FROM THE MILD TO THE MONSTROUS: MALADIES OF THE MIND IN THE
NOVELS
OF JANE AUSTEN, CHARLOTTE BRONTE, AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

Christine Moreau

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
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ABSTRACT

In 1677, Caius Gabriel Cibber created the sculptures of "Raving" and "Melancholy" madness which adorned the gates of Bethlem hospital for over a century, and which epitomized the Augustan vision of the lunatic as a naked and manacled madman. By the nineteenth century, however, such images of insanity had been replaced in the cultural imagination by visions of the female form, and for the Victorians, the hysterically distraught woman eventually emerged as the totemic figure of 'madness.' In the early twentieth century, the first World War altered the established popular image of insanity once again, as masses of shell-shocked soldiers captured the nation's attention. These are only some of the changing faces and figures of 'madness' captured in the works of the three British novelists who constitute the foci of this thesis. Jane Austen's novels embody both parodic and soberly didactic visions of mental disorders which strongly reflect her inheritance of a rationalist and empiricist Augustan psychology, while images of madness in the novels of Charlotte Brontë are primarily determined by literary conventions of the dual romance-realist modes she works within. Such generic factors are also of relevance in Virginia Woolf's portrayal of mental illness in

<u>Mrs</u>.<u>Dalloway</u>, for her realist delineation of the character of Septimus Smith is uniquely marked by overtones of the carnivalized serio-comic tradition. The thesis which follows is an attempt to reveal not only the literary, but the social, medical, and philosophical concepts which inform and shape these novelistic representations of madness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

When Jane Austen has Emma Woodhouse, at the nadir of her fortune, describe her misperceptions of the external world, and the misdeeds contingent upon them, as a form of 'madness,' she is not simply mocking her heroine's propensity to exaggerated self-chastisement, but characterizing in earnest, as well, the nature of Emma's overheated imaginative faculty, which she understood as a genuine species of potentially grave mental disorder. Like Austen, Charlotte Brontë also works within a tradition of 'faculty psychology' which opposed the forces of 'Reason' and 'Fancy,' and yet one need only contrast the errant but bright and vivacious Emma Woodhouse to Brontë's spectacularly deranged Bertha Mason, the attic lunatic who growls and prowls about Thornfield Manor, shrieking obscenities and attempting homicide, to see the extent to which the two authors' conceptions of 'madness' were apt to differ. And both Austen and Brontë's portrayals of mental disorder appear far removed again from that of Virginia Woolf in <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u>, who diverges from a nineteenth-century tradition followed by her predecessors by focusing upon a case of male insanity. Neither lucidly

wayward after the fashion of Emma, nor criminally deranged like Bertha, Septimus Smith is a young ex-soldier whose psychologically devastating experiences during the Great War eventually culminate in a distinctively twentieth-century clinical malady: schizophrenia.

What were the formative influences which combined to shape such seemingly disparate images and notions of 'madness'? It is the object of this thesis to identify and explore the heterogenous conceptual strands which manifest themselves in the depictions of mental illness by these three British women novelists, whose lives spanned roughly a century and a half; from the advent of the French Revolution to the outbreak of World War II. To this end, the focus of the study is fundamentally twofold, encompassing considerations of how the artistic representation of forms of mental disorder is liable to be affected by both literary variables, such as authorial purpose, generic convention, and narrative technique, as well as by the many theoretical and cultural variables inherent in the medical and social history of insanity. As mimetic reflections of their respective milieus, that is, the novels of Austen, Brontë, and Woolf provide strikingly accurate records of significant historical trends and developments in social and psychiatric attitudes toward, beliefs about, and treatments of the mentally ill individual. At the same time, however, the individual authors' experimentations and achievements with

the malleable novel form also exert important modifying influences which lend unique qualities of tone or vision to their depictions of madness.

The concept of insanity, like the artistic medium which represents it and the historical context which produces it, is of a ceaselessly dynamic nature, which points to the incredibly multivalent and chequered connotative substance one is apt to discover embodied within blanket terms such as 'madness' or 'mental illness.' Even in a strictly medical sense, such words are frustratingly inclusive, vaguely embracing a host of discrete clinical entities. In the works of these three authors alone, 'madness' ranges in nature from fairly mild neurotic aberration or maladjustment to severely disabling psychoses; from imaginative delusion, melancholia, and monomania, to affected or real 'nervous' disorders such as neurasthenia and hysteria, to cogenital idiocy, raging dementia, and paranoid schizophrenia. But 'madness' and many specific manifestations of mental disease such as hysteria are also elusive entities to grasp because beyond their medical significance, they encompass matrices of subtle social, moral, sexual, and even legal implications which are subject to continual permutation over time. For as J.K.Wing emphasizes, echoing a large critical chorus, theories of disease throughout history have "depended a good deal on what was regarded as socially desirable."[1] And as

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[1] J.K.Wing, <u>Reasoning About Madness</u> (Oxford: Oxford

successive ages inevitably slough off the social, sexual, and ethical norms of their predecessors, and redefine the perameters of tolerable behaviour in response to the realities and pressures of their own age, standards of mental deviance or 'insanity,' like standards of fashion, steadily reveal themselves to be flexible, fickle, and somewhat arbitrary requisites.

Given the largely mutable nature of the concept, the fact that 'madness' assumes substantially dissimilar forms and shapes in the novels of Austen, Brontë, and Woolf becomes relatively unsurprising. Yet nevertheless, there are important themes in relation to the subject of mental illness which emerge to persist throughout the work of all three authors; from the early realist depictions of Austen, dominated by the tenets of a rationalist Augustan ethos, through to Brontë's uniquely dichotomous mid-Victorian vision, and ultimately to Woolf's early modernist portrayal of madness in an Edwardian era slowly making the transition from Darwinian to Freudian psychiatry. And although the attitudes of the individual writers are likely to vary greatly, their mutual interest with such related issues as sex, language and communication, and morality, does begin to reflect patterns of some of the abiding concerns and aspirations, fears and fascinations, which maladies of the mind have elicited throughout human history.

University Press, 1978), p.16.

Chapter I

Delusions From Without and Within:
Society and the Mechanics of the Mind
in the Novels of Jane Austen

> Perhaps, if we speak with rigorous exactness, no
> human mind is in its right state....All power of
> fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but
> while this power is such as we can control and re-
> press, it is not visible to others, nor considered
> as any depravation of the mental faculties; it is
> not pronounced madness but when it comes ungover-
> nable, and apparently influences speech or action.
> To indulge the power of fiction, and send imagina-
> tion out upon the wing, is often the sport of
> those who delight too much in silent speculation.

-Samuel Johnson,<u>Rasselas</u>

"We live at home, quiet and confined, and our
feelings prey on us."

-Anne Elliot, in <u>Persuasion</u>

Jane Austen, esteemed by literary critics primarily for
her masterful ironic technique, may appear at first a rather
unlikely author with which to begin a study of mental ill-
ness and insanity in literature, for indeed, as Susan Gubar
observes, many readers have responded to her portrayals of
genteel provincial life in Regency England by emphasizing
precisely "the sanity of her vision."[1] And yet the essence
of Austen's well-studied narrative technique -- her relent-
less exposure of the disparity between "the appearance of
things, the way they may be perceived, and their true reali-
ty, the ways in which they exist"[2]-- also points at once to
the centrality of the theme of delusion or aberrant cogni-

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[1] Susan Gubar, "Sane Jane and the Critics: Professions and Falsehoods," <u>Novel</u> 8 (Spring,1975), p. 246.

[2] John Halperin, <u>The Life of Jane Austen</u> (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p.69.

tion in her fiction.   As various scholars have noted, Austen's novels characteristically offer the heroine an "education in perception" by tracing a "pivotal" process of "disillusionment" or undeception.[3] This authorial concern with the potential fallibility of human perception and judgement of reality points not only to Austen's position within the mainstream of the nineteenth-century realist literary tradition in general,   but also to her fundamental impulse to rigorously test "the sanity of her vision" before ultimately offering to her reader a coherent and stable worldview.   In this respect, Austen's work with delusion as well as other forms of mental and emotional disorder may be viewed as an aspect of what George Levine sees as the "monstrous" embodied within "the work of this sanest and most pragmatic realist novelist":   the potentially disruptive and "continuing tension between personal need and desire and social order," which results from the characters' attempts to aspire beyond quotidian reality by allowing the "free play of the imagination, uninhibited by critical consciousness," to "determine the shape of experience."[4]

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[3] Halperin, The Life of Jane Austen, p. 70; C.S. Lewis, "A Note on Jane Austen," in Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), p.27, p.28.

[4] George Levine, The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press,   1981), p.70, p.76, p.71, p.72.

In Austen's early works, such as <u>Love</u> <u>and</u> <u>Friendship</u> (1790) and <u>Northanger</u> <u>Abbey</u> (published posthumously in 1818, but begun in 1797), however, themes of mental delusion as well as nervous debility are exploited primarily for their comic potential. Here, burlesque and parody serve as effective tools with which the young novelist reveals the false values and behavioural standards promulgated by gothic and sentimental fiction of the period, and the ludicrous consequences contingent upon her heroines' internalizations of such ideals. The authorial focus in these two early works evinces a remarkably precocious comprehension of the social contexts of emotional, intellectual, and nervous disorders, for they irrevocably indict the lack of proper female education and occupation, as well as the contemporary ethos of 'sensibility,' as major factors which encourage and directly contribute to the heroines' radically distorted standards of both reality and femininity. Despite the gravity of the issues involved, however, Austen is principally engaged in the business of parody and caricature in these early works, and the comic distance she posits between herself and her subject results in a depiction of mental instability which is, as Claudia Johnson maintains, "delightful" in its witty and exuberant energy, but for the most part, "psychologically flat."[5]

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[5] Claudia Johnson, "Time and the Human Mind: Jane Austen and Dr. Johnson Again," <u>Modern</u> <u>Language</u> <u>Quarterly</u> 44 (1983), p. 24.

Both the mood and the focus of Austen's treatment of mental delusion and illness, however, alter substantially in later novels, as a more pronounced element of didactic sobriety enters the ironic authorial stance, and as the emphasis of her perspective simultaneously shifts to a closer and more profound examination of the mechanics of the human mind itself. This is perhaps best illustrated by _Sense and Sensibility_ (1811), where Marianne Dashwood's unreasonably excessive emotional indulgence is allowed to progress to the point of a severely debilitating form of monomania in order to clearly convey the psychological dangers attendant upon unchecked passion. And although folly never threatens to become fatal in _Emma_ (1816), in this novel, too, the heroine's comically delusive "blunders" are shown to embody a dimension of compulsive mental pathology, which, though it does not carry potentially grave consequences for Emma herself, certainly does for those implicated in her wild, imaginative schemes.

