description of Edna focuses on her eyes: “She had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought” (Chopin 550). This foreshadows Edna’s relationships as if those she observed were objects and not subjects. Subjects have agency, objects do not. Chopin describes Edna as the unfolding, the birth of an individual human being:

Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her … But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. (558)

The reader develops his/her own description and belief system about Edna. It, again, must be noted that the reader’s beliefs about the character are based on knowledge of the time in which the character lived, the norms of that time, as well as the norms, beliefs, critical structures that shape the experience of Edna’s observer (both the reader and the other characters). It is a worthwhile exercise to read psychological interpretations of Edna from childhood until her suicide, such as Ryan’s “Depression and Chopin’s The Awakening.” Edna may also be exhibited through the lens of mythology, for example:

Freudian and other psychological critics have helpfully detailed the infantile and regressive traits in Edna, but this line of interpretation tends to view Edna’s struggle as narrowly pathological rather than universally human. (Franklin, “The Awakening and the Failure of Psyche,” 510).

The facts of Mrs. Pontellier’s struggles consist of the narrator’s perspective and Edna’s view of her interactions with others. Of course, the reader is also offered the narrator’s perspective of other characters and the other characters’ own communications. For example, the
reader is informed early in the story that Edna is an American woman (551) who felt “[A]n indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness” (553). She is also “not a mother-woman” (554). The reader needs only one more reference point for this woman who “was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (558). The narrator supplies the reference point on the following page:

Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions. (559)

In her dual life, her internal experience is one in which “her whole existence is dulled, like a faded garment which seems no longer to be worth wearing” (584). And yet the narrator describes Edna’s feelings as she “finished her dinner alone, with forced deliberation. Her face was flushed and her eyes flamed with some inward fire …” (589). She cannot survive the dichotomy, the binary, the either/or of dullness and fire. In this, she is the ultimate Other. She cannot integrate both.

She is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous because of her observer, outsider role. Virtue requires relationship in the world. Kate Chopin spends more time outlining Edna’s differences than her similarities. The author offers the genesis of Edna’s self-contained life as Chopin describes her childhood relationships with her sisters:

She and her younger sister, Janet, had quarreled a good deal through force of unfortunate habit. Her older sister, Margaret, was matronly and dignified, probably from having assumed matronly and house-wifely responsibilities too early in life, their mother having died when they were quite young. Margaret was not effusive; she was practical. Edna had an occasional girlfriend, but whether accidentally or not, they seemed to have been all of one type—self-contained. (561)

She is not like her friend Madame Ratignolle, an archetype of the late nineteenth-century wife and mother: “the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm” (554). Neither is she
Mademoiselle Reisz, the eccentric confidant who appears free of cultural norms and accepting of the status of Other. Mademoiselle Reisz acts as the mythic, metaphoric foreshadower of Edna’s life.

Mrs. Pontellier appears to move chronologically through time. In fact, the reader learns early about her childhood and she will return to her childhood at her end. Her self-containment begins her Otherness. It is the self that she cannot shed for the norms of her community—not mother norms, nor wife norms, nor sexual norms. In her self-contained journey, in her observer status, she cannot have friendships or intimacy either:

How to explain the development of Edna’s self? Léonce Pontellier answers.

It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier’s mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world. (593)

In describing Edna’s “birth” as a human being, Chopin points out: “How few of us ever emerge from such a beginning! How many souls perish in the tumult! The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation” (558). The arc of the story is foreshadowed in these lines from her severing ties with her family, her attempts to become an artist and her failed romantic relationship with a younger male artist. When Edna Pontellier sheds her garments, she dies. Why can’t the reader understand her other-ness rather than defining her as mad? Because the reader, the critic, would, then, be forced to examine their own assumptions about people who are different; who want to or have to live differently.

The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Gilman (1892) has different roles. She is a wife, mother, sister-in-law. Roles are labels and suggest normative behaviors. The reader
is, once again, confronted with the customs, context, cultural imperatives of how one behaves in these roles. A name is also a label that may be of questionable utility, but naming a person serves as a way of marking personhood and agency. Like three patients in Chekhov’s “Ward No. 6,” the narrator of Gilman’s short story does not have a name, and her physical confinement suggests she is deprived of agency. Nevertheless, she writes in the first person from her own perspective, even as she describes others’ opinions of her behavior.

Critics such as Schöpp-Schilling, Treicher, and Thrailkill have looked at this short story, told by a woman with no name, from a feminist lens, a semiotic lens, a physiological lens, a psychological lens. In “The Yellow Wallpaper’: A Rediscovered ‘Realistic Story,’” Schöpp-Schilling comes close to the thesis of this study, that Gilman uses the image of the wallpaper with its multiple setting functions as objective correlative to the heroine’s repressed emotions, and finally as the symbol of her life (285). It is notable that the reader is able to look at the narrator from her lens, her experience, her understanding of herself, without the contextual overlay of others' opinions about her, which she relates though she voices her disagreement with them. Gilman’s narrator is not acting rightly according to her husband and brother. They diagnose the wrongness of her behavior, as a form of “nervous depression.” Thrailkill conceptualizes Gilman’s story as the melding of medicine and literature “within the nascent discourse of psychotherapeutics” (527; see also 549), suggesting that the doctor, the authority, began looking as much to what the patient said as to physical (material) symptoms associated with the body. The narrator's doctor husband proposes a cure. The cure, ostensibly, is rest alone, without the company of her baby or children, in a room with barred windows at the top of a rented summer home. Yet the reader is first assaulted by her confinement in a “haunted house” (844). She “proudly declare[s] that there is something queer about it” (844).
Although her husband is the doctor, the scientist, the narrator’s relationship with the wallpaper is as empirical as any scientific observation: “It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions … The color is repellent, almost revolting, a smoldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight” (845). Later, she will note an olfactory observation: “But there is something else about the wall paper—the smell! I noticed it the first time we came into the room … Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here … A yellow smell” (852). In a neuro-cognitive approach to Gilman’s narrative, Roethle argues that “The obsessiveness of her attention becomes not a sign of deepening madness, but a sign that she is working her neurological cure (“A Healthy Play of Mind: Art and the Brain in Gilman’s The Yellow Wallpaper,” 152). The rest of the story is her attempt to first understand, then deconstruct, and, finally, to survive her environment. Since so many theories have been used to explain Gilman’s narrator, it may be helpful to suggest a theory that probably devolved from evolutionary and biological theories. The organism’s primary purpose is to survive. Actually, all the characters survive, although the narrator’s defiant agency at the story's conclusion causes John, her husband, to faint.

The narrator appears to have two lives: her life as she experiences it, and the life she must present to the other characters to survive:

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I’m sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired. (845)
There is no need here to break down the narrator’s behavior into conscious/unconscious or any other binary. She tells the reader explicitly that she has two selves—a public one and a private one. The public one is the one necessary to survival in her environment, the private one is for herself, her internal power, to survive.

The reader need only remember that the self is contextual, embodied, under authority, both practical and symbolic. The symbolic becomes practical if the organism is to survive. Institutional authority, social community, the verticality of family roles (husband to wife to children), all create what we think of as a Self. Here Gilman introduces a variable as yet unseen in the literature discussed—social isolation. Rest and social isolation are conflated in the story. In social isolation, there are no mirrors. Gilman’s narrator understands this. She creates her own mirror in the wallpaper. Early in the story her mirror is her husband’s beliefs: “He sees that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency” (846). Later she tries to reason with John: “I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day…” (849).

Her husband, as mirror, becomes more dangerous as she moves away from her belief that “It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so” (849). Her internal truth begins to assert itself: “The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John (851) … it does not do to trust people too much” (853). She is learning what she needs to do to stay sane, to stay separate, to not be drawn into the wallpaper. To be swallowed by the wallpaper, at least metaphorically, may be a definition of madness. She is not swallowed, but succeeds in emerging from the wallpaper. Her husband is left unconscious. There may be madness in her situation, in her environment, in the dictates of authority. But, in the end, she is
able “to creep over him every time!” (855). She does not succumb to her cure. Madness, to the
degree that the word is definable, is ego dystonic. Gilman’s narrator’s behavior is ego syntonic
throughout. Survival and awareness of one’s self, contextually, cannot be defined as madness.⁹
At the end, the only mirror worth trusting is her own. Perhaps, resiliency is the greatest virtue for
humans and one that has to be tested again and again.

The mirrors for Mary Katherine Blackwood, the first-person narrator of Shirley Jackson’s
novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), are different. The resiliency of the
Blackwood family is different. The only mirror that matters to Mary Katherine (Merricat) is her
sister Constance. She tells the reader so in the first paragraph of her story. Mary Katherine is the
narrator of her own life as well as the lives of Constance, Uncle Julian, Cousin Charles, and the
townspeople. Her presentation is (almost) like a Venn diagram in which the edges of each circle
touch the other, but cannot reform together, cannot overlap.

Most of Mary Katherine’s narrative concerns the safety of being apart from the
townspeople, not part of them. Safety includes elaborate talismans, locked gates, specific paths,
to avoid the townspeople. The Blackwoods are Other, the townspeople are Other, like two
magnets with the same pole facing. In describing the town that, unfortunately, she had to visit
twice a week for provisions and to return library books (that would never be returned), she
describes the “rot when I came toward the row of stores; I thought about burning black painful
rot that ate away from the inside, hurting dreadfully” (6). How is one to do that, to burn away rot,
to burn away pain? As Woodruff points out: “More important than the physical squalor and
ugliness is the moral dry rot of its inhabitants” (“The Real Horror Elsewhere: Shirley Jackson’s
Last Novel,” 154). The reader might consider her mad as the town’s kids chant:

Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?
Oh no, said Merricat, you’ll poison me.  
Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep?  
Down in the boneyard ten feet deep! (Jackson 16)

What the town folks could not see was Merricat’s ability to hide “very far inside....” (16).