As Austen's more mature explorations of the mind, moreover, _Emma_ and _Sense and Sensibility_ best reflect the formative influences which helped to shape her notions of sanity and reality -- and their antitheses. In this regard, the influence of Samuel Johnson is of specific significance,[6] as are the broader currents of eighteenth-century social, medi-

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[6] Cf. Claudia Johnson, "Time and the Human Mind: Jane Austen and Dr. Johnson Again," _MLQ_ 44 (1983), pp. 23-38.

cal, and philosophic thought in general. As such, it is of paramount importance to situate Austen in the context of an empiricist and rationalist Augustan tradition which conceived of "madness" not in a specifically or even primarily technical or clinical sense, but rather, in extensive terms as any manifestation of 'unreason' which entailed a false impression or perception of the external world. The concept of insanity, that is, embraced all forms of defective ratiocination as well as psychological aberration. Thus, for the eighteenth century, as Michael Donnelly claims, "madness" was an extremely "plastic" and "labile" term which embodied a constellation of metaphoric and social connotations, and which, when combined, formed a "general cultural perception of irrationality."[7] And although Austen, writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, witnessed the ground swell of a new cultural sensibility towards insanity -- a positive change in social attitudes toward irrationality and passion which is reflected in the rise of Romantic literature during this period, she remains essentially a product of the 'Age of Reason,' both at heart and in mind.

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[7] Michael Donnelly, Managing the Mind: A Study of Medical Psychology in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain (London; New York: Tavistock, 1983), pp. 108-109. Cf. also Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965).

During Jane Austen's lifetime, the random and superficial nature of the education typically offered to daughters of the gentry and aristocracy was rapidly becoming a topical issue. In 1792, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft loudly lamented the disgraceful state of female education in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. And though certainly not motivated by the feminist polemic of Wollstonecraft, some physicians soon began to voice similar sentiments as they perceived a link between mental illness and women's lack of proper education and meaningful employment. William Moseley argued in 1838, for example, that for "demonstrative evidence" of the fact that "non-exercise of the brain and nervous system" constituted "a very frequent predisposing cause of every form of nervous disease and insanity itself," one had only to

> look at the numerous victims to be found among females of the middle and higher ranks who have no strong motives to exertion, or any cause to exert themselves for honour or gain; no interests that call forth their mental energies, or to prevent, by their employment, these energies sinking into feebleness by disuse.... In this state, home, with its little interests, is the centre of attraction; and the mind, which is constituted for a wide range of employment and pleasure, is confined within boundaries too limited for the range of a worm.[8]

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[8] William Moseley, Eleven Chapters on Nervous and Mental Complaints, (1838), excerpt reprinted in Vieda Skultans, Madness and Morals: Ideas on Insanity in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 43-44.

The emotional, psychological, and intellectual effects of such a vapid and severely circumscribed sphere is a theme intrinsic to many of Austen's novels, but <u>Northanger Abbey</u> traces perhaps most minutely of all such a relationship between the progressive delusions of its heroine and their "predisposing cause" -- her confinement within a domestic reality "too limited for the range of a worm." Austen's novel thus begins by swiftly establishing the miseducation of Catherine Morland, which commences as a series of lax attempts on the part of her mother to discover some subject from which Catherine is not disqualified on grounds of "incapacity or distaste."[9] This fitful program is soon abandoned, however, as Mrs. Morland, otherwise occupied with a brood of youngsters, decides to let her elder daughters "shift for themselves" entirely (15). For Catherine, who is "noisy and wild" and "hate[s] confinement and cleanliness" (14), this means the opportunity for unbridled indulgence in favorite activities such as "cricket, base ball, riding on horseback, and running about the country" (15). About the same time she relinquishes these pastimes to begin "curl[ing] her hair" and "long[ing] for balls," however, she also begins to read books on her own initiative and with a new purpose -- which unfortunately, is wholly unacademic.

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[9] Jane Austen, <u>Northanger Abbey</u>, in <u>The Novels of Jane Austen</u>, ed. R.W. Chapman, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), Vol. 5 (pp.11-252), ch.1, p. 14. I will refer to this edition throughout, citing page numbers in parentheses within the body of the essay.

For from the ages of fifteen to seventeen, as the narrator sardonically remarks, Catherine is "in training for a heroine," and she therefore reads "all such works as heroines must read" to supply her memory with "serviceable" quotations (15). The implication of Austen's opening chapter, then, is quite clear: Catherine's adolescent initiation to the cramped and passive realities of adult female life precipitates her first imaginative flight into fiction and romance.

In <u>Northanger Abbey</u>, of course, the specific target of Austen's satire is gothic literature, and indeed, Catherine's "training for a heroine" only begins in earnest when she embarks on a voracious course of gothic novel reading. Under the tutelage of her older friend, Isabella Thorpe, she wends her way through a variety of hair-raising specimens which include "Necromancer of the Black Forest," "Orphan of the Rhine," "Horrid Mysteries" (40), and, most importantly, Radcliffe's "Udolpho," which she deems "the nicest book in the world" (107). Largely "ignorant and uninformed" (18), and therefore an undiscriminating reader, Catherine is easily and profoundly impressed by the morbid excesses of the gothic fiction she consumes, and as reading "trashy" novels becomes virtually the extent of her intellectual exertions, her "judgment" -- easily "bought off" at the best of times (50) -- is further and further undermined, until finally, she becomes incapable of making even the cardinal distinc-

tion between fiction and reality. Having, that is, project-
ed herself imaginatively into a world of gothic romance, or,
as she puts it, of "broken promises and broken arches, phae-
tons and false hangings, Tilneys and trapdoors" (87), Aus-
ten's heroine begins to formulate an independent plot, which
she also, delusively, attempts to live. For as Susan Gubar
asserts, Catherine "genuinely believes that she can become
the heroine of her own life story."[10]

Thus, while visiting the Tilney family at their suitably
gothic residence, an ancient abbey, Catherine begins to
function (or rather malfunction) in reality according to the
fictional conventions which she has naively absorbed from
gothic novels. With a sense of "anxious acuteness" (169)
she begins to pry and peer into old chests, and, on one
stormy night, succeeds in "breathless wonder" (168) in
breaking open a locked cabinet.   "Trembl[ing] from head to
foot" and in a "cold sweat" (170), Catherine fully antici-
pates to retrieve an important, long-lost manuscript from
within its mysterious drawers, but recovers, in fact, only a
dusty bundle of household accounts, chiefly laundry bills
(172).   For a moment, she feels "humbled to the dust" over
the "absurdity of her recent fancies" (173), and yet with an
indefatigable alacrity which points toward the later Emma

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[10] Susan Gubar, "Shut Up in Prose: Gender and Genre in Jane
   Austen's Juvenilia," in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar,
   The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nine-
   teenth- Century Literary Imagination (New Haven; London:
   Yale University Press, 1979), p.142.

Woodhouse, Catherine continues to compulsively manufacture imaginative mystery plots.

Ultimately, she convinces herself of the "probability" that her host, General Tilney, is really a nefarious criminal, who, for reasons "yet to be unravelled," has either murdered his wife or secreted her in a hidden "cell" within the Abbey to languish out her days (188). But, caught hunting for evidence of her hypothesis in the bedroom of the late Mrs. Tilney, Catherine is compelled to confess her suspicions to the General's son, Henry, with whom she is in love. And although the nature of Catherine's conjectures are, of course, laughably outrageous, Austen does indicate, at this point, that her heroine's delusions have far exceeded the realm of fanciful adolescent gullibility, and now constitute a potentially harmful break with reality. For Henry is understandably shocked and offended by Catherine's capacity for such irrational and pernicious allegations, and as her "causeless" and "idly entertained" (230-231) fancies begin to impinge on their relationship, Catherine almost fatally impairs her chances for love and happiness in real life.

Henry Tilney's response to Catherine's warped speculations is significant in itself because it reflects his own imperfect comprehension of reality. For the only aspect of Catherine's condition which he understands "rightly" is the

"dreadful nature" of the "suspicions" she has harboured (197); beyond that, his words reveal a male ignorance which is blind to the reality of women's lives as Austen has previously established it in the case of her heroine's upbringing. "What have you been judging from?" he asks Catherine indignantly, before further admonishing her:

> Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you -- Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? (197).

Henry cannot understand the "atrocity" of Catherine's aberrant delusions because, as a male, he has been "prepared" by a vastly different type of education, and moreover, has experienced a wholly other social reality from Catherine. Her education has, after all, virtually begun and ended as "a good little girl working [her] sampler at home," long before Henry has completed his "studies at Oxford" (107). The more comprehensive and enriched masculine scope, Austen implies, not only helps to check the urge to escape into imagination and fantasy, but helps to prevent men from making an excessive and deleterious psychological investment in the fictions they do indulge. Thus, young men can read "nearly as many" gothic novels as women -- Henry himself is an enthusiast who has enjoyed, by his own estimate, "hundreds and hundreds" (107) -- but remain staunchly resilient to the sort of delusive malaise to which Catherine succumbs. Gothic novels pose little threat to clear-sighted sanity when they

are merely diversions of a full intellectual and emotional life.

Although insofar as Catherine's delusions have no objective basis in external reality, they are, as she admits after her confrontation with Henry, "voluntary" and "self-created" (199), Northanger Abbey clearly reveals the underlying social conditions which foster such "atrocious" "visions of romance" (199) in its heroine, thereby emphasizing the nature of mental instability as a cultural construct.[11] Thus, if Austen ridicules her heroine's liability to lapse into preposterous illusion, she also makes it plainly evident that the feebleness of Catherine Morland's mind is not attributable to some intrinsic "natural folly," but rather to a society which values "imbecility in females" as a "great enhancement of their personal charms" (111) and rears and educates them accordingly.

Indeed, Austen had begun expounding her insights about the social factors influencing female psychology and behaviour at an extremely early age. She was only fifteen when she wrote Love and Friendship; a raucous burlesque of the 'novels of sentiment' which proliferated in the latter half

[11] This is an aspect of feminist studies of mental illness which is cogently explored, for example, by Phylis Chesler Women and Madness (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972), and Ludmilla Jordanova, "Mental Illness, Mental Health: Changing Norms and Expectations," in Women in Society: Interdisciplinary Essays, ed. Cambridge Women's Studies Group (London: Virago Press, 1981), pp. 95-114.

of the eighteenth century, and which, along with gothic fiction, formed a major component of most young ladies' literary education. Love and Friendship is similar to Northanger Abbey in that it also travesties the impact of a specific literary genre on the mind of a woman. But while the latter restricts itself to an examination of the role which an unwholesome intellectual diet plays in producing mental unsoundness, the former embodies an additional treatment of the contemporary 'cult of sensibility' as a more extensive cultural phenomenon which also promotes "imbecility in women" -- only in this case, of a 'nervous' rather than delusory nature.

Generally regarded as "one of the most important" items in Austen's juvenilia,[12] Love and Friendship is composed of a series of epistles by the "refined and Amiable" Laura, a widow who relates the "many Afflictions" of her past life for the moral edification of a friend's daughter.[13] Characterizing herself as a woman whose single "fault" -- "if a fault it could be called" -- is a "sensibility too tremblingly alive to every affliction of my Freinds [sic], my Acquaintance, and particularly to every affliction of my

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[12] Halperin, The Life of Jane Austen, p. 41.

[13] Jane Austen, Love and Friendship, in The Works of Jane Austen, ed. R.W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), Vol. 6, p. 108, p. 77. I will refer to this edition of the text throughout, citing page number. Following R.W. Chapman, I shall retain Austen's idiomatic spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

own" (78), Laura is remorselessly lampooned as the quintessential heroine of sensibility or 'woman of feeling,' whose overwhelmingly fragile physical and emotional constitution necessitates frequent recourse to sighs, swoons, and tears, and facilitates a capacity for instant and excessively ardent attachments. All in the space of one evening, for instance, Laura meets, falls in love, is 'courted' by, and marries, Edward, an "unfortunate Stranger" who has happened to knock on the door (80). And as with love, so with friendship. Shortly after Laura's impromptu marriage ceremony (conducted by her father "who tho' he had never taken orders had been bred to the Church"(82)), she meets Sophia, who is also "all Sensibility and Feeling": "We flew into each others [sic] arms and after having exchanged vows of mutual Friendship for the rest of our Lives, instantly unfolded to each other the most inward Secrets of our hearts" (85).

Compounded by a ludicrously complicated plot, the frantic narrative pace of <u>Love</u> <u>and</u> <u>Friendship</u> effectively conveys a forceful sense of chaos and confusion; crisis following upon crisis with the same effusive responses from Laura and Sophia. The ultimate climax, however, occurs when the the two women, who have been inadvertently separated from their husbands for some time, are unexpectedly reunited with them. Unfortunately, they are a moment too late, though, for as the result of a dreadful accident which has thrown the men

from their Phaeton, Sophia's husband already lies dead upon the road, and Laura's is in the process of expiring. Sophia thus promptly commences shrieking and fainting, while Laura "instantly" screams and "run[s] mad," beginning to rave non-sensically in a "frantic and incoherent manner," and temporarily "postponing" her fit of madness only long enough to hear Edward utter his last word, whereupon she smoothly resumes her "Lamentations"(99-100). As she states in retrospect:

> For two Hours did I rave thus madly and should not then have left off, as I was not in the least fatigued, had not Sophia who was just recovering from her swoon, intreated me to consider that Night was now approaching and that the Damps began to fall (100).

As a result of Sophia's prolonged inactivity upon the ground, she develops a case of "galloping Consumption" which "in a few days carried her off" (102); a fate which Laura is spared, because, as she punctiliously notes, her "fits of frenzy" effectively "circulated and warmed [her] Blood," thus protecting her "against the chilling Damps of Night" (101).

Beneath the adolescent author's exuberant and unrestrained satire of Laura and Sophia's severely afflicted 'sensibilities,' Love and Friendship indicates a truly astute comprehension of the important dimension of fashionability which nervous and emotional disorders had come to embody by the late eighteenth century. For it is the sort

of hysterical 'madness' which Austen portrays, which, as Max
Byrd contends, "entered fashion's circle" as the result of a
gradual change in cultural attitudes toward irrationality
and emotion:

> In the earlier part of the century, [madness] had
> been the badge of folly, a reprehensible condition
> brought about, the satirists thought, almost by an
> act of will; in the latter half of the century it
> was becoming the inevitable consequence of prog-
> ress, the price paid by the sensitive and vulnera-
> ble for refinement.[14]

In literature, this new cultural disposition is reflected in
the rise of the novel of sensibility during the century,[15]
but in actuality, it represents the social diffusion of an
aspect of a larger debate over the relationship of madness
and mental disease to civilization. On the one hand, the
more established notion of insanity as "a badge of folly"
conceived of mental disease as a form of atavistic regres-
sion; a "reprehensible condition" which the steady progress
of civilization would eventually eradicate. It is to this
stream of thought that the opprobrious image of the lunatic
as a depraved beast, bereft of all divine powers of reason
and morality, is fundamentally aligned. Though the newer
and opposing theory of mental illness did not extend to in-
clude this type of "gross" madness, it in effect reversed
the terms of the previous argument by identifying "the ad-

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[14] Max Byrd, Visits to Bedlam: Madness and Literature in the
Eighteenth Century (Columbia, S.C.: University of South
Carolina Press, 1974), p. 88, p. 132.

[15] Cf. Byrd, Visits to Bedlam, p. 88ff.

vance of civilization" itself as an "unsettling force which inevitably disturbed individuals" -- a potential cause, rather than cure, of mental disorders.[16] It is in the sense that forms of emotional and nervous debility came to be theoretically attributed to the pressures and complexities of coping with modern life in a highly evolved, urban society, that "madness" became the province of the cultured and refined individual; the assumption being, as Byrd suggests, that the more "advanced" a society became, the more susceptible its members were to a host of generic 'nervous' distempers.[17]

This conceptual cultural association forged between nervous malady and refined superiority informs Austen's parody of Laura and Sophia, for Love and Friendship does not merely satirize the 'cult of sensibility' as a "female cult of weakness and dependency,"[18] but also as a spurious vogue of pretentious gentility. Her heroines affect debilitating 'vapours' and hysterical fits because hysteria, in particular, had come to be regarded as "a token of social distinc-

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[16] Donnelly, Managing the Mind, p. 124.

[17] Byrd, Visits to Bedlam, pp. 128-132. Cf. also Michael Donnelly, Managing the Mind, pp. 121-130, for a helpful overview of the competing theories of madness and civilization.

[18] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, editors' intro. to Love and Friendship, in The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1985), p. 207.

tion"; the distinguishing mark of the "well-born" woman.[19] In other words, Laura and Sophia's simulated swoons and sicknesses carry implicit claims to a status of well-bred respectability which Austen shows neither of them is able to support: Laura is, after all, the grand-daughter of an "italian Opera girl" (77) and her "family mansion" is soon revealed to be a "rustic cot[tage]" (79); while Sophia evinces an unmistakable measure of vulgarity when she stoops to theft (95-96).

Because, by the late eighteenth century, nervous afflictions had come to be regarded as something of social ideals, they are pursued by Austen's heroines like any other form of feminine "accomplishment"; like dancing or singing they constitute accoutrements or talents which must be cultivated and practiced, and above all, executed with stylish, ladylike grace. Laura and Sophia, for instance, always manage to accomodate their propensity for swooning in a most elegant -- and safe -- manner by fainting either "[in]to each other's arms" for mutual support (92), or "alternately" when only one couch is available (86). The art of running mad and fainting thus becomes a matter of social decorum which a younger generation of aspiring heroines of sensibility must be instructed in by seasoned experts, like Sophia. Indeed, her advice, as she lies dying of consumption induced by

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[19] Ilza Veith, Hysteria: The History of a Disease (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 174.

fainting fits, embodies a tonal quality resonant of a young

ladies' manual of etiquette:

> Beware of fainting fits..though at the time they
> may be refreshing and Agreable [sic] yet beleive
> [sic] me they will in the end, if too often re-
> peated and at improper seasons, prove destructive
> to your Constitution.....My fate will teach you
> this....A frenzy fit is not one quarter so perni-
> cious; it is an exercise to the Body and if not
> too violent is I dare say conducive to Health in
> its consequences -- Run mad as often as you chuse;
> but do not faint -- (102).

In Love and Friendship, then, Austen ridicules a contempo-

rary trend which had elevated the rage of the madman into

the latest rage of fashionable society. It was primarily a

feminine fad for "frenzy fits" and fainting that led at

least one late-century physician to resignedly conclude

that, "It is easier to meet with a mad, than a healthy woman

of fashion."[20] And importantly, it is with this period that

the tenacious medical suspicion of hysterical women as cun-

ning actresses first originated.[21]

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[20] William Pargeter, cited in Byrd, Visits to Bedlam, p.
127.

[21] This suspicion was being clearly articulated by the mid-
nineteenth century. In 1853, for example, Dr.Robert Car-
ter called his colleagues' attention to the "many little
arrangements" he felt to be contrived to "add to [the]
effect" of a hysterical fit, such as hair "so fastened as
to fall at the slightest touch, in most 'admired disor-
der.'" Other devices could be resorted to "depending upon
the ingenuity of the performer and the extent of her re-
sources." Cited by Ilza Veith, Hysteria: The History of
a Disease, p. 203. For the especially hostile tone adopt-
ed by late-Victorian physicians, see Carroll Smith-Rosen-
berg, "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict
in Nineteenth-Century America," Social Research 39 (Win-
ter,1972), pp. 652-678.

Whether they embody affected nervous disorders or genuine delusion, Austen's early works consistently stress the heroines' psychological and behavioural aberrations as dispositions fostered by current values and vogues. In Austen's view, these illnesses, as social fabrications, are worthy only of the censorious laughter of the satirist. But if she can laugh at 'madness' as a product of culture or civilization, she stops laughing -- or at least stops laughing so heartily -- when it is regarded as a force latent within the human mind itself. This concept, reflective of a powerful Augustan fear of insanity as an intrinsic human capacity for an "irrationality that destroy[s] all order,"[22] prevailed during the early eighteenth century but persisted almost throughout, running as a dark counter current to the newer, more optimistic theory of madness as a distinguishing feature of advanced civilzation and progress. This more ominous and anxious strand of eighteenth-century thought forms the second major component in Austen's portrayal of mental illness, and is most manifest in _Emma_ and _Sense and Sensibility_, where perceptions warped by imagination and sensibility ungoverned by reason are examined more seriously in terms of the potential dangers, both public and private, which the perpetually fallible and unstable mechanics of the mind are capable of creating. In both novels, Austen's exploration of the theme brings the plot to the verge of ei-

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[22] Byrd, _Visits to Bedlam_, p. 54.

ther social chaos or personal tragedy before a final reinstatement of the ordered, reasonable, and 'sane' world from which she has, rather riskily, diverged.