Is the ability to hide “very far inside” madness or might it be adaptation, as Gilman’s narrator adapted to her mortally reduced circumstances? Carpenter, in “The Establishment and Preservation of Female Power in Shirley Jackson’s ‘We Have Always Lived in the Castle,’” sees in her place on the moon (Jackson 15), her talismans scattered across the Blackwood property, evidence of agency that protects her from them, the Other, the town’s people (Carpenter 32-38). Mary Katherine’s goal is to clean, clear out the rot that infested her own people and the rotten relationship with the folks in town. Here the internal Other meets the external Other.

If the mirror that Merricat used was her mother and father or the town, she was doomed to danger. There could not be safety for her. Constance is totally aware of her sister’s need for safety and is, therefore, willing to go on trial for murders her sister committed. At the end, it is Mary Katherine who takes care of her sister, who appears to devolve during the trauma of the fire—fire that destroys and cleanses, like the cellar that both preserves and rots; like “burning black painful rot that ate away from the inside, hurting dreadfully” (6).

Perhaps what the reader might perceive as madness is a flight towards safety, towards sanity. Madness and sanity are not binaries. They are not mutually exclusive. These definitions are based on perception and perceptions are relational. Carpenter offers her own opinion seventeen years after Woodruff as she quotes a review in Time magazine:

The book manages the ironic miracle of convincing the reader that a house inhabited by a lunatic, a poisoner, and a pyromaniac is a world more rich in sympathy, love, and subtlety than the real world outside. Many readers express discomfort at being made to identify with a madwoman, but is Merricat mad? If paranoia depends on delusion, Merricat is not paranoid because the hostility she perceives is the villagers is real. Like
most of Jackson’s protagonists, she seems young for her age, but immaturity is not madness. (Carpenter 36).

Sanity requires mirrors that accept. In the end, the moat around the castle is breached and norms of family, norms of community, virtues like generosity, exhibited by one sister to another, come into the foreground like two circles whose tangents barely touch.

For Ivan and Dr. Ragin of Chekhov’s story, there is trauma and loss. For Thérèse and Laurent in Zola’s novel there is terror that can only be revoked by suicide. Suicide also solves the problem of never really belonging anywhere for Edna Pontellier. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” finds a solution in which she survives as she crawls over the body of her husband, who has fainted. She maintains consciousness and narrates her story from her own perspective. He does not.

For Merricat and Constance, at the end, madness is burned away and safety remains for the Blackwoods while it appears that sadness and guilt remain for the town people. Labeling people mad, regardless of particular social constructs, becomes a statement about the labelers, about their power to define, to enforce, to demand. The exercise of defining Other may be madness concealed in pomp and circumstance, in power and control and, most important for this study, in the “angle of vision.”

10
Notes to Chapter 2


2 Whether the definers use law, science, philosophy, or norms, people deemed mad are outsiders. See: Mirković’s “Anton Pavlovich Chekhov and the Modern Sociology of Deviance,” 66-72.

3 Leader offers an interesting interpretation of some of Freud’s ideas about psychosis. Unfortunately, psychosis (madness) remains mired in internal projections. His quoted statement (34) is as close as he comes to viewing madness as not within, but rather interactional, cultural, and determined by a power differential.

4 Bell, in “Thérèse Raquin:’ Scientific Realism in Zola’s Laboratory,” offers an interesting interpretation, suggesting that, in fact, Zola weds science and literature:

   The refusal on the part of Zola’s contemporaries to grant any merit to his claims about the scientific nature of this work is an eloquent commentary on their own incapacity to imagine in a fruitful manner the relation between literature—or the humanities—and science (123).

5 While it may be intellectually stimulating to discuss the behavior of Thérèse or Laurent or Camille or Mme. Raquin from Saussure’s perspective (Johnson 302) or Marxist distinctions (303), these are theories placed on the characters by the critic in the process of explicating or deriding Zola, the author. As Naturalism is a theory, so are the other theories presented by Johnson.

6 Ryan states: “… we have typically ignored the possibility that Edna’s suicide derives from depression and that she is a woman haunted by the attachment deprivation of her childhood. Admittedly, Kate Chopin was fascinated by Darwinism and presents Edna’s sexual awakening as a product of a biological imperative … Edna sees herself … as an isolated individual caressed by nature’s force and both isolated and freed by her self-realization” (254). To reinforce both his beliefs and his categorizations of the author, Professor Ryan also categorizes Edna using the DSM-IV. Unfortunately, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders conceives of non-normative behavior as psychopathology following the history of madness from Hippocrates through Galen and the reemergence of “science” since the late eighteenth century.

7 See Franklin, “The Awakening and the Failure of Psyche.” 510. See also: Feder, *Madness in Literature*, who argues: “Madness as a theme of myth and literature has always dealt with personal responses to environmental influences, which include political, social, and cultural pressures …” (xi). Although she will use standard Freudian orthodoxy as explanation for character behavior, she does not lose sight of social, political, and cultural complications in the character’s life. In this way her approach is aligned with that of this study. For examples of acceptable norms in Mrs. Pontellier’s society, see Franklin 588 and 607. Also see: Blashfield et al.; Surís et al.

8 Treichler does mention the “stimulus-deprived environment” (63) in which the narrator lives, but quickly passes over it. She does get beyond Western binaries at the conclusion of her article: “Woman is both passive and active, subject and object, sane and mad” (74). This might be used as a definition of “embodiment,” for all persons. Freud took the materialist approach, and
believed that bodily symptoms, behaviors were intimately connected to the patient’s story and that bodily symptoms would lessen when the patient’s story was correctly interpreted. Thrailkill references the “domestic environment” (542). Why was it necessary for her to “have conflated the activities of literary critic and psychotherapist” (552)? Why argue for an overlay of a deeper story (549)? Warner offers an explanation with which this study concurs:

The idea is that the activity we undertake with each other, in a kind of agonistic performance in which what we become depends on the perspectives and interactions of others, brings into being the space of our world, which is then the background against which we understand each other and our belonging (553).


As Woodruff notes:

we find the concepts of normal and abnormal behavior highly ambiguous, if not actually reversed, not because Merricat is unable to distinguish between them, but because the novel’s angle of vision forces us to find all that is good and meaningful in the lives of the three recluses scorned by the community at large (155).

Woodruff speaks of Merricat’s vivid imagination that “insulates her against the world’s lovelessness and greed, just as Constance has created a way of life which comes close to matching her sister’s lunar fantasy” (155). Imagination is not insanity. Indeed, Shannon Turlington echoes Woodruff in “We Have Always Lived in the Castle: An Inside-Out Fairy Tale.” This study is based on the “angle of vision” that Woodruff posits in Jackson's narrative, as it also bears on other works analyzed here.
Chapter 3

Film: An Interaction with Madness

Film shares, with literature and art, an audience or observer and it engages the observer’s imagination. Reading literature calls into action one’s understanding of metaphor, irony, and other descriptive and rhetorical devices. It calls for an understanding of the character’s feelings as they are explained linguistically and perceived through the reader’s imagination. The reader is led to imagine and to experience scenes, characters’ feelings, sounds and other sensorial aspects of a fictive reality constructed by language. Literature comes to life from the connection between the author’s narrative or poetic voice and the reader. The reader “metabolizes” the text, or processes it through his or her own filters of experience.¹ That connection is often based on shared meanings and historical understandings in which the connection between author’s narrative and reader is, in modern mental health terms, “syntonic.” That is, the reader perceives an understandable context and responds with reactions—thoughts, emotions—that are considered culturally appropriate for the represented content. In other words, the reader or viewer sees that the scene harmonizes with the reader’s or viewer’s beliefs regarding the given frame, the given moment. The reader or viewer’s observations are consonant. If they are dissonant, they are said to be ‘dystonic.”

Madness is “dystonic.” Madness, as it is focused in this study, suggests meanings not shared; contextual and normative rules not followed; and power differentials not accepted by those who are subjected to the definers of madness. It is this lack of shared meaning that defines madness and differentiates culturally conforming subjects from those defined as Other. Madness
is, in effect, a metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson explain, in *Metaphors We Live By*, “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5).

This chapter focuses on selected modern films that represent characters’ experiences in insane asylums: *The King of Hearts*, directed by De Broca; *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, directed by Forman; *The Fisher King* directed by Gilliam; and *Library of Dust: The Documentary*, directed by Ondi and James. It explores madness through the optics of the power differential that defines it, where the institution is the definer and the patient is the subject or, perhaps, the object. It explores madness as trauma, for which agency is found in individual experience, not that dictated by authority; it also explores when the authority is mad and the insane are sane; and, finally, madness as relegated to corroded copper canisters.

If society judges one to be bad, criminal, s/he is sent to a correctional institution. If society labels one of unsound mind, mad, s/he is sent to an asylum. Both institutions confine the individual apart from, separate from others. History has not offered what appears to be a clear distinction between madness and socially undesirable behavior, that is, what authorities define as madness changes, as does what authorities define as criminal. The institution where the societal offender is sent is either a place for criminals or a place for insane people. For example, into the seventeenth century poverty could be seen as criminal or the “offender” could be defined as insane. “Asocial” is simply the word used for dystonic behavior, that is, behavior not harmonious with community norms.