The roots of the rationalist, empiricist psychology which informs Austen's later novels can be traced to the seventeenth-century philosophers, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Essentially, Hobbes emphasized the relationship between "unguided" emotion and insanity, advocating that all passionate excesses "that produce strange and unnatural behaviour" be viewed as degrees of mental pathology, for "madness," as he claimed, "is nothing else, but too much appearing passion."[23] Conversely, Locke stressed the nature of madness not as passion, but as a form of defective reasoning:

> Madmen....do not appear to me to have lost the power of reasoning; but having joined together some ideas very wrongly, they mistake them for truths, and they err as men do that argue right from wrong principles.[24]

Locke was thus the first to extend the notion of 'insanity' to include all forms of irrationality or unreason. Together, the theories of Hobbes and Locke established a formal psychological model based on the opposition of the human faculties of reason, on the one hand, and imagination, fancy, or passion on the other.

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[23] Thomas Hobbes, <u>Leviathan</u>, ed. and intro. by Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), pp. 47-48.

[24] John Locke, <u>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</u>, Vol. 1 of <u>The Works of John Locke</u> (London: Thomas Davies, 1823), bk.2, ch. 11, p. 150. Subsequent references are to this edition, which is hereafter cited in footnotes as <u>Essay</u>.

In empiricist terms, the human mind could thus be regarded as a kind of "prism": when guided by the "white light" of reason, it could perceive the external world "unrefracted"; but when operating under the aegis of the imagination or the passions, which functioned as distorting "filters" or "lens," it perceived "colored" or "confused" images of the world.[25] The problematics of perception were also compounded by the fact that the human senses, though 'objective,' were limited receptors of reality, capable of conveying only partial, and therefore inaccurate, information.[26] In any case, the fundamental assumption upon which this model of psychology rests is the existence of a stable, objectively knowable reality which all minds perceive in essentially the same way. This, briefly, is the theoretical foundation of the pervasive eighteenth-century suspicion, not only of the broad realms of the irrational and emotional, but as Max Byrd suggests, of all "private, unverifiable experience."[27]

The tenuous relationship between the mind's ability to perceive reality accurately and the faculties of human imagination and reason, is a pre-eminent thematic concern in Emma, a novel which, as Mark Schorer rightly speculates, could well have been entitled "Perception and Self-Decep-

[25] Cf. Donnelly, Managing the Mind, p.111.

[26] Locke compared the mind in this regard to a partially darkened closet with a half-opened door. Cf. his Essay, bk.2, ch.11, p.152.

[27] Byrd, Visits to Bedlam, p. 51.

tion."[28] For Emma Woodhouse is indeed a thoroughly compulsive "imaginist"; a young woman with a mind so "delighted with its own ideas" that it "never submit[s] to anything requiring....a subjection of the fancy to the understanding."[29] Similar in many respects to Catherine Morland, Emma's incessant indulgence in fanciful scheming drastically impairs her ability to perceive and judge reality, and leads to a series of "blunders," as she calls them, throughout the novel.

Bored with her monotonous domestic existence as the sole caretaker of an elderly and hypochondriacal father, Emma Woodhouse esteems match-making to be "the greatest amusement in the world," and her first imaginative plot originates as a benevolent wish to do "poor Mr.Elton," a young vicar of the vicinity, a "kind office" (13) by selecting a suitable mate for him.[30] When shortly thereafter, the attractive Miss

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[28] Mark Schorer, "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse," in Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt, p. 98.

[29] Jane Austen, Emma in The Novels of Jane Austen, ed. R.W. Chapman, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), Vol. 4, p.335, p.24, p.37. I will refer to this edition throughout, citing page numbers.

[30] The theme of women's enforced idleness and its consequences for the mind is thus relevant in Emma as it is in Northanger Abbey, for Emma's imaginative projects represent the fruit of well-meaning and understandable attempts at usefulness. However, Austen's portrayal of delusion in this novel, as I hope to show, emphasizes the defective internal dynamics of the heroine's mind at work, and not her vulnerability to external predisposing influences. For the Johnsonian influence evident in Austen's concern with the idle mind, see Claudia Johnson,

Harriet Smith makes her appearance at a dinner party given by the Woodhouses, Emma is suddenly provided with the matrimonial candidate she has resolved to present to Mr. Elton, for as she later acknowledges, her match-making plan "had entered her brain the very first evening of Harriet's coming to Hartfield" (35). Austen immediately underscores an element of obsessive, competitive perversity beginning to manifest itself in her heroine's fantasizing, for Emma's greatest dread is that "every body" else will "predict" the union she does, or that "any body" else will "equal" her "in the date of the plan" (35).

Although the longer she considers her scheme the greater her "sense of its expediency" (35), the reader is fully aware of the irrational nature of Emma's "sense" from the outset, because Miss Smith, though lovely, is hardly the social equal of Mr.Elton, a gentleman, who, if not wealthy, is at least "comfortably" settled (13) with some "independent property" (35). Harriet, on the other hand, is very modestly circumstanced, and not only betrays a certain vulgarity of manner, but is also vaguely reputed to carry the supreme social stigma of illegitimacy:

> Harriet Smith was the natural daughter of somebody. Somebody had placed her, several years back, at Mrs.Goddard's school, and somebody had lately raised her from the condition of scholar to that of parlour-boarder. This was all that was generally known of her history (22-23).

"Time and the Human Mind," MLQ 44 (1983), pp. 36-38.

Emma, to be sure, is clever enough to perceive that this situation poses an uncomfortable threat to the "expediency" of her plan, and she thus endeavours "to find out who were the parents," but Harriet "could not tell": "She was ready to tell her everything in her power, but on this subject questions were in vain" (27). Instead of deducing the strong possibility of Harriet's low social rank from the circumstances of her present position, and from her inability or unwillingness (as it turns out) to divulge the secret of her parentage, Emma feels "obliged to fancy what she liked" (27) -- which is, "that there can be no doubt" of Harriet's "being a gentleman's daughter" (30).

Emma does in fact come to acknowledge that "the doubtful birth of Harriet" (30) means that "in a legal sense she may be called Nobody" (62), but she still prefers to adhere to her conviction "that she is a gentleman's daughter" as the "indubitable" truth (62). And once it is established in Emma's own mind, the 'fact' of Harriet's impoverished gentility becomes the major premise upon which she continues to operate. It is the principle upon which she effectively pressures Harriet into rejecting Robert Martin's proposal of marriage, and it is the basis upon which she justifies her behaviour to the indignant Mr.Knightley when he accuses her of having deprived Harriet of a respectable opportunity, and of injuring her young friend by encouraging her to aspire beyond her 'proper' social rank. Although Emma chooses "not

to make a direct reply to this assertion" (63), she does re-
spond with a very valid counterpoint, and extrapolates from
it plausibly enough:

> till it appears to me that men are much more phil-
> osophic on the subject of beauty than they are
> generally supposed; till they do fall in love with
> well-informed minds instead of handsome faces, a
> girl, with such loveliness as Harriet, has a cer-
> tainty of being admired and sought after, of hav-
> ing the power of choosing from among many, and has
> consequently a claim to be nice....I am very much
> mistaken if your sex in general would not think
> such beauty, and such temper, the highest claims a
> woman could possess (63-64).

Wilfully deluded though she is about the fact of Harriet's
real social status, Emma definitely retains her capacity for
cogent argumentation. Austen shows her heroine to manifest,
that is, the fundamental 'error' of madness in Lockean
terms: she has not lost her power of reason, but, "having
joined together some ideas very wrongly" -- namely that Har-
riet is a gentlewoman and is therefore a suitable wife for
Mr.Elton -- she 'errs' as a woman does "who argues right
from wrong principles." It is in this sense, then, that the
exasperated Mr.Knightley charges Emma with irrational folly:
"Upon my word, Emma, to hear you abusing the reason you have
is almost enough to make me think so too. Better be without
sense, than misapply it as you do" (64). Interestingly,
Knightley's distinction between utter lack of sense and mi-
sapplied sense is itself a Lockean principle of the differ-
ence between "naturals," or idiots, and madmen.[31]

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[31] As Locke states, "the difference between idiots and mad-
men [is] that madmen put wrong ideas together, and so

But despite Mr.Knightley's emphatic admonition that Emma is espousing "nonsense, errant nonsense as ever was talked!" (65), and despite her own subsequent disclaimer to "have done with match-making indeed" (66), Austen's heroine continues to pursue, with single-minded obstinacy, the fancy which has gripped her brain. It is a process of the diseased imagination lucidly described by Samuel Johnson's Imlac in <u>Rasselas</u>:

> In time, some particular train of ideas fixes the attention; all other intellectual gratifications are rejected; the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favorite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood, whenever she is offended with the bitterness of truth. By degrees, the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious, and in time despotic. Then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish.[32]

Like Catherine Morland, then, Emma is the victim of a "reign of fancy" in which "fictions begin to operate as realities." But whereas Catherine's delusion is the product of an osmotic process, absorbed, as it were, from the gothic fiction she consumes, Emma's 'madness' is shown to be a seed germinated within her own brain -- a much more foreboding possibility.

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make wrong propositions, but argue and reason right from them; but idiots make very few or no propositions, and reason scarce at all." Cf. Locke, <u>Essay</u>, bk.2, ch.11, p.151.

[32] Samuel Johnson, <u>The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia</u>, ed. and intro. by D.J.Enright (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1976), ch. 44, p. 134.

But Emma's "feast" on the "luscious falsehood" of her fancy, to borrow Imlac's words, is brought to an abrupt end when Mr.Elton indeed proposes, not to Harriet as she had intended, but to herself. Only then does she wonder "how she could have been so deceived!" Looking back in "confusion" she does dimly perceive that "she had taken up an idea, she supposed, and made everything bend to it" (134). "Too eager and busy" in her own "previous conceptions and views" of Mr.Elton to "hear him impartially, or see him with clear vision" (110), Emma must finally confront the unpleasant truth that her imagination has, as the optical theories of empiricist psychology held, functioned as a distorting lens, radically obscuring her perception of objective reality.

When the charade she has attempted to engineer collapses into truth and reveals itself as a disasterous social 'faux pas,' and, more importantly, as a cruel trifling with the affections of Harriet, Emma is "quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more" (137). But the nature of her malady is indeed despotic, and the unfortunate Harriet is destined to continue as a martyr to Emma's imaginative effervescence, as Emma herself continues as the dupe of her own designs. Before she can be genuinely impressed with the harmful extent of her folly, Emma must witness the Frankenstein of her own creation parodying the defective dynamics of her own mind; for Harriet, as Mr.Knightley had foreseen, has gradually, almost imperceptibly, abandoned her

formerly "docile, grateful disposition" (26) and become sig-
nificantly "less humble" (414). Steadily encouraged by
Emma's example throughout, "the daughter of nobody knows
whom" (61) is near the end of the novel under the sway of a
delusion "as complete....as any of [Emma's] own" (430), fan-
cying herself indeed "the chosen" of none other than
Mr.Knightley himself (414). And it is only at this point
that Emma is suddenly prompted to a "formal recognition of
the distortions caused by her own subjectivity"[33]:

> How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How
> inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how
> unfeeling, had been her conduct! What blindness,
> what madness had led her on! It struck her with a
> dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every
> bad name in the world (408).