As Foucault explains in his *History of Madness*:

Confinement was an institutional creation peculiar to the seventeenth century … As an economic measure and a social precaution, it was an invention. But in the history of unreason, it signals a decisive event: the moment when madness is seen against the social horizon of poverty, the inability to work and the impossibility of integrating into a social group … The new meaning assigned to poverty, and the importance accorded to the
obligation to work and the ethical values surrounding it were ultimately determining factors in the experience of madness, transforming its meaning. Confinement was merely the spontaneous elimination of the “asocial.” The classical age is taken to have neutralized, with sure-footed efficiency—all the more efficacious for being blind—the people who, without hesitation or danger, we now divide between prisons and corrective institutions, psychiatric institutions and the psychoanalyst’s couch. (77-78, italics added)

This idea of the fracture between bad behavior and mad behavior gained traction in the nineteenth century. Discussing shifts in psychiatric thought in the late nineteenth century, Scull notes in his Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity: “Degeneration was invoked to explain far more than insanity alone. All the pathologies of modern life were laid at its door: prostitution, crime, delinquency, alcoholism, suicide, epilepsy, hysteria, feeble-mindedness, the physical deformation of many of the lower classes (in reality a result of want and malnutrition)” (245). Such distinctions have historically remained in the hands of the people and institutions with the power to make them.

In Forman’s 1975 film, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, the problem for Randle Patrick McMurphy is that he may be both criminal and mad. He does not deny that his bad behavior led to prison. As Dr. Spivey notes: “You went in for statutory rape.” Dr. Spivey also shares from his chart that he had been arrested at least five times for assault. He adds that the case notes: “… Said you’ve been belligerent, talked when unauthorized, been resentful in attitude toward work in general. You’re lazy.” The doctor explains, in a confidential tone: “The real reason they sent you over here [from the work farm] is because they want you to be evaluated to determine whether or not you are mentally ill.” The question to be answered as he is introduced to group therapy: is he a criminal, a mentally ill criminal, or mentally ill and not a criminal at all? The latter hypothesis requires the viewer to believe that his criminal behavior is caused by some psychological problem. His tenure on Ward 81 is supposed to answer this
fundamental question. In the opening scene, he is being driven to the hospital. He is, then, led inside with waist handcuffs that are removed as he begins his interaction with Dr. Spivey. Now his introduction to the ward takes place as a group therapy session is under way. Nurse Ratched, as facilitator, (with Nurse Pilbow silently next to her) is following up with concerns a patient had the day before.

Viewing a film, the observer can empathetically interact with the characters, that is, the viewer interacts from her/his own experience. The interaction is real as social reality is real. The observer has at his/her disposal, what s/he sees, hears, feels as a response to the characters. The viewer responds directly to the characters even without the ability to interact with them. It is the social reality of the viewer’s history that s/he brings to the film. The observer is also offered the represented interactions among the characters. Both the viewer and the characters in relationships have histories prior to the present moment, relationships into the present moment between themselves and the history each brings to their interactions. Each brings history, habit, custom, cultural rules and norms to this shared interaction. The content may be fictional; the interaction between viewer and character in the form of the viewer’s response is not.

In the group therapy session of the film’s opening scene, Mr. Hardy, a patient, is trying to explain the difficulties of his interactions with his wife. Mr. Hardy, who is addressed by his last name as an indication of respect, is trying to explain his frustrations in his marriage. It is reminiscent of Dr. Andrey Yefimitch Ragin’s interactions with Gromov. Mr. Hardy tries to respond to Nurse Ratched’s judgment that he is “impatient with (your) wife because she doesn’t meet (your) mental requirements.” Mr. McMurphy, the newcomer, looks quizzically from one to the other as Mr. Hardy replies, “Perhaps the only thing I can really speculate on, Nurse Ratched, the very existence of my life with or without my wife in terms of the human relationship, the
juxtaposition of one person to another, the form and the content . . .” He is interrupted by Taber, who angrily suggests that everything Mr. Hardy is saying is “bullshit.” The latter becomes more agitated and retorts, as McMurphy looks at him seriously,

This is the point, Taber. It’s not bullshit. I’m not just talking about my wife. I’m talking about my life. I can’t seem to get that through to you. I’m not just talking about one person. I’m talking about everybody. I’m talking about form. I’m talking about content. I’m talking about interrelationships. I’m talking about G-d, the Devil, Hell, Heaven. Do you understand, finally? ... It makes me feel peculiar.

Peculiar and particular or “granular” apply to all characters, including the reader or viewer. To look at a scene, the context granularly is to see and to intuit both verbal and non-verbal interactions at their most immediate present (in the present). Nurse Ratched and Nurse Pilbow stare blankly.

What is peculiar is Mr. Hardy's inability, his frustration to be understood. He is met with the fears of Mr. Martini, sadness and fear of Billy, the anger of Mr. Taber, the frustration of Mr. Cheswick, who complains: “You guys just don’t want to learn anything. You just don’t want to listen to anybody. He has intelligence” (pointing to Mr. Hardy), and the blankness of Nurses Ratched and Pilbow.

The group therapy session is held in the Day Room with assorted chairs and tables, and a TV screen secured to the wall and controlled by Nurse Ratched. What is immediately notable is that the group therapy session is carried on in an inner circle. The patients are dressed in street clothes. Their dress will take on a different meaning later in the film and will further confuse any notion of madness. There are also patients outside the group who are talking to themselves, walking in circles, sitting in wheelchairs. And then there is the Indian, mostly seen in shadow, standing and observing the group. If the context of the psychotherapy group were moved to a
psychologist’s office or to a group of men who met regularly at a coffee shop or in a Twelve Step meeting or other church setting, it would be difficult to ascribe madness to the participants.  

Similarly, the viewer cannot fault McMurphy for trying to teach Chief Bromden how to shoot a basketball as Ratched looks blankly through a second-floor window. Orderly Turkle makes it clear “what the hell you talkin’ to him for. He can’t hear a fucking thing.” McMurphy replies: “I ain’t talking to him. I’m talking to myself. It helps me think” as the Chief looks at McMurphy. While the orderly disapproves of the attempted communication, McMurphy ignores him as he goes on explaining how to shoot the basketball, saying, “doesn’t hurt you, does it Chief?” Killing time by teaching basketball skills is a normal way of forging friendships, institution walls notwithstanding.

The narrator of Ken Kesey’s 1962 novel, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, is the Chief, a character often subjected, along with the other locked ward inmates, to inaccurate psychoanalytic interpretations by film critics who overlook his full discursive development in the novel on which the film is based. The Chief is far from uncomprehending, explaining as the book’s narrator “They don’t bother not talking out loud … when I’m nearby because they think I’m deaf and dumb. Everybody thinks so. I’m cagey enough to fool them that much” (3). He can narrate the story because, as he is mopping the floor in a restroom, two psychiatrists talk about other patients in front of him, assuming that he will not hear information about their treatment. The only apparently “deaf and dumb” Indian of Kesey’s novel is transformed in the movie into a deaf person ascribed no agency, no separate self, without dignity. While he does not speak, the character does have great courage, compassion, and integrity, and shows unexpected agency. The viewer cannot know this in these early scenes in the film or text. These virtues have no value if one is perceived as a mental patient, or, as we have seen in fictive texts analyzed in previous
chapters, a losing warrior (Ajax), a withered gentleman (Alonso Quijano), an upper-middle class woman in late nineteenth century New Orleans who falls short of fulfilling her maternal and societal role (Edna Pontellier), a child (Thérèse Raquin) traumatized at birth, or a birth mother sent into sensory deprivation (Gilman’s unnamed narrator).

It is difficult to ascribe foreshadowing in a film since there are many more frames that the writer, director, actors have yet to assemble. However, the power struggle between McMurphy and Ratched and what this struggle portends is already clear in the medication line at the nurse’s station window. McMurphy asks why the background music is so loud on the ward as they line up for their medication. She explains, as if McMurphy is developmentally, not mentally, disabled: “We have a lot of old men on this ward who couldn’t hear the music if we turned it lower. The music is all they have.” Ratched points out that McMurphy’s hand is touching the window glass of the nurse’s station. “Sorry, ma’am. I’m really sorry” the latter replies as he attempts to wipe the window with his shirt. As he is handed his pill by Nurse Pilbow, he takes the pill, looks at it and says that “it looks like a horse pill. I don’t like taking something if I don’t know what it is.” When he refuses to ingest it, Nurse Ratched assures him that they can administer it in ways other than orally. McMurphy makes a show of swallowing the pill although he palms it under his tongue, later spitting it out. It is clear at this point in the plot that the power struggle between this noncompliant inmate and the staff dedicated to controlling patient behavior with unexplained compulsory measures has begun. However, ultimately the movie lays bare the truth that the inhabitants of hierarchical institutions, whether prisons or mental hospitals, (to name those specifically focused in the film and Kesey’s novel) cannot win any confrontation; they cannot negotiate with their keepers, with those who have the power over their lives and their deaths.
Randle Patrick McMurphy with all his flaws—prison worthy and mental hospital worthy—has his own self, his own agency. He does not believe in madness. He believes in possibility. He believes that the Chief can learn, that he can lift the hydrotherapy machine (he can’t, although the Chief can), that Billy can be sexual (if he can forget for a moment his stutter and the shame forced on him by Nurse Ratched), that the patients have the right to watch or listen to the World Series, that they can escape. The experience of the labeling of madness is, in one sense, the core of McMurphy’s predicament. Even after the boating experience, when McMurphy commandeers a bus excursion of inmates dressed in civilian clothes and they board a charter boat with the dignity of doctors on a fishing trip, the correct label for McMurphy remains unclear. The question of criminality versus madness is terminally muddled in the next scene.

This scene foreshadows the rest of the film. Three psychiatrists and Nurse Ratched are meeting to discuss the disposition of McMurphy. Dr. Spivey, the chief psychiatrist, points out that, ironically, “the person he’s closest to is the one he dislikes the most. That’s you, Mildred.” Nurse Ratched (Mildred) takes responsibility for their nonconforming patient: “Well, gentlemen, in my opinion, if we send him back to Pendleton (prison) or we send him up to disturbed, it’s just one more way of passing on our problem to somebody else. You know, we don’t like to do that. So, I’d like to keep him on the ward. I think we can help him.” McMurphy has become a problem to be solved.

The power in a mental institution or asylum, from the seventeenth century to the present, rests primarily with the medical doctor. However, on the ward itself, it is the head nurse who has ultimate power. The end of the power struggle between Nurse Ratched and Randle P. McMurphy is inevitable. As he has previously explained in a staffing with Dr. Spivey: “Well, that fuckin’ Nurse, man … She, uh, ain’t honest. She likes a rigged game, you know what I mean?”
added). McMurphy, however, is unaware that the rigged (or the authoritatively contrived) game is spelled out clearly in the difference between penalties for criminality and penalties for madness. Penalties for criminality have definite termination dates. Penalties for madness might not. McMurphy believes he has sixty-eight days left in his sentence in either institution. He was bored in the first institution, so he has no difficulty going to the second. Quite chillingly for viewers, he is uninformed about the difference between voluntary and involuntary commitment. His commitment is involuntary. The patients in his group therapy are there voluntarily and can leave if they choose. He cannot. The game is over … almost. After McMurphy is lobotomized, his silently observant ally throughout the film, the Native American Chief Bromden, will not allow McMurphy’s agency, McMurphy’s self to be lobotomized. Early in the film, McMurphy tries to lift the hydrotherapy machine and cannot. Chief Bromden can and does, throwing the machine through the wired, grill-covered dayroom window. The film closes with Chief Bromden running towards the horizon.

The labeling of madness (or criminality) does not always lead to institutions. If madness is defined as a result of shame and trauma, outcomes might vary. Ajax’s trauma and shame led to suicide; Alonso Quixano experienced the trauma of a loss of life meaning and resurrected himself as the mad Don Quixote. This study has examined shame and trauma caused by culture, custom, and abandonment at birth. Aside from institutional authority that gives agency to some folks over others deemed nonconforming, shame and trauma, evident to observers or unbeknownst to them, are inherent in madness.

This is profoundly apparent in Terry Gilliam’s 1991 film, *The Fisher King*. The viewer cannot ascertain whether Edwin Melnick is a madman or a mad man, or a man filled with rage. However, it is clear that he brings together two men: Parry (Henry Sagan, formerly professor of
ancient history at Hunter College) and Jack Lucas, a shock-jock radio personality. After speaking with Jack live, on Jack’s call-in show, Edwin goes into a restaurant and massacres a number of people before turning the weapon on his own self. One of the people massacred is Professor Sagan’s wife.

The film depicts two men who struggle with grief and loss. Professor Sagan, in order to survive (physically), becomes Parry, a homeless man who lives in a boiler room and is troubled by images of a Red Knight on horseback. Jack Lucas is a celebrity with a great Manhattan apartment, a great collection of art and furniture, a beautiful girlfriend, and the same life bereft of meaning as Alonso Quixano, except that rather than becoming knight-errant, Jack Lucas becomes a drunk. For Parry, his agency, his self, his identity as Professor Henry Sagan becomes unbearable because of his wife’s murder. He tries to survive as a homeless person, forever in terror of the Red Knight. It is the Red Knight that stands between his madness and his grief. His grief, his loss is encapsulated by the Red Knight. Jack Lucas’s drunkenness stands between his meaningless existence and his grief and loss. There may be no redemption on the other side of grief and loss. All of Jack’s “techniques” to find meaning have failed. He will fail again.

Three years later, Jack Lucas finds himself in a video rental store with the owner, his girlfriend, Anne. He describes himself as a “suicidal paranoiac.” He stumbles out of their apartment, rips his jacket, and his couture now mimics a homeless person. He accidentally meets Parry and Parry watches as Jack ties cinder blocks to his feet and is about to embark on the same journey by drowning taken by Edna Pontellier. Jack is also hounded by two adolescents, who are intent on setting him on fire. Parry appears standing regally on a mound of garbage. He threatens the teen-age thugs by shooting a rubber tipped arrow into the crotch of the closest boy. Other
homeless people appear with tire irons and other weapons around Parry. They begin singing: “How About You?” The thugs retreat until, late in the film, they will beat Parry into a coma.

In this scene, the question of who is sane and who is insane, who is mad and who is a madman, who is terrified and who is not terrified, who has agency and who does not, is moot. What is not debatable is that Parry recognizes Jack. Jack wakes up in Parry’s humble abode, the boiler room under a Manhattan building. It is adorned with objects that serve as symbols. Parry may not be able to formulate, in words, how he can regain Professor Henry Sagan. Jack is the vessel to carry out the plan. In this scene, the mission begins to unfold. For Parry to know that he is psychotic suggests that he can observe his own behavior. Perhaps, he knows that because “he is out there,” referring to the Red Knight, he cannot come back from psychosis. It is not psychosis that Parry needs to return from. He needs to return from traumatic grief and loss. In this sense, he is healthier than Jack, who is mired in his meaninglessness. Returning from grief and loss is not to return to ‘before.’ Grief and loss are transformative for those who make it to the other side. Many of the characters in this study do not make it to the other side.

Parry has a love interest, Lydia, who is protected from his love. He follows her looking lovingly at her clumsiness and poor relationship skills, but he does not approach her. Parry and Lydia live in self-alienation caused by loss and grief, as their own Other. Lydia doesn’t chance her valueless life. Parry has the Red Knight as his avatar. Jack’s girlfriend Anne, already mentioned, loves him despite his drunkenness and his being a “suicidal paranoiac.” When Jack returns from a suicide attempt in Parry’s boiler room and relates it to her, Anne's retort is: “You don’t have to pour gasoline all over yourself to break up with me.” It has been stated repeatedly in this study that what one sees, what one perceives depends on where one stands. Anne speaks
from a position of agency recognized, ironically, by Parry but not by Jack, who will not see her until the end of the film.

In moving from trauma, grief and loss to redemption, one must go through fire. The Red Knight keeps Parry in the fire. Jack buries himself in alcohol. He tells Anne: “I’m cursed. I attract shit. Of all the people in this city, why did I meet the man whose wife I killed?” Lydia, traumas unknown, no longer ventures into the world. It is Anne who is redemptive. It is Anne who is on the other side. It is Anne who sees, loves, and grieves clearly. She says to Jack early in the film as she is preparing supper: “You come. You go. All I do is cook like a jerk. You’re wasting good lasagna. Find yourself another dope. Son of a bitch.” She has agency.

Redemption gives one knowledge and humility, sadness and loss; it is a living with not something to run from. The reader may ask, why not stay mad or drunk, given the pain of the process to get to redemption? Or why not become insane to be sane? It has been assumed, until this point, that agency is the behavior, the role of a character as defined by authorities, customs, context, history. But what if there were some deeper agency, deeper self underneath what one shows others? What if one lived free of assigned roles, assigned behaviors? All of the characters considered thus far have had to go through fire, like Parry and the Red Knight, to find that deeper, truer self. It suggests a deeper meaning than agency, because agency is constructed by authority, context. What if, regardless of appearances, madness becomes sanity and sanity becomes madness?

This is the question that confronts Private Charles Plumpick, the King of Hearts, in Philippe de Broca’s 1967 film, King of Hearts. The hierarchical institutions considered here are the military and the mental hospital. They are what Goffman, in his book Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates, has called “total institutions”: “Their
encompassing or total character is symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside” (4). Private Charles Plumpick inhabits the British military, a mental ward, and the community, in the small town of Marville, France. Private Plumpick is assigned the task of diffusing a bomb hidden in a nearby town. He questions his regimental leader since Private Plumpick’s job, his vocation really, is to be the keeper of carrier pigeons, an ornithologist. The confusion between sense and non-sense begins here. He enters the town and it appears empty of inhabitants. The townspeople have learned that a bomb has been hidden and they have fled.

The Germans, as they are leaving, after planting the bomb in the town square, confront Plumpick and he manages to escape by running through a gate at the edge of the town. He leaves his bird cage behind. Through the gate, he runs into a building and is confronted by patients in a mental ward. He disguises himself in the clothing of a mental patient to avoid detection as a British soldier. When questioned by a German soldier who follows him into the ward, he tells him that he is “The King of Hearts.” When he feels safe, he returns through the gates into the town, reverting back to his military costume.