"Blessed" with this unprecedented insight, Emma is at length
forcefully awakened to an awareness of how "wretchedly" she
has "hitherto misunderstood even those she was watching"
(416).

At first too overwhelmed by the extent of her own culpa-
ble delusion to credit Harriet's astonishingly presumptive
aspirations, Emma soon realizes to her horror that such a
seemingly preposterous union is, in fact, "far, very far
from impossible," and, moreover, that "were this most un-
equal of all connexions to take place, on her must rest all
the reproach of having given it a beginning" (413). Aus-
ten's heroine, that is, must be brought to a full under-

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[33] George Levine, The Realistic Imagination, p. 76.

standing of the broader social ramifications of her wayward
behaviour, for in Emma, the danger posed by the compulsive
imagination is a public one which threatens to subvert hier-
archical order. And it is the point at which her heroine's
"blunders" appear likely to culminate in the "dreadful se-
quel" (414) Emma envisions that Austen begins to neatly re-
solve her plot by means of the very "romance devices" she
often parodied.[34] She thus swiftly brings Harriet to acqui-
esce to a marriage with the ever-faithful Robert Martin
while simultaneously leading Emma and Knightley to a union
of "perfect happiness" (484); thereby successfully averting
altogether the potentially disruptive outcome she has been
moving toward.

Ultimately, as John Halperin asserts, Emma voices "a pow-
erful plea for the subjection of the imaginative faculties
to the rational ones," and is perhaps of all Austen's nov-
els, "the most deeply rooted in eighteenth-century rational-
ism."[35] It certainly stands as her finest dramatization of
the human struggle to separate what Samuel Johnson once
termed "the affairs of life" from "the foam of a boiling im-
agination."[36]

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[34] George Levine, The Realistic Imagination, p.71, p.62.

[35] Halperin, The Life of Jane Austen, p.276.

[36] Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, 3 Vols., 15th ed. (London:
J. Johnson et. al., 1806), Vol.1, no. 66, p.419. All sub-
sequent references are taken from this edition.

Whereas in _Emma_ the processes of the errant mind are delineated principally in Lockean terms, as manifestations of flawed logic and impaired vision resulting from an imagination grown despotic, in _Sense and Sensibility_, Austen provides an illustration of the Hobbesian precept of the essential pathology of unchecked or excessive passion. The novel's central characters are Elinor and Marianne Dashwood; two sisters "quite equal" in almost every respect but the one indicated by the title. Elinor, the eldest, possesses a superior "strength of understanding and coolness of judgment" which enables her to effectively "govern" strong "feeling," while Marianne, conversely, is "eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation."[37]

Marianne's immoderate sensibility characterizes her response to all things in life. Autumn foliage, for example, inspires her with "transporting sensations" of "delight"; an enthusiasm the more reserved Elinor can only wonder at: "It is not everyone," as she states dryly, "who has your passion for dead leaves" (87-88). Literally "transported" by the dashing Mr.Willoughby when he carries her home after a mishap on the road, Marianne begins a romantic relationship which progresses to intimate terms with such astonishing celerity that Elinor, disconcerted, ventures indeed to "sug-

[37] Jane Austen, _Sense and Sensibility_, in _The Novels of Jane Austen_, ed. R.W. Chapman, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), Vol.1, p.6. I will refer to this edition throughout, citing page numbers.

gest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne" (53). But the younger sister eschews social decorum as irrational, and in little over a week, she and Willoughby are on a Christian name basis, she has accepted a horse from him, and together they have toured, unchaperoned, the grounds of an estate he expects to inherit.

Because Marianne instantly and irrevocably commits herself to a full emotional investment in the relationship, her grief at Willoughby's sudden departure to London for an extended length of time is predictably passionate. It is a "violent sorrow" and an "oppression of the spirits," accompanied not only by profuse weeping, but by headaches, insomnia, lack of appetite, and unwillingness to speak (82-83). Perversely though, Marianne attempts to sustain her suffering at a pitch of raw misery by "feeding and encouraging" her grief as though it were a "duty" (77). Thus, she sits mournfully at the pianoforte,

> gazing at every line of music that [Willoughby] had written out for her, till her heart was so heavy that no further sadness could be gained; and this nourishment of grief was every day applied. She spent whole hours at the pianoforte alternately singing and crying, her voice often totally suspended by her tears (83).

And though her heavy affliction gradually subsides into a "calmer melancholy," she continues to resist the abatement of her sorrow by recurring "daily" to her "employments" at the piano and by indulging frequently in "solitary walks and silent meditations" (83-84).

Marianne's unnatural cultivation of pain points to the important role which memory and hope play in the novel, for as Claudia Johnson maintains, "<u>Sense</u> <u>and</u> <u>Sensibility</u> is concerned with the psychological perils of obsessive wishing and expectation, and, conversely, obsessive regretting and retrospection."[38] In this regard, Austen follows in a tradition established by Augustan humanists who were fascinated by the peculiar structure of human consciousness. The mind, able to function only by looking backwards or forwards, could never fully experience the present moment, which seemed to remain ultimately inaccessible or unknowable; a conceptual illusion which humans fabricated in a desperate attempt to "stabilize the future as it rush[ed] past."[39] Continually eluding consciousness, "the time present," as Samuel Johnson once remarked, "is seldom able to fill desire or imagination, and we are forced to supply its deficiencies by recollection or anticipation."[40]

So great are the "deficiencies" of Marianne's "present" after Willoughby has left, that she attempts to disengage herself from it as far as possible, withdrawing into a shell of morose introspection, "wrapped up in her own music and

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[38] Claudia Johnson, "Time and the Human Mind," <u>MLQ</u> 44 (1983), p. 26.

[39] Paul Fussell, <u>The</u> <u>Rhetorical</u> <u>World</u> <u>of</u> <u>Augustan</u> <u>Humanism:</u> <u>Ethics</u> <u>and</u> <u>Imagery</u> <u>from</u> <u>Swift</u> <u>to</u> <u>Burke</u> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 43.

[40] Samuel Johnson, <u>The</u> <u>Rambler</u>, Vol. 3, no. 203, p. 363.

her own thoughts," and often oblivious of those about her (145). "Ill-disposed from the state of her spirits" to cultivate new aquaintances (127) or take an interest in anything but her own misery, Marianne allows herself to lapse into a melancholy which soon exceeds the realm of foolish sensibility to become, as Claudia Johnson has argued, a form of debilitating monomania.[41] Samuel Johnson, an authority in his own right, regarded melancholic monomania as especially insidious:

> Sorrow....gains such a firm possession of the mind that it is not afterward to be ejected; the mournful ideas, first violently impressed and afterwards willingly received, so much engross the attention as to predominate in every thought, to darken gaiety, and perplex ratiocination. An habitual sadness seizes the soul, and the faculties are chained to a single object, which can never be contemplated but with helpless uneasiness.[42]

As a kind of "fanaticism carried to the point of delusion," the malady from which Marianne suffers represents an affliction commonly referred to in the eighteenth century as "the tyranny of a ruling passion."[43]

When the opportunity of travelling to London presents itself to Marianne, however, she is temporarily reanimated by an obverse single-mindedness -- the hope of seeking out the miscreant Willoughby, who has apparently forgotten all about

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[41] Claudia Johnson, "Time and the Human Mind," MLQ 44 (1983), p. 28.

[42] Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, Vol.1, no.47, p.304.

[43] Byrd, Visits to Bedlam, p. 105.

her.   She is only released from the "chains" of her sorrow,
that is, to be gripped by what Dr.Johnson termed the "shack-
les of expectation" or the "inveterate disease of wish-
ing."[44] Austen describes it much less ominously as "the rap-
ture of delightful expectation" (159), but it amounts to the
same helpless, manic, obsessive anticipation: wherever the
sisters travel or visit in London, Marianne is "always on
the watch," her eyes roving in "constant inquiry" and her
mind "equally abstracted from everything actually before
them." "Restless and dissatisfied everywhere," she receives
"no pleasure from anything" and is "only impatient to be at
home again" (164-165).   And once at home, she can only lis-
ten "anxiously" for "the sound of every carriage" (161), or
pace "backwards and forwards across the room, pausing for a
moment whenever she came to the window in hopes of distin-
guishing the long-expected rap" of Willoughby at the door
(166).   As Elinor sadly observes, "the expectation of seeing
him every hour of the day made her unfit for anything"
(169).

The "fever of suspense" (185) is finally broken by the
crisis; an exceptionally poignant encounter between Marianne
and Willoughby during which he publicly spurns her. This is
subsequently followed by a letter in which he formally and
coldly severs all ties with her.   By this time, the pattern
of response has already been firmly established: after an

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[44] Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, Vol.2, no.73, p.15, p.18.

initial flare of grief so extreme that it is "shocking" even
to Elinor, who is accustomed to her sister's volatile nature
(182), Marianne sinks into an automaton-like state of abject
apathy:

> it was becoming a matter of indifference to her
> whether she went [out] or not, and she prepared
> quietly and mechanically for every evening's en-
> gagement, though without expecting the smallest
> amusement from any, and very often without knowing
> till the last moment where it was to take her
> (249).

In addition, Marianne's "personal attractions" begin to fade
(237), for she has grown "perfectly indifferent" "to her
dress and appearance" (249) -- an unmistakable symptom of
grave female abnormality in Austen's fiction, and one poised
in direct contradistinction to the elegant fashionability of
Laura and Sophia's 'vapours' in <u>Love</u> <u>and</u> <u>Friendship</u>.

Back in the country, Marianne continues to indulge her
"invaluable misery" in "luxurious solitude"; "whil[ing]
away" her days by "lounging round the kitchen garden" and
"dawdling through the greenhouse" (303). It is this habitu-
al propensity to idle meditation and "solitary rambles"
which leads to her great "imprudence" of sitting absently
outdoors in wet shoes and stockings; which in turn results
in a serious illness. Vacillating for days between periods
of "sleepless pain and delirium" and "heavy stupor"
(312-313), a second heroine of sensibility comes dangerously
close to succumbing to the "chill Damps." But this time
Austen refrains from jokes about running mad and fainting.

There is indeed nothing humorous about the spiralling course of mental deterioration Austen has traced in Marianne. Her case is marked by a gravity which far exceeds that of Emma's, for Marianne's perverse sorrow, initially a matter of "ritualized" form,[45] has become through continual indulgence an almost irresistable propulsion to self-destruction. As Jane Nardin concludes, Marianne has played her role of heroine of sensibility so well "that she comes close to destroying her ability to give it up when she decides to do so."[46] Thus, although the younger sister eventually regrets "most bitterly," her easy inclination to the gratifications of passion, she fears it is too late to resist the diseased process already underway: "Her mind was so much weakened that she fancied present exertion impossible, and therefore it only dispirited her more" (270).