When the patients feel safe, they venture into the town and masquerade as townspeople. Plumpick is given one clue. The barber, Le Coiffeur, a spy for the British army, has radioed Plumpick’s regiment that there is a hidden bomb and it is set to go off at midnight. Unfortunately, the barber is murdered by the Germans as they leave the town. Private Plumpick does not know, when he meets the barber, that the gentleman is a costumed mental patient. Phillippe de Broca, who directed “The King of Hearts,” explains the basis in reality for his casting of mental patients in masquerade, to lay bare the lack of any difference between them and others exposed to the trauma of war:
In *King of Hearts* there is the real world, represented by caricatures of soldiers and there is the mad world—gay and imaginative people playing costumed roles and applauding the battle as a performance for their amusement. Which is more real? It is tragedy seen comically. The conception came from a story I read in *France-Soir*. It was just a short item about the commemoration of 50 French mental patients who had been killed by the Germans. Their hospital had been bombed and they wandered through fields dressing themselves in the uniforms of dead American soldiers. When the Germans saw them, they thought they were Americans and shot them. It is a terrible story … I want to continue making these “comedies” because, for me, the only way to meet the tragedy of life is through comedy. I’m afraid of the world. I’m frightened. The comedy is a mask…. The seriousness lies behind the humor. (157) 9

The mental patients, in their new personas, create a community that would, surely, be labeled eccentric. The greatest eccentricity, perhaps, is that they all get along in a social community. Through a series of miscommunications, Private Plumpick finds and diffuses the bomb a moment before midnight.

The Scottish army and the German army, through another series of misperceptions, cross at right angles through the town as the mental patients flee back to the asylum. Plumpick see the two armies cross in the square and, as one soldier bends down to pick up a bouquet of flowers thrown from the balcony, he sees the other army. They face off with each other in shooting position and they all kill each other. Plumpick finds the birdcage where he left it at the beginning of the film and sheds his uniform as he walks through the gate of the asylum. The viewer sees the iconic image of Private Plumpick, naked, from the rear carrying the birdcage in his left hand as he enters the asylum.

To view the film as allegory or metaphor is to miss the experience of the characters; to reduce their experience to farce; to make their interactions valueless, without virtue. For viewers looking and feeling and listening through the experiences of the characters, definitions of sense and non-sense are adjusted. They are re-adjudicated by the optics of the film. The experience of the insane characters is redeemed.
Resurrection, literally, is the foundation of *Library of Dust*. The 2011 documentary film, *Library of Dust*, is based on a 2008 book of photographs of the same title by Maisel, with contributors Manaugh, Toedtemeier, and Roth. The *New York Times* review of Maisel’s book from the year of its publication shows the poignant link between his images and the history of total institutions, whose film representation this chapter has studied:

*Library of Dust*, from the photographer David Maisel, may well be this year’s most haunting book of images. It is a collection of photographs of copper canisters, each containing the unclaimed remains of a patient from a psychiatric hospital in Oregon (the same one used for filming “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest”). Rivulets of chemical corrosion, almost oceanic in their intense coloring, run down the sides. Mr. Maisel’s book is a fevered meditation on memory, loss, and the uncanny monuments we sometimes recover about what has gone before. (*New York Times*, November 28, 2008)

It is a film about time and memory, grief and loss, resurrection and redemption. The concepts of metaphor, allegory, fiction, imaginative rendering, do not apply. The film is about a small structure on the grounds of Oregon State hospital. From the outside it looks like an entrance to a steepled farmhouse. A key has to be found to gain entrance. Down a short hallway a room opens to shelves of canisters three deep, from the floor to a few feet below the ceiling. On the shelves are thirty-five hundred canisters of the cremains of mental patients who died in hospital. In the middle of the horseshoe shaped shelving is a small desk with a ledger open on the desktop. In the journal are thirty-five hundred names and thirty-five hundred numbers corresponding to the names.

After visiting a retort in a crematory, the viewer is driving alongside a woman on her way to the hospital. She is explaining, as narrative voiceover:

People don’t know these things happen; that their relatives have been put away in a small copper canister; they represented, in many ways the throwaway folks of our society. Nobody wanted them; nobody called for them; nobody came to see them. They died. They didn’t know what to do with the bodies so they cremated them. They put them in cans and then they put them away. And still nobody came. Nobody ever came.
The viewer will meet Mimi Stang, formally, later in the film, as she accepts Canister #3197, Herman L. Duncan, her uncle. He had dementia. He died in Oregon State Hospital in 1945. There are other families and other canisters. There is State Senator Peter Courtney, president of the Oregon State Senate, inexplicably left in this place. Viewers learn:

It was like these people had spent their lives in this place, which now is totally decaying and broken down. But not only that, they were cremated and nobody claimed them. So the whole thing was just a total nightmare as well as an awakening that we just had to do something about this. This is just not right.

It is an awakening for other families, as well. Viewers watch Kate O’Connor and her sister accept the cremains of their relative, Ada Winterbrun, canister #2709. They hear: “These are lost souls. They are literally people put away and forgotten and left and nobody wanted them and they were made uniform by being put in these canisters and they refused to be identical.”

Stephen Younger retrieves the cremains of Hester A. Thrush/patient Oregon state hospital/died 1936, stating “I exist because she existed and I’m here and I’m her caretaker. And what am I going to do?”

These are not characters one can step away from. They do not exist in a novel, a short story, a film about madness imagined. Madness, contextually, is what has been done to these human beings. It is not about labels from authorities. Indeed, the viewer will learn about the man with dementia, the man who was hospitalized for speaking in tongues. In fact, he spoke a foreign language. The viewer learns of the woman in the late nineteenth century who refused to do housework, and the depressed woman whose fiancée was killed in World War I.

A former patient standing on the grounds of the hospital speaks of her experience in that institution: “There are people there who would never be in a state hospital now and probably that was a great benefit to the people who were weaker, as I was when I first came in for the first few months. I think I would have starved to death if it hadn’t been for another inmate on my ward
who took care of me and made sure I got fed.” Nobody freely joins the community that Grace Heckenberg is talking about. Yet, community is a fundamental concept throughout this study; even if the community numbers two individuals, like Gromov and Dr. Ragin. The label of mental illness often creates communities of Others.

Rex Gorger is a current patient in Oregon State Hospital. In his words, “Nurse Ratched is very real and very alive and she’s saying: ‘How do you feel Mr. Gorger?’ And you know, well, I feel like shit because I’m in this room with you and I don’t want to talk about stuff that you really don’t understand and I don’t even understand. Who understands insanity; who can say ‘I’ve been there and I wrote it all down?’... Nobody.” It might be suggested to Mr. Gorger that folks have been writing it down, filming it, painting it, at least, since Sophocles wrote Ajax.
Notes to Chapter 3

1 Metabolism is used here in the figurative sense of breaking down, i.e. taking in (introjecting or swallowing in psychoanalytic terms). Images, feelings, sounds are broken down in the reader’s or viewer’s imagination and then perceived through that person’s filters of experience. Filters are the narratives that the reader or viewer has through experience learned about power, agency, authority, and self-worth. This is what constructs the dyad between an author and reader, filmmaker and viewer, painter and observer. As Weinstein explains, this “internal history,” or “aggregate” “gives the measure of one’s actual, fuller existence” (3). As applied to visual art, see: Winner, Invented Worlds: The Psychology of the Arts, 95-109 on the Gestalt theory of perception; and 164-168 on its application to drawing.

2 See Berger and Luckmann, especially III “Society as Subjective Reality.” See also Becker, Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, and from a fictional perspective, see Hinton.

3 It is of note that the patients in the psychotherapy group are dressed in clothes that would not distinguish them from normative people outside the institution. This idea of patients dressing like people on the outside may be traced, historically, to December 8, 1939 where “35 patients, neurotics and psychotics, met in ‘Sunnyside House’ and formed a social club” (Shorter 232). In the following few years Maxwell Jones, a British psychiatrist would introduce therapeutic community to mental institutions. See his Social Psychiatry: A Study of Therapeutic Communities. Here, the hierarchical structure would be deliberately flattened (Shorter 232-234) For the reader who is interested in the growth of Mad Pride, see: Farber; Hall; Hornstein; and Smith.

4 Van Nostrand, for example, portrays Billy Bibbit as “a stuttering, sensitive suicidal boy with a mother complex” (24). While this may not be the critic’s intent, her psychoanalytic diagnosis of Billy Bibbit misses, completely, the young man’s history of shaming. Shaming is traumatic.

5 When McMurphy is confronted by the harbor master, who asks for his identity as the patients already on the boat are putting on life jackets, he replies, “We’re from the State Mental Institution. This is Dr. Cheswick, Dr. Taber, Dr. Frederickson, Dr. Scanlon, the famous Dr. Scanlon, Mr. Harding, Dr. Bibbit, Dr. Martini, and Dr. Sefelt.” In this scene of cinematic brilliance, the patients are transformed into the roles ascribed to them. They stand straighter, they nod or wave as McMurphy says their names. (Since they are not dressed in “inmate uniforms,” they look, normatively, as men (and a woman) dressed for a fishing trip.

6 Madness is often morphed into mythic constructions: a battle between good and evil, vices and virtues, right and wrong. Handlen points out: “… McMurphy is practically superhuman, a giant of a man with a great booming voice and seemingly inexhaustible lust for life, an avatar for all that is individual and righteous and masculine … His battle against Ratched for the soul of the ward plays out like an epic show-down between two brilliant, near mythic opponents. Even the glimpses we get of McMurphy tired or acting in self-defense have a Christ-like feel to them, a certain garden of Gethsemane vibe. He struggles whether he wants to or not, he’s responsible for all of them; an in the end, he has to sacrifice himself to free them.” As most inmates are portrayed in the film, madness is much more prosaic, much more life deadening. Van Nostrand rightly points out: “… male patients move lifelessly through the motions of a daily routine that dominates their existence” (25).
See Ryan's chilling bioethical article on coercive treatment for mental illness patients, focused on practices portrayed in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

Pat Dowell’s description of the “fisher king” is instructive in an anthropological and mythical sense. One cannot assume that the legend has anything to do with madness (46).

See De Broca and Gardner. For a description of the Nazi occupation conditions that inspired Boulanger’s screenplay for the movie, see also Hammond and Boulanger.
Chapter 4

The Artist and the Observer: One-On-One

In literature, the reader must imagine the characters and their circumstances as the author’s narrative progresses. Since literature is written, by definition, in a time and place, it is often circumscribed by the rituals, customs, norms, history and organization of the place(s) in which the characters function. Literature as “thought experiment” is able to imagine and represent what is beyond the boundaries of societal limits, and it is these narratives that have occupied this study. In the literature and films considered, the characters have lived outside the norms, outside the demands of a given moment, of a given culture. Most died in the chasm of Otherness. A few made it through the fire, into redemption. Grief, loss, and trauma followed (or led) the characters analyzed in this study from one scene to the next.

Representation through painting captures a moment in time, frozen, and any interpretation must rest with the appraisal of that moment. Although it may be interesting to consider the state of the artist as the painting was being produced, this study must stay with the characters in the painting as messengers of what madness may be, how it looks, how it feels, and sounds, if sound might be depicted through a two dimensional image. This chapter will consider Bosch’s fifteenth-century Cutting the Stone and the nineteenth-century paintings Artist with Bandaged Ear (Van Gogh); The Scream (Munch); and Ward of the Madwomen of San Bonifazio (Signorini).

It must be remembered that perceptions define perspective and that perspective is based on one’s agency, internal and external, and by what Fry, citing Burke in “Symbolic Action in the
Episode of the Cave of Montesinos from ‘Don Quijote’,” has called “perspective by incongruity,” or “metaphor in the widest sense” (p. 469).² That is, what one sees is based on what one knows through experience and learned symbolic association. Knowing, as has been repeated, is phenomenological, culturally, historically, and authoritatively defined. In that agency is both seeing and knowing. Madness is, likewise, both.

Perspective for this chapter must also be thought of visually. As Winner argues in Invented Worlds: The Psychology of the Arts, “linear perspective, atmospheric perspective, and the illusion of depth are other ways of apprehending art” (84). She notes that perspective may be a function of the laws of physics: “… a realistic picture looks realistic because the picture gives off light rays identical in wave length and intensity to the light rays emitted from the actual depicted scene” (85). These ways of describing perspective assume that the painting is “realistic.” “Realistic,” unfortunately, gets us back to the question of what Hogan, in Cognitive Science, Literature, and the Arts: A Guide for Humanists, and Sass, in Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Art, Literature, and Thought, analyze as consensual or “reasonable” reality.³ In terms of Hogan’s study, the painting The Scream by Munch bypasses consensual reality (or “reasonable” reality) and goes directly for a representation of mid-brain or “feeling brain” reality.⁴ As with madness, so it is with art. There is more than one reality, as the following discussion will suggest.

Before visiting with Signorini, Van Gogh, and Munch, there are further observations that are in order. As has been observed repeatedly in this study, what is observed is dependent on one’s own history, agency, and authority as defined by community norms and the institutions of one’s context. The reader or viewer forms a relationship with the characters that can be independent of the author’s, dramatist’s, or painter’s ideas or goals. Foucault, viewing
Hieronymus Bosch’s “Extracting the Stone of Madness, circa 1490” opines: “Bosch’s famous doctor is far more insane than the patient he is attempting to cure, and his false knowledge does nothing more than reveal the worst excesses of a madness immediately apparent to all but himself” (*History of Madness*, 25). Foucault is, apparently, an authority, although he is neither Bosch nor any other viewer than his own self.

Here both Foucault and his interpretation (including the author’s interpretations in this study) must be bypassed. Scull reminds us that while the social and cultural aspects of mental disorders are critical to studying madness through centuries, scholars have yet to capture its evasive meanings. Taking issue with theoretical claims ranging from Foucault in *History of Madness* to Szaszian sociologists who, in different ways, posit mental illness as an institutional and social construct, Scull, citing MacDonald (1), stresses that “What I do insist, however, is that mental illness remains ‘the most solitary of afflictions to the people who experience it; but … the most social of maladies to those who observe its effects.’” (“Madness in Historical Perspective,” 758). Both Foucault and the author of this study are entitled to their own interpretations as long as all elements of the work are considered. For example, with Bosch, what is the viewer to make of the patient sitting up, rather than lying down? (Bosch, *Cutting the Stone*; see Appendix). Or why are the patient’s shoes neatly placed below his chair? Who is the assistant looking at, the doctor or the patient or both? Or is there a relationship between the flower on the table where the nun (with book on head) looks on with the flower being removed from the patient’s brain? The background of the painting presents its own interpretations. It is the concatenation of all of these individual perceptions that leads viewers into their own beliefs about madness.

A major problem with art, as arbiter of madness, is that a painting is two-dimensional and can only depict a moment in time. Parsing all of the contextual elements is left with the viewer.
To add to the complexity, a painting may suggest some kind of movement: Bosch’s doctor’s hands are “moving” as he removes the flower. As will be proposed shortly, it appears as if Munch’s piece has the most movement, Signorini’s next, and finally, Van Gogh. Even in Van Gogh’s work, there is clearly movement in the lower right-hand quadrant of the painting. In any event, this study has shown that consideration of madness as a represented object, diagnosis, model, or event, without understanding its context, limits analysis unsatisfactorily to definitions imposed by authorities. Scull provides a history of madness that locates madness in the body, a tenet that has validity only to the definers of madness:

Though many in classical Greece and Rome still embraced supernatural accounts of mental disturbance and had recourse to the temple medicine of the god Asclepius, with its purification rites, charms, and spells, others were attracted to the humoral model of disease embraced by the followers of Hippocrates and later systematized by the Graeco-Roman physician Galen—a model of illness, both mental and physical, that would survive in Europe into the nineteenth century…. Though religious interpretations of mental disturbance persisted in both polite and popular circles well into the eighteenth century (and among hoi polloi even longer than that), medical models of mental disorder gradually became dominant and then almost the only legitimate interpretation of the sources of mental distress. (Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity, 2-3)

This is a concise history of the theories of madness and how madness has been treated since ancient times. In the part of the essay quoted above, he does not include the emergence of asylums in the nineteenth century. An example of a nineteenth-century asylum (for women) is Signorini’s painting, which the reader will enter shortly.

It has been stated repeatedly that what one perceives is based on one’s perspective; and that perspective is based on authority, agency, etc. Therefore, the readers or viewers are influenced by not only knowledge gleaned from history (their own and what purports to be objective history), they are influenced by the paradigm in which they live and who the definers are of a given paradigm in time. What makes works of literature, film, and art canonical is their ability to teach, to touch, to offer fundamental truths that are not time sensitive, that both
question the paradigms of a given moment or period and, at the same time, go beyond the time and offer a shift in paradigm, a shift in perspective. Madness is a paradigm subject to the biases of those who have the authority to define it. The type of bias that seems to hold preeminent power is the sovereignty of authority. Works of art serve to contest that authority in important ways that speak to us, show us the possibility of other perspectives.

It has been the argument of this study that the power of understanding resides in how represented characters interact with each other and the observer; that madness, itself, does not and cannot define a person; and that when those labeled “mad” have their own agency, their own perspective, that label is suspect, if not irrelevant. The “authority” for understanding what may be perceived as “madness” exists between readers or viewers and the characters with whom they interact. Knowing an artist’s history does not explain the figurative representation before us; rather, the reader or viewer imagines the represented character’s experience. The idea that the artist and the observer may be apprehending two different realities is found in an article by Norma Broude, who writes of another of Signorini’s paintings:

“The Ghetto of Florence” in 1882, an ancient area of the city that was soon to be demolished and rebuilt, Boime [Professor of Art History, UCLA] has good things to say about this ghetto—“this vital traditional area”—which has come to represent for him nothing more sinister than a threatened remnant of a picturesque tradition.… Now casting Signorini as an advocate of historic preservation, Boime overlooks the fact that in this case Signorini has indeed painted a truly realistic image of contemporary poverty. (139)

Perhaps it is Broude who sees “a truly realistic image of contemporary poverty” and Boime sees “a threatened remnant of a picturesque tradition.” Perhaps, Signorini painted what was for him a different image. Van Gogh can paint his experience of being in a mental hospital, but that is not the same as my experience, the viewer’s. To understand Vincent Van Gogh’s life is not the same as interacting with his painting, as we shall see. There was much trauma and
sadness in Munch’s life prior to his artistry. Yet the observer's perception of Munch’s The Scream will be informed by viewing it and other experiences unrelated to the artist's history.

One more consideration must be made before the specific paintings are introduced. The differences between rationality and emotion have been touched on earlier in this chapter. Indeed, the language of emotion includes words like touched, affected, stirred, disturbed, aroused, impassioned. These are descriptors of emotion. But what, exactly, is stirred? What, exactly, connects the literature, film, or artwork to the observer? What, exactly, gives madness meaning in the context of emotions? It is the argument of this study that what is touched, moved in the observer of represented madness is recognition of and empathy with perceived experiences and emotions: these may include trauma, abandonment, death or fear of death, grief, loss, rage, and terror. While all of these words, descriptors, may have relevance to madness, these descriptors are not constitutive of madness. As has been revealed in literature and film, madness may have some contextual meaning but when the observer is moved, changed by reading or observing madness, it is by the feelings suggested above. This is the between that is the basis of this study. Madness may be a diagnosis, but it is the observer’s humanity that is touched. Perhaps the reason madness is not more comprehensively parsed in its history rests with the difficulty of looking directly, feeling directly, listening deeply to the trauma and grief that underlies most manifestations of madness.