As Elinor has perceived throughout, Marianne's melancholic sensibility has been allowed to become "potent enough!" (83) because she has consistently refused to "exert" herself under mental tribulation. For depression or sorrow, as a "kind of rust of the soul" or "putrefaction of stagnant life" could be "scour[ed] away," according to eighteenth-century thought, by "exercise and motion."[47] Employment is

[45] Claudia Johnson, "Time and the Human Mind," MLQ 44 (1983), p.27.

[46] Jane Nardin, Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1973), p. 41.

precisely the palliative which allows Elinor to recover from an intense disappointment similar to Marianne's; when she discovers that the man she loves is bound in honour to a previous engagement, she does not turn inward to the self, but rather seeks solace by turning "outward to sociability."[48] Elinor not only continues to carry out her familial and social obligations as eldest daughter, but also assumes, as Jane Nardin points out, all those small civilities of social intercourse which her sister, in her morbid silence and solitude, forfeits.[49] To an extent, therefore, Marianne's malady, like Emma's compulsive delusions, also embodies a dimension of wider implications which reach beyond the self to affect others.

Most importantly, however, Elinor's efforts to "exert" herself in daily activities and thus conceal her pain from family and friends -- her defense against that Hobbesian madness of "too much appearing passion" -- reflects an understanding of mental health which places a premium on individual volition; a recognition, as Max Byrd puts it, "that to be rational, decent, and sane is uncertain business at best and requires effort forever and costs pain forever."[50]

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[47] Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, Vol.1, no.47, p.307.

[48] Claudia Johnson, "Time and the Human Mind," MLQ 44 (1983), p.38.

[49] Jane Nardin, Those Elegant Decorums, p.36.

[50] Max Byrd, Visits to Bedlam, p.56.

Thus, when Elinor finally reveals to her sister the agony she has silently endured over Edward Ferrar's prior commitment, she informs her as to both the price and the rewards of unwavering "self-command":

> The composure of mind with which I have brought
> myself at present to consider the matter, the con-
> solation that I have been willing to admit, have
> been the effect of constant and painful exertion;
> they did not spring up of themselves; they did not
> occur to relieve my spirits at first (264).

The strict regulation of passion in Austen's view, moreover, represents not only a means of maintaining sanity, but constitutes as well a fundamental exercise in morality. For it is Elinor's sense of "duty" and "solicitude" (262) for her mother and sisters which has led her to "command herself enough to guard suspicion of the truth" (141), and thus spare them the pain of entering into her misery. In this depiction of the "composed" mind as the product of the conscious exertion of moral and rational faculties, Austen directly anticipates the Victorian psychiatric theories of "moral insanity" and "moral management" which become relevant in the work of Charlotte Brontë.

In light of the destructive consequences of her sister's overly indulgent sensibilities, Elinor's cool capacity for emotional self-government certainly appears a noble and commendable alternative. And yet, importantly, Austen's novel does not reflect an unqualified endorsement of the elder sister's "sense" either. For indeed, not only is Elinor, as

the novel's representative of clear-sighted rationality, also revealed to be a fallible judge of character, deceived in the intentions of Willoughby almost as completely as her infatuated sister is, but Austen also clearly indicates an obverse element of excess in Elinor's sustained mental stoicism and silent sufferings. One begins to suspect, in fact, the same measure of masochistic perversity in Elinor's sense of "duty" to check emotion as was evident in her younger sister's sense of "duty" to "feed" and "nourish" it at the pianoforte. Thus, if the passionate Marianne swings too far in one direction, then the repressive Elinor is at least in danger of swinging too far in the other. "Somewhere between sense and sensibility," as John Halperin suggests, "lies what is just plain sensible, and it is here that Jane Austen wishes us to stand."[51]

According to Ian Watt, Austen's primary achievement in Sense and Sensibility is that she succeeded in developing, "for the first time,"

> a narrative form which fully articulated the conflict between the contrary tendencies of her age: between reason and rapture, between the observing mind and the feeling heart, between being sensible and being sensitive.[52]

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[51] Halperin, The Life of Jane Austen, p.91.

[52] Ian Watt, "On Sense and Sensibility," in Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt, p.51.

Despite the authorial advocacy for a moderate balance of "contrary tendencies" in <u>Sense</u> <u>and</u> <u>Sensibility</u>, however, Austen's work with the broad theme of mental illness as a whole evinces a fundamental commitment to the rationalist ethos of the eighteenth century; for she remains deeply distrustful of the new Romantic attitudes toward irrationality and madness manifest during her lifetime. At the most benign level, Austen can view a "passion for passions" or "fascination with feeling for its own sake"[53] as simply ludicrous and laughable; but at its most sinister, the "passion for passions" becomes a potentially self-destructive means of trifling with one's sanity. Ultimately, Austen posits her faith in the existence of a public, verifiable reality within which heroines like Emma Woodhouse and Marianne Dashwood must learn to tame and subdue distorting personal desires and needs. This, perhaps, is what Charlotte Brontë -- a writer who also explores the maddening dangers of passion but insists on the validity of private and emotional experience -- meant when she called Jane Austen a novelist "more real than true."[54]

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[53] Byrd, <u>Visits</u> <u>to</u> <u>Bedlam</u>, p.116.

[54] Charlotte Brontë, letter to G.H. Lewes, 18 January 1848, in <u>The</u> <u>Brontë's</u>: <u>Their</u> <u>Lives</u>, <u>Friendships</u>, <u>and</u> <u>Correspondence</u>, eds. Thomas J. Wise and John Symington (1933; rpt. Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980), Vol.2, p.183.

Chapter II

Beauties and Beasts, and Moral Managers:
The Dual Vision of Madness
in Charlotte Brontë's
Jane Eyre
and
Villette

Nothing can be more slightly defined than the line
of demarcation between sanity and insanity. Physi-
cians and lawyers have vexed themselves with at-
tempts at definition in a case where definition is
impossible. There has never yet been given to the
world anything in the shape of a formula upon this
subject which may not be torn to shreds in five
minutes by any ordinary logician. Make the defini-
tion too narrow, it becomes meaningless, make it
too wide, the whole human race are involved in the
drag-net. In strictness, we are all mad as often
as we give way to passion, to prejudice, to vice,
to vanity; but if all the passionate, prejudiced,
vicious, and vain people in this world are to be
locked up as lunatics, who is to keep the key of
the asylum?

-The Times, 22 July 1854

Poor Ophelia
Divided from herself, and her fair judgment,
Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts.
-Hamlet, IV,v,83-85

"To speak truth," confesses the heroine of Villette, re-

garding her divided allegiance to the "stinting check of

Reason" and the "full, liberal impulse of Feeling," "I com-

promised matters; I served two masters."[1] Lucy Snowe's

statement is of paramount importance to any study of Char-

lotte Brontë's work, for not only in this novel and the ear-

lier Jane Eyre, but indeed, throughout her entire career,

the author, like her heroine, "serves two masters"; vacil-

lating ever and anon between her impulsive propensity to the

genre of gothic-Romance, and her equally strong sense of

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[1] Charlotte Brontë, Villette, intro. by Susan Fromberg
Schaeffer (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1986), p.
243. I will refer to this edition throughout, citing chap-
ter and page.

commitment to the mimetic integrity of mid-Victorian realism. The significance of these mixed generic modes in Brontë's depictions of madness or forms of mental illness is fundamental, but has yet to receive full critical attention.[2] Indeed, the generic textures of <u>Jane</u> <u>Eyre</u> (1847) and <u>Villette</u> (1853), "two major types of modern psychological novels," according to John Maynard,[3] exert a profound influence on Brontë's portrayal of mental disorders; leading her in essence to explore two dimensions of madness, which sometimes inform one another, yet remain ultimately distinct.

On the one level, within the gothic realm of her attics and "forbidden alleys," Brontë largely inherits, intact, notions and images of insanity typical of both the eighteenth-century gothic literary tradition and the Romantic age. These fossilized tropes and concepts of lunacy manifest

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[2] Elaine Showalter, in <u>The</u> <u>Female</u> <u>Malady</u>: <u>Women</u>, <u>Madness</u>, <u>and</u> <u>English</u> <u>Culture</u>, <u>1830-1980</u> (New York: Pantheon, 1985), touches briefly on this aspect of Brontë's portrayal of insanity, stating that, "Her work shows an evolution from Romantic stereotypes of female insanity to a brilliant interrogation of the meaning of madness in women's daily lives"(p.66), but the thrust of her argument situates Brontë's work in the cultural context of psychiatric history. Similarly, John Maynard, in <u>Charlotte</u> <u>Brontë</u> <u>and</u> <u>Sexuality</u> (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) is sensitive to the role of mixed generic modes in psychological studies of Brontë, but his focus is primarily on her representation of sexuality. Most writers on Brontë's depictions of insanity, such as Barbara Hill Rigney in <u>Madness</u> <u>and</u> <u>Sexual</u> <u>Politics</u> <u>in</u> <u>the</u> <u>Feminist</u> <u>Novel</u>: <u>Studies</u> <u>in</u> <u>Brontë</u>, <u>Woolf</u>, <u>Lessing</u> <u>and</u> <u>Atwood</u> (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), do not differentiate between genre.