As Scull notes: “San Bonifacio’s hospital was founded in Florence in 1377, becoming an asylum for the insane in the eighteenth century under the rule of Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo I.” Viewing the painting, the observer would probably not need the title offered by Signorini: “Ward of the Madwomen …”. However, without the title, all that can be adduced from the painting itself is that the residents of this space are incarcerated (Signorini, Ward of the
Madwomen; see Appendix). Further, there appears to be no community in the sense of women communicating with each other. Most of the women are cramped behind the table, as if the tables themselves serve as further incarceration. The line of the tables is drawn to the locked gate, giving further evidence of incarceration.

Line, space, and the positioning of most of the women suggest both a large and cramped space at the same time. It seems that there are two sets of women; the women behind the cramped tables and the women outside the tables. Six women are outside the tables, if the woman huddled under the table is not counted. Signorini’s light source moves from right to left and accentuates the blankness of the high walls. Indeed, the upper half of the painting is blank other than a high inverted window, which shows little light, and the locked gate and grate above it that does not emit light. The viewer must wonder what is on the other side of the gate?

Assuming that Signorini “views” the subjects from in the space, there appear to be at least two focal points. The first is the woman standing in the foreground just to the left of the corner of the wall. The standing woman in the foreground and the corner wall share a focal point, and the women behind the table and the locked gate represent another focal point. The only movement that is apparent is the woman with raised fist in the left foreground behind the standing woman, and the woman in the right background, who appears to be moving and looking down. The women behind the table with their backs on the trellised backrest deserve the observer’s scrutiny because they all look different from each other. From the woman on the far left, who appears to be looking directly at the artist as she scratches her head, to the shrouded woman at the far end at the wall of the gate, each woman looks trapped in her own way. Whether they are trapped by the table or their own thoughts cannot be determined. Indeed, they may be trapped by both. What is clear is that none of the women look at each other. The only woman
who clearly looks outside the space is the woman in the foreground. She appears to be the only person who might have agency, the ability to move into the light, although she is shrouded in shadow. The women outside the tables look at the blank wall or the floor. The only character who breaks the silence is the woman with her arm in the air behind the standing woman in the foreground. Her hollering, if that is what she is doing, is actually silent because no one appears to be listening.

Signorini is painting madwomen. What makes them mad is their location, the space in which they exist. In the context represented by Signorini’s painting, the observer would have to have the courage to go into the ward, to listen, to touch, to be touched. That is why madness has been defined over the centuries as inside individuals. Yet, as has been determined, what makes these characters relevant since ancient times is the meaning inside the observer. Signorini’s women are disconnected, locked away, visualized as dangerous. Who of us would want to enter this tableau? Who of us would like to be touched by the abandonment of these women with the outside world and with each other? Who of us would like to look directly at the grief and loss of agency? To do so would force us to look at those elements within ourselves—our traumas, losses, sense of abandonment in our own lives. For centuries, we have kept madness separate lest it be an experience between us and those elements directly.

One of the reasons that Van Gogh’s *Artist with Bandaged Ear* continues to fascinate is the painting’s backstory, Van Gogh’s real life, his life as Other. This backstory is irrelevant to the perception of the observer because the observer can only interact with the painting, not Van Gogh’s motivation for painting it, or the possible traumas and disappointments of his personal life. The connection made to this work has to do with the observer’s own experience. It is the
observer’s ability to empathize with the characters represented, to feel with them. This can only arise from the observer’s experience, not that of the artist.

Although intuitively obvious, a self-portrait places the artist in the position of observer. What is of import here is what the viewer observes. The man in the picture is clearly looking out, yet there is the appearance that he is looking in because of the blankness of his visage, for there is no reflected light in his eyes (Van Gogh, *Artist with Bandaged Ear*; see Appendix). There is a bandage over his right ear to his jaw line. His title, of course, draws the viewer to his ear, but it is the setting and his dress that may draw in and repulse the observer at the same time. From observation, whether Van Gogh was himself wearing a hat and winter cape while painting can’t be known. We can only know what we view: that he is dressed heavily, that his look is flat and that, clearly, he has been wounded. The cause of the wound cannot be ascertained from the painting. His blankness does not indicate physical pain. It is his “bundled-upness” that is apparent. It looks as if there is a door in the right side with a window in it, suggesting an outside door. Why isn’t the door closed? Would he be cold either way? Would he be blank if he were warmer? We see blankness in the canvas behind him and the only “alive” part of the painting is the picture over his left shoulder. The picture is a “manipulated copy of a real print by Sato Torakiyo, owned by Van Gogh and pinned on the wall of his studio.”\(^\text{12}\) It looks as if people are interacting in it, as the woman in the foreground is holding up her right hand while she looks up at the two people behind her. This print embeds a representation of being alive in a canvas whose primary subject appears in stasis, looks blank. There is no way to know, if the represented Van Gogh were to turn around, which image would he be drawn to—the blank one or the “alive” one.

The representation of the three people reveals another point central to the thesis of this study. The people in the print are relating to each other, while the figure of Van Gogh is not in
visual or spatial relationship to the tableau depicted behind. The canvas requires us to respond to a juxtaposition of blankness and aliveness in one image. Presumably, the man depicted in the picture had to know both to paint them within one scene. Yet the dominant image shows viewers a studio with no sense of movement, a cold place with a blank canvas, a wounded man, and an open door. Whatever meaning the observer might have about madness comes from his own backstory, not from the painting. In the image, the viewer cannot see grief, loss, trauma, or abandonment. Whatever feeling, whatever emotion is to be had, is hidden. The only hint is the representation on the wall behind the subject, of which he is not a part. Viewers may look for the painting’s meaning as it relates to madness. The fundamental problem of this painting is that it does not relate to anything, not even to his wound. Perhaps, the viewer may deduce that to look directly at what is hidden is the most terrible and terrifying. The observer would have to see the “feelings” the viewer would see and feel their own grief, loss, trauma, abandonment. This level of “seeing” would recreate, re-cognize the wounds in the viewer, in the viewer’s own experiences of grief and loss and history of abandonment.

Munch’s *The Scream* is emotional. It bypasses the rational part of the brain by being both impressionistic and expressionistic. These two words are used here literally. The image both impresses itself on the viewer and expresses emotion. Three people take up about a third of the painting, while the other two-thirds are expressions of nature—the sea and the sky. The figure in the foreground is emotional and nature is emotional, as the sky is represented in undulating reds, yellows, and blues (Munch, *The Scream*; see Appendix). The swirls of water are menacing next to the foreground figure while calming as the water moves toward the back of the canvas to the sky. Indeed, the boat close to the horizon seems to rest in a body of water of its own. The swirls in the body of the foreground figure are duplicated in the water directly on the screamer’s right.
There are two figures behind the foreground figure, one who appears to be looking over the railing and the other who appears walking away towards the horizon. They appear more solid, not undulating as the screamer. The only straight lines in the painting are the railing and the walkway. They contain all of the colors in the rest of the work. The screamer is coming towards the viewer, the other two characters receding, and boat almost placid, as if on an island rather than water.\textsuperscript{13}

Whatever the event that suggested the painting, it must be remembered that the artist’s represented perspective in the painting is not the same as the artist’s perspective in the process of painting. It is probable, as in the Van Gogh painting, that Munch was in his studio using his own emotion and memory to execute the work. The scream is intended for the viewer, not the two people walking away.

Intentional fallacy given all due consideration, as with all artists, those considered here painted in the context of their lives, their backgrounds. We know a little about Signorini’s background as a painter, not his personal history. We have ample information about the personal histories of Van Gogh and Munch. It is natural to infuse and confuse their backstories with their works. Signorini was interested in mental hospitals and prisons in his work. Van Gogh and Munch had much in their backgrounds that could be used to define madness—histories of trauma, of grief, of loss.

This chapter has sought to establish the visual perspectives through which viewers “enter” the paintings analyzed here and through which these visual representations communicate directly with the observer. The interaction is in the present moment. The only variable of import is what the viewer brings to the interaction. Clearly, the viewer of \textit{The Scream} is optically sliding directly down into the walkway. Perhaps the viewer could squeeze by on the screamer’s right.
What the observer cannot miss is the sound. And here, the only interpretation that matters belongs to the observer. Is the scream one of terror or grief, a scream of death or hopelessness, is it mindful or soulful, or is it primitive like his impressions of nature appear to have been? With the interpretive “illegibility” of their paintings, Van Gogh and Munch both ask the viewer to stay away, not get too close, not enter the danger. Signorini’s work would be considered more realistic. It could have been a photograph. There is some distance between the observer, the painter, and the madwomen. We are, colloquially, in Van Gogh’s face and Munch, likewise, is in the viewer’s face. There is definitely some daring going on in the latter two works. There is no room to get out of the way in Van Gogh’s studio. A sliver of walkway might get the observer away from the screamer and up to the two characters in the background and the boat on the island-lake. But here in Munch’s painting, the pitch of the ground, the pitch of the sound that the viewer’s mind can hear, and the up slope do not offer a promising view of escape. The viewer confronts a representation of primal emotion and must share it.

It is the primal emotion in the viewer, the observer that makes the work so compelling. Indeed, the literature, film, and works of visual art considered here are all compelling because they touch, they reacquaint, they re-cognize some quality or belief or narrative in the receiver of these works of representation. In this sense, all three mediums offer the same possibility, the possibility of a shared reality, a social reality, a reality betwixt and between.
Notes to Chapter 4

1 See Brown and Fehige, “Thought Experiments,” for more on “thought experiments” as “devices of the imagination” that enable a wide range of communication, including entertainment, conceptual formulation, and education, usually in narrative format.

2 Don Quixote’s Cave of Montesinos would be an exception to death in the chasm. Fry’s essay bears directly on the following discussion about art and madness, and it is important for me to cite it at length:

In the Montesinos episode the range of ‘combinations and permutations’ is unusually wide, permitting frequent transformations of one term ... into another. As we have seen, Agents and agency interact. Act, Agency, Scene or setting sometimes merge. What is so apparently Act can also be regarded as Agency, and what appears as Agency is closely woven into the fabric of Scene as to be almost one with it. By far the most meaningful and dramatic example of this interpretation of terms is found in the character of Don Quijote himself.... If we accept that the premise of the novel is a purification of the chivalric ideal, we may consider the Montesinos episode as a ‘cleansing’ of Don Quijote of his malady before he can be readmitted into the society of his time. His experience at Montesinos is the most complete preparation for finding his way back to La Mancha, and for feeling once more, though briefly, that he is part of the safe world of Sansón and the Caballero del Verde Gabán. For his rebirth, he has to pay a price. He does so. And like his creator, Don Quijote comes to terms with the life of ordinary men without rancor or bitterness. (473; italics added)

3 For a more detailed theoretical formulation of consensual or “reasonable” reality see: Hogan, especially Chapter 7, “From Mind to Matter: Art, Empathy, and the Brain,” and Chapter 8, “The Evolutionary Turn: Blindness and Insight in the Explanation of Art and Mind.” See also, Sass, particularly “Part One: Early Signs and Precursors: Perception and Personality” (43-116).

4 For a deeper understanding of the mid-brain or “feeling” brain, see Damasio, particularly, “The Brain Machinery of Emotion,” in Chapter 2: “Of Appetites and Emotions” (54-57) and “Feelings are Interactive Perceptions,” in Chapter 3 (91-99).

5 This authority is close to Farber’s definition in The Spiritual Gift of Madness: The Failure of Psychiatry and the Rise of the Mad Pride Movement, in his “Introduction: Discovering the Higher Sanity within Madness” (1-34). See also Hornstein’s Agnes’s Jacket: A Psychologist’s Search for the Meanings of Madness.

6 Beresford seems to agree with Broude: “The section entitled ‘European Naturalism’ … includes the famous Sala delle agitate al S. Bonifazio in Firenze (1865) admired by Degas a decade later, an exceptionally early testimony to Signorini’s commitment to Social Realism” (281).

8 See Tallman’s article, “The Not-So-Mad Munch,” and Bowen's essay, “Munch and Agoraphobia: His Art and His Illness,” for studies of how the artist's personal challenges may have influenced his art.

9 Sorin’s “The Language of feelings—Words and Pictures and … ?,” Viscott’s The Language of Feelings, and Johnson-Laird and Oatley’s article “The Language of Emotions: An Analysis of a Semantic Field” provide in-depth analyses of the relationship between emotion and cognition.

10 As an appellation, “mental illness” is of limited utility. It is used most accurately as a designation for Huntington’s Disease, Lewy Body Dementia, and other organic maladies. See, for example, Schweiger and Brown, “Organic Brain Syndrome.” “Mental illness” has also been used for a binary differentiation between organic and functional psychoses, or affective and nonaffective psychoses; see Dilsaver, S. C. “Differentiating Organic from Functional Psychosis.” It is difficult to read these publications and understand where madness fits.

11 Scull, “Madness in Historical Perspective.” See also Mora, “Vincenzo Chiarugi (1759-1820) and his Psychiatric Reform in Florence in the Late 18th Century: On the Occasion of the Bicentenary of his Birth.” His concept of the “sensorium commune”—which combines senses and soul—is of particular relevance to this study (429).


Conclusions

This study has offered comparatively simple assertions. Madness is relative to the person or institution making the assertion and the comparative powerlessness of the person so described. The assertion is contextual, that is, it is based on history, on societal norms, on power on a macro scale. On a micro scale, the assertion of madness is correlative with a history of community norms and personal, familial trauma.

Power has historically been asserted through the authority of the state and institutions such as the church, medical science and hospitals, academia, the military, and the social hierarchy of the community in which the person is deemed mad. It cannot be separated from the mad person’s trauma history.

The subjects we have seen represented as characters in works of art, reflective of these realities over a long time span, do not exist as separate objects. As in life, characters are shown to live within a community. In the works considered in this study, we almost always witness two communities: the one in which individual behavior is deemed dystonic, that is, not harmonious with norms, and the one deemed syntonic, harmonious. The latter is deemed “social reality.”


In 1966, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote a book of seminal importance, “The Social Construction of Reality.” Its central observation is that the “everyday life” we experience as “reality” is actively and perpetually constructed by us. This ongoing miracle of social order rests on “common sense knowledge,” which is “The knowledge we share with others in the normal self-evident routines of everyday life.”

In the play of Sophocles, Ajax’s rage is dystonic although he has a family, a community. In Ajax, the chorus is syntonic in its warnings, its prophecies. Ajax is outside norms, outside community. Thérèse Raquin, Gilman’s narrator, and Mrs. Pontellier are also outside, or out of
harmony with the norms of their different societies. It appears that Van Gogh as subject is also outside norms. He is alone. Life exists in a picture behind him. Signorini’s female patients, although housed in a community of sorts, are clearly disconnected from each other.

Don Quixote is blessed with a community of a niece, barber, priest, housekeeper, and neighbors who value him. The Blackwoods are harmonious within their nuclear structure, while disconnected from the townspeople. Here are two communities that learn to co-exist. Parry lives in a community of the homeless, folks labeled mentally ill. It is Jack who appears without community at the beginning of *The Fisher King*. In *Library of Dust*, disconnected communities, families, become reunited. All of the films considered have both an inside community of folks labeled mad and an outside community of labelers. The labelers may not be normal. They are, however, normative. Witness the military in *King of Hearts*.

This study has sought to demonstrate these assertions with analysis of the artistic works considered, grounding in relevant critical theory and studies from various fields its discussion of how literature, film, and art represent madness. These creative media do not relegate madness to scientific or religious definitions, but show how, to the extent that it is shared, it is evinced between characters and the observer in literature and film, and in an art work’s moment between viewer and artist. They portray a wider context for its meanings.

Madness may define a moment. It does not define a person. Sophocles suggests that the origin of Ajax’s madness is in his rage, his murderous actions. Yet it is his hubris that leads to his suicide. Other than Ajax and Laurent, all of the characters discussed in this study are virtuous. If madness exists as a condition or way of behaving, it is a response to a specific context and not inherent. Decency, kindness, courage are not denied the mad.
Don Quixote is defined as mad within the first two pages of the text. According to the narrator, it is his beliefs that make him mad. His actions follow the assertion. Contextually, before the reader can see, ascertain, process Don Quixote’s interactions with others, the label has been given. The reader has been warned. What follows is madness. Yet, as has been shown, if madness has meaning, it is only in momentary behaviors. Madness does not define Don Quixote. Aristotle’s virtues follow him through the text (as they do for Odysseus in Ajax). Perhaps, we would not be reading Don Quixote five hundred years later if Cervantes, in the first few pages, defined Don Quixote as virtuous for seeking meaning in a life presented as meaningless on the first page.

Thérèse Raquin’s abandonment at birth is an instance of trauma long before the trauma created in front of Madame Raquin’s eyes. Gilman’s narrator barely escapes the trauma of her sensory deprivation locked in a room with hideous wallpaper. Chekhov’s Gromov has been destroyed by his traumas; Dr. Ragin, through alcohol. Madame Pontellier cannot escape the alienation of her motherless childhood. Madness, grief, and loss are all conflated in the Blackwood family and between the family and the townspeople.

Which of Private Plumpick’s experiences are sane, which are mad? Are his relationships with his military unit sane and those with the mental patients insane? Is Randall McMurphy sane or insane, ask the psychiatrists. Is McMurphy’s relationship with Nurse Ratched sane or does it suggest a rageful power struggle? It is unlike Ajax’s power struggle with grief and loss; it eventuates in his own death with her complicity. The Red Knight is the metaphor for Parry’s trauma, while alcohol is Jack’s. It is not madness that is the prime concern in Library of Dust: The Documentary. The film focuses on grief and loss, the damaging power of institutional definition of madness, and the reintegration of family.
There is a genre of mad painting that has already been discussed. One of the paintings represented here is, indeed, an image of women in a madhouse. The viewer may view madness as the disconnection between inmates. The viewer may also perceive madness as a prison, the dimness of the environment in which the women live. It recalls the prison where Gilman’s narrator lives. The other two paintings may be perceived as more personal. Indeed, Van Gogh is the subject of his own painting. Again, it is the viewer that has to define madness. Does it really matter how the artist defines madness if definitions are a confluence of authority, history, and power in a given moment, a given milieu? The only confluence that matters is between the viewer and the artist, the reader and the text, the viewer and the film. It is the only definition of madness that matters. It is betwixt and between.
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*The King of Hearts.* Directed by Phillippe de Broca. MGM, 1966.


Van Nostrand, Jillian. “‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest’: A Portrait of Despair in One Dimension.” *Film Criticism,* vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1976, pp.23-26.


Appendix

*Cutting the Stone*, Hieronymous Bosch, c. 1494
The Ward of the Madwomen at San Bonifazio, Telemaco Signorini, 1865
Artist with Bandaged Ear, Vincent Van Gogh, 1889
The Scream, Edvard Munch, 1893