[3] Maynard, <u>Charlotte</u> <u>Brontë</u> <u>and</u> <u>Sexuality</u>, p. ix.

themselves most clearly in her novels as a paradigm of the Victorian madwoman as a spectre of dual extremes: the victimized, ethereal "Beauty," embodied in <u>Villette</u> by the ghostly "nun" and the legendary Justine Marie, and conversely, by the predatory, criminally-deranged "Beast"; the infamous Bertha Mason of <u>Jane Eyre</u>. But beyond the preservation of these sensational stereotypes of madness within the gothic sub-strata of her plots, Brontë is increasingly drawn to examine the mechanics of the aberrant psyche from a realist perspective, sensitively probing the individual psychological and larger socio-cultural factors which affect her heroine's mental well-being. It is primarily within this realist dimension of the texts that the author reveals her own extremely competent grasp of contemporary nineteenth-century psychiatric theories, treatments, and images of madness, from the holistic model of Victorian health, to the popular pseudo-sciences of phrenology and craniology, to the fundamental tenets of the age of "psychiatric Victorianism"[4]: "moral management" as a combatant of "moral insanity." The portraits of mental disease presented in <u>Jane Eyre</u> and <u>Villette</u>, then, are in effect filtered through the dual dis-

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[4] The term "psychiatric Victorianism" is taken from Elaine Showalter, <u>The Female Malady</u>. Vieda Skultans, in <u>Madness and Morals: Ideas on Insanity in the Nineteenth Century</u> (London; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), refers to the same era as the age of "psychiatric Romanticism" to denote "the idea of the individual as possessed of powers and the will to combat insanity"(p.2). I have chosen to use Showalter's term to avoid confusion with the Romantic literary images of madness which Brontë works with.

courses of generic literary conventions rooted mainly in the eighteenth century, and the embryonic nineteenth-century sphere of psychiatry.[5]

The Romantic iconography which may be seen to inform Brontë's gothic depictions of madness has been provocatively examined by Elaine Showalter in a recent feminist study of psychiatric history.[6] Showalter traces the gradual displacement of the Augustan cultural image of lunacy -- a manacled, beastial madman -- with the Victorian icon of the madwoman, who unveiled a composite self in the guise of three Romantic personae of ultimately Shakespearean origin: "the suicidal Ophelia, the sentimental Crazy Jane, and the violent Lucia." All three, according to Showalter, helped to perpetuate a Victorian myth of insanity as a distinctly "female malady" by implicating female sexuality or feminine nature itself as a source of madness.[7] This is an aspect of the social history of insanity which would change by the time of Virginia Woolf, but as Bertha Mason and the legendary nun of _Villette_

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[5] According to Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine in, _Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry_, _1535-1860_: _A History Presented in Selected English Texts_ (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. x., the foundations of the modern, autonomous psychiatric profession did not begin to emerge until the decade 1850-60. For the sake of specificity, however, I use the word to denote that segment of the early Victorian medical profession concerned primarily with psychology and mental health care.

[6] Elaine Showalter, _The Female Malady_ (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

[7] Showalter, _The Female Malady_, p.8, p. 10.

would seem to suggest, Brontë not only absorbed her culture's primary identification of madness with the female form, but also fashioned her own binary paradigm of insanity from the triple-faced prototype Showalter describes; indicating, therefore, an admixture of Romantic and Victorian influences at work.

However, as a dangerous descendant of Scott's Bride of Lammermoor, Lucy,[8] Bertha Mason also represents a continuum in a gothic tradition which preserved certain patently Augustan notions of lunacy. Michel Foucault, for instance, has shown how the transcendent qualities that Renaissance culture had posited in madness were entirely stripped by the eighteenth-century, when the image of the lunatic as beast came to the fore:

> The animality that rages in madness dispossesses man of what is specifically human in him; not in order to deliver him over to other powers, but simply to establish him at the zero degree of his own nature. For classicism, madness in in its ultimate form is man in immediate relation to his animality, without other reference, without any recourse.[9]

Brontë's Bertha, with her purple face, rolling red eyes, and swollen lips, is clearly presented as a savage beast confined perforce to its lair:

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[8] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 14.

[9] Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965), p. 74.

> In the deep shade, at the further end of the room,
> a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was,
> whether beast or human, one could not, at first
> sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all
> fours; it snatched and growled like some strange
> wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and
> a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane,
> hid its head and face.[10]

Perhaps more important than the fact that Bertha typifies a
facet of the Victorian madwoman as a Lucia-figure, then, is
the fact that she is shown to have degenerated through in-
sanity to the level of a creature utterly devoid of the de-
fining rational and moral attributes of a human being; to a
level which clearly reflects the totemic eighteenth- century
image of the lunatic as beast.

Brontë is, moreover, typical of the gothic novelist in
her association of mental illness with violent crime.[11] Ber-
tha is a "foul Vampyre"(XXV,286) who preys on men just as
the grotesque cretin of Villette has an instinctive "propen-
sity....to evil"; "an aimless malevolence" which is linked
directly to her "warped" mind and body (XV,149). In her
homicidal tendencies, as in her wild appearance, Bertha
presents a close parallel to Sir Walter Scott's Lucy, who,
having stabbed her bridegroom on their wedding night, is
found blood-bespattered, crouched in a corner "like a hare,"
"her eyes glazed, and her features convulsed into a wild pa-

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[10] Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (New York: New American Li-
brary, 1960), p. 295. I will refer to this edition
throughout, citing chapter and page.

[11] Cf. Elizabeth Mac Andrew, The Gothic Tradition in Fiction
(New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 147.

roxysm of insanity": "an exulting demoniac."[12]

Yet even Bertha Mason's madness -- by far Brontë's most sensational and gothic presentation of psychological disorder -- modifies the Lucia or bestial prototype of insanity in important ways. Thus, as Showalter notes, the etiology of the madwoman's illness is congruent with the discourse of early Victorian psychiatry, which fostered myths about the transmission of insanity through female bloodlines.[13] The nineteenth-century medical profession was indeed in general agreement that hereditary mental disorders were most often the result of a special susceptibility on the part of female family members; and as late as 1875 one physician asserted that,

> girls are far more likely to inherit insanity from their mothers than from the other parent....the tendency of the mother to transmit her mental disease is....in all cases stronger than the father's; some physicians have, indeed, insisted that it is twice as strong.[14]

Suitably, then, when Rochester reveals Bertha's family history as consisting of "idiots and maniacs through three generations" (XXVI,294), he focuses mainly on the maternal role in the family's degeneration: Bertha Mason is "the true daughter of an infamous mother"(XXVII,308-309). Popular

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[12] Sir Walter Scott, The Bride of Lammermoor (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1906), p. 232.

[13] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 67.

[14] Andrew Wynter, The Borderlands of Insanity (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1875), excerpt reprinted in Vieda Skultans, Madness and Morals, pp. 235-236.

Biblical euphemisms aside, mental disorders in Brontë's time specifically represented a visitation of the sins of the mothers on children, and significantly, Bertha's father, the vastly prosperous West India merchant, is the only member of the family who dies, or is destined to die, with his sanity intact.

Moreover, Showalter keenly observes that Bertha's "worst attacks come when the moon is 'blood-red'(XXV,278) or 'broad and red' (XXVII,310)"; a subtle association, as she contends, of fits of derangement with "female sexuality and the periodicity of the menstrual cycle."[15] She fails to note, however, the intimate relationship between the terms 'lunatic' and 'lunar' even on a semantic level, for both words stem, of course, from the Latin root 'luna.' The astonishing tenacity of the ancient fallacy that periodic manic fits of insanity were determined by the phases of the moon is, in fact, intriguing: in the early nineteenth century, at least one doctor still chose, quite consciously, to describe his patients' mild mental aberrations in terms of a "partial eclipse," and their most violent paroxysms of dementia as a form of "total eclipse."[16]

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[15] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 67.

[16] Edward Sutleffe, Medical and Surgical Cases Selected During a Practice of Thirty-Eight Years (London: privately published, 1824), excerpt reprinted in Hunter and Macalpine, Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, p. 764, p. 767.

Distinctly Victorian convictions about the nature of mental maladies in women are thus manifest in Brontë's delineation of Bertha, but nevertheless, the portraiture remains dominantly coloured by the eighteenth-century credo of the lunatic as a malevolent, brute creature. It is on this basis that contemporary reviewers of the novel such as Julia Kavanagh and Leigh Hunt found the character of Bertha "shocking." In a letter to her publisher, Brontë defended her belief that there is "a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend-like nature replaces it," but she does accede:

> It is true that profound pity ought to be the only
> sentiment elicited by such degradation, and equal-
> ly true is it that I have not sufficiently dwelt
> on that feeling; I have erred in making horror too
> predominant.[17]

Brontë's situation was one in which the conventions of a literary genre flew in the face of the spirit of the age, for prominent psychiatric reformers such as the Tuke family at the York Retreat and John Conolly at the Hanwell Asylum were at this time working actively to promote humane methods of managing the insane, and to discredit precisely the image of beastiality which Brontë's gothic portrayal propagated. Merely two years prior to the publication of Jane Eyre, for

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[17] Charlotte Brontë, letter to W.S. Williams, 4 January 1848, in The Brontë's: Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence, eds. Thomas Wise and John Symington (1933; rpt. Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980), Vol. 2, pp. 173-174. Hereafter cited in footnotes by volume and page number as, The Brontë's.

example, a widespread public backlash against legal and medical abuses of the insane within the private madhouse system had culminated in the Lunatics Act (1845) which established a national inspectorate of all asylums in order to guard the interests and welfare of inmates.

There is evidence within the novel itself that Brontë did, to an extent, anticipate an audience critically predisposed on this sensitive issue. Thus, although her representation of madness itself is unsympathetically drawn, her portrayal of Rochester's care of Bertha integrates essential aspects of the Victorian concept of "moral treatment" of the insane -- an eclectic but rational and humane approach to the management of lunatics, which precluded the use of mechanical restraints.

Accordingly, Rochester evinces throughout the novel an acceptably conscientious, if grudging, concern for the welfare and comfort of his mad wife. Ostensibly, as we are told, he could have lodged her "safely enough" at Ferndean Manor (or even have abandoned her in the West Indies, for that matter), had he not had a moral "scruple about the unhealthiness of the situation": "Probably those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge," he tells Jane, "but to each villian his own vice; and mine is not a tendency to indirect assassination, even of what I most hate"(XXVII,303). Since Rochester's "conscience" "re-

coil[s]" from this insalubrious "arrangement"(XXVII,303), he instead places Bertha in relative "safety and comfort" at Thornfield (XXVII,311), and provides her with Grace Poole, a trained attendant whose competency is marred only by a penchant for porter and gin (XXVII,312;XXXVI,430). Furthermore, as Bertha's numerous rampages through Thornfield indicate, Rochester does not resort to methods of mechanical restraint unless absolutely necessary; as, for example, when the madwoman attacks him as he enters her room with the wedding party (XXVI,296). And at the end of the novel, Brontë even has Rochester risk his life in an attempt to foil Bertha's final suicidal leap from the flaming mansion (XXXVI,431). By thus stressing the element of ethical integrity in Rochester's care of his crazed wife, Brontë is able to foster and maintain a measure of readerly empathy for a hero, who, though operating primarily in a gothic subplot, must also satisfy the standards of an age imbued with a new social conscience in the sphere of mental health.

Bertha Mason, then, as a bestial Lucia figure, is a gothic and Romantic prototype of insanity tailored in certain respects to suit the tastes and expectations of a mid-Victorian audience. By the time Brontë comes to embody in _Villette_ the other half of her paradigm of madness, the beautiful yet pathological Ophelia figure, the need to break beyond conventional Romance stereotypes of lunacy has become even more pronounced. The seemingly ethereal 'nun' of _Vil-_

lette thus functions complexly on two narrative levels. In-
sofar as 'she' is a mysterious figure shrouded in white and
linked to a tragic legend of frustrated love, the 'nun' is a
sensational trope; freighted with generic connotations which
place her in a tradition of ghostly Ophelias and sentimental
Crazy Janes (two aspects of the victimized, rather than vic-
timizing madwoman, which are often indistinguishable) in Ro-
mantic poetry and Victorian literature. One might point to,
for instance, the various female lunatics in Wordsworth's
poetry, such as Martha Ray of "The Thorn," Tennyson's
"Maud," Wilkie Collins' Anne Catherick, and even, to an ex-
tent, George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver.[18] On the other hand,
as John Maynard perceives, "we are encouraged to see [the
nun] as an aspect of Lucy's way of seeing rather than as an
ordinary hoax,"[19] and in this sense, the entity of the nun
becomes a potentially viable psychological projection of the
heroine's disturbed mind: a phantom of psychic realism as
well as a sensational gothic trapping. Brontë brilliantly
exploits both possibilites.

It was the Ophelia figure which, in fact, became the most
emblematic of female insanity for the Victorians,[20] and as a

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[18] Elaine Showalter points as well to Dickens' Miss Havisham
in Great Expectations and John Fowles' "Tragedy" in The
French Lieutenant's Woman. Cf. The Female Malady, p.
90, p. 97.

[19] Maynard, Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality, p. 192.

[20] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 92.

sensational trope the nun of <u>Villette</u> may be profitably compared with one of the clearest representations of the type, Wilkie Collins' "Woman in White," Anne Catherick. Like both Lucy Snowe, whose presence is described as being as "inoffensive as a shadow"(XXVII,304), and the gliding nun of Brontë's novel, Anne Catherick flits intermittently through Collins' text like a spectre. A true Ophelia, Anne is a tragic figure destined to a gentle death; as the main narrator, Walter Hartwright, concludes,

> So the ghostly figure which has haunted these pages as it haunted my life, goes down into the impenetrable gloom. Like a shadow she first came to me in the loneliness of the night. Like a shadow she passes away in the loneliness of the dead.[21]

Anne is characterized by Collins as a "sweet, affectionate," and lovely little lunatic, who "says the quaintest, prettiest things....in the most oddly sudden, surprised, half-frightened way" (69), very much as Shakespeare's original heroine, with her pathetic ditties, turns "Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself/....to favour, and to prettiness"(IV/v/185-186). Although Catherick embodies the potential to erupt into a Lucia or a Bertha Mason — for at the mention of her antagonist's name, her eyes become "like the eyes of a wild animal," "maniacally intense" with "hatred and fear"(112) — she is fundamentally aligned to the Romantic idiot. For as her benefactress, Mrs. Fairlie, asserts,

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[21] Wilkie Collins, <u>The Woman In White</u>, (Scarborough, Ontario: The New American Library of Canada, 1985), p.552. All further references are to this edition, and cited by page number.

"the poor little thing's intellect is not developed as it ought to be at her age" (69), and her deficient mental capacity accounts for her characteristically vacant glance, rambling speech, and eccentric garb.

Notwithstanding Anne Catherick's imbecility, the legendary Justine Marie of Villette, M. Paul's first love, is modelled after the same Ophelia prototype. Like Catherick, whose wan and emaciated appearance -- the face beauty wears "after a long illness" (280) -- imparts an especially touching attractiveness, the portrait of the dead Justine Marie "though not beautiful, was pleasing; pale, young, and shaded with the dejection of grief or ill-health" (XXXIV,375). The painting leads Lucy to conclude: "I knew what she was as well as if I had seen her [alive]....there were girls like her at Madame Beck's school -- phlegmatics -- pale, slow, inert, but kind-natured"(XXXV,381). It is eventually revealed that the marriage of the "mild" Justine Marie and M. Paul had been thwarted decades ago by the opposition of her nefarious grandmother, Madame Walravens. As though in an instinctive response to Hamlet's injunction to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery!"(III/i122), Justine had then given up her suitor in despair and immured herself in a convent. There she promptly "died in her novicate"(XXXIV,376), having suffocated her spirit within the cloister walls as effectively as Ophelia stopped her breath by another means.

The crucial point about the legendary nun's life and character within Brontë's novel, though, is that it is perpetuated almost exclusively by a foppish character named de Hamal, in a series of sensational appearances as a 'nun.' Beyond these sporadic encounters with 'her', Lucy must admit that the tale of Justine Marie remains largely "unconfirmed and unaccredited"(XII,99) -- until, that is, she sees the portrait at Madame Walraven's and hears the authentic history from Pere Silas and then M. Paul himself.

It is a mark of Brontë's growth as an artist that this time, unlike in Jane Eyre, she happily deflates the conventional expectations which she has nurtured throughout the novel; stripping the stereotypical image of the distraught and tragically victimized Ophelia of its gothic and romantic implications, to uncover in the end the utterly ludicrous reality: none other than a dandified rake disguised for the purpose of illicitly courting his mistress. As one of the author's friends remarked upon finishing the novel: "it annoys one at last that that Nun, who really has frightened one all through the book, turns out a trick of such a stupid creature."[22] Similarly, Robert Colby has long since pointed out that in "making the source of the ghost stem from the comic side of the novel," Brontë is

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[22] Catherine Winkworth, letter to Emma Shaen, 23 March 1853, in Wise and Symington, eds., The Brontë's, Vol. 4, p. 53.

> surely mocking the tradition that once teased her
> own fevered fancy. This, her last word on the
> Gothic novel, is a laugh at it -- and a laugh that
> liberates....Charlotte Brontë exorcises the Gothic
> novel that once fired her imagination even as Miss
> Austen had exorcised it earlier in the century.[23]

More specifically, perhaps, Brontë at once exercises and exorcises a too sensational and superficial paradigm of female madness.

If, however, one dissociates the nun from the legends of Villette and considers her, as Dr. John Bretton does, a phantom emanating from Lucy's own aberrant state of mind, then she becomes a much more complex and subtle vehicle for Brontë to explore the turmoil of a psyche suspended in limbo. Lucy ponders fearfully, for instance, the doctor's conviction that the nun "is all a matter of the nerves": "You think, then, that she came out of my brain, and is now gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her?"(XXII,239). She is left, as she states, for an agonizing length of time

> secretly and sadly to wonder, in my own mind,
> whether that strange thing was of this world, or
> of a realm beyond the grave; or whether indeed it
> was only the child of malady, and I of that malady
> the prey (XXII,242).

At this level of the text, the extra-rational spectre of the nun functions much like the gothic ambience of the Red Room in Jane Eyre: it is a means of juxtaposing and testing the truth of the inner psychological world against that of the

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[23] Robert A. Colby, "Villette and the Life of the Mind," PMLA 75 (Autumn 1960), p. 419.

empirical senses and outer surroundings. In both instances, Brontë presents the paradox of having her heroine see what is at once real and not real. For whether they are concrete presences or not, Jane Eyre's ghost of Uncle Reed and Lucy Snowe's nun can be seen as psychologically realistic entities of overwrought minds. And it is this means of achieving a dimension of psychological realism through the use of sensational images and settings that Robert Heilman has called Brontë's "New Gothic."[24]

Brontë's sophisticated use of the nun in Villette indicates a whole new dimension of authorial treatment of mental disease in her work. For whereas confined within the gothic sub-plot and its Romantic iconography of insanity, Bertha Mason and the legendary nun of Villette remain, as one critic suggests, "virtually....allegorical types," Brontë's heroine's themselves are in fact the subject of her serious psychological studies.[25] Cast in a realist context, mental illness assumes far less dramatic, but equally invidious forms, and between them, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe run the gamut of nineteenth-century psychosomatic afflictions. As well as symptoms of minor mental disturbance, such as insomnia, loss of appetite, and headaches, both heroines suffer

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[24] Cf. Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë's 'New Gothic'," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, eds. R.C. Rathburn and M. Steinmann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp.118-132.

[25] Maynard, Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality, p. 213.

hysterical or "nervous" fits, accompanied by fainting, identity crises, delusion or hallucination, and hysterical paralysis, which manifests itself in Jane as a form of "syncope," as she calls it, and in Lucy as aphonia. In addition, Jane once lapses into involuntary speech, and Lucy is plagued with bouts of severe depression, as well as a period of intense neurotic monomania -- similar to, but not as sustained as Marianne Dashwood's lengthy subjection to 'the tyranny of a ruling passion' in Austen's Sense and Sensibility.

It is an extensive catalogue of ailments which Brontë appends to the characters of Jane and Lucy, and it is at this point that predominant contemporary medico-cultural theories and beliefs of both insanity and femininity become particularly relevant for a full appreciation of the novels. According to Bruce Haley, Charlotte Brontë herself may be regarded as a representative example of some of the fundamental cultural and medical attitudes of her time; first, in her obsessive fear of disease in general, but more importantly, in her conception of health as a distinct form of holistic harmony between the mind and the body -- a harmony which nineteenth-century psycho-physiologists often expressed in terms of "mens sana in copore sano."[26] Especially in the first half of the century, the health of the psyche

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[26] Bruce Haley, The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 26-27, p. 4.

and the soma remained inextricably bound for physicians and laypersons alike. It is a point which Haley suggests is illustrated in Brontë's case by a self-diagnosis she offered while prostrated by a severe influenza in 1851, for she clearly ascribes the physical symptoms -- vomiting, headaches, and toothaches -- to a prior period of mental stress:

> The illness has been coming on for a long time....I am well aware myself that extreme and continuous depression of spirits has had much to do with the origin of the illness -- and I know a little cheerful society would do me more good than gallons of medicine.[27]

In Villette, Lucy Snowe's bout with "hypochondria" -- that "strange fever of the nerves and blood"(XV,151) -- is also precipitated by mental depression, accurately reflecting Brontë's own experience. In fact, one of the lessons which both Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre must learn is that of the holistic totality of health: the lesson that the mind and the body are symbiotically related, and that to neglect the well-being of one is to endanger the other as well.

Nineteenth-century medical authorities, moreover, posited that the healthy mind and body operated to a great extent under the aegis of an individual's moral volition. And it is on this theoretical basis that the concept of "moral insanity," one of the most important ideas of the optimistic Victorian age of psychiatric reform, evolved. As Elaine

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[27] Charlotte Brontë, letter to Ellen Nussey, 17 December 1851, in Wise and Symington, eds., The Brontë's, Vol. 3, p.300.

Showalter claims, "moral madness" radically redefined insanity, "not as a loss of reason" or Lockean 'error of reasoning' as it had been for Jane Austen and her Augustan predecessors, but as any marked "deviance from socially accepted behaviour." Its manifestations, according to one contemporary medical source she cites, could include the "morbid perversion" of any "natural"

> feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder of the intellect, or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion or hallucination.[28]

In the nineteenth century, then, notions of 'insanity' continued to encompass a vast scope of human behaviour and characteristics, although the context in which mental illness was viewed and treated had shifted from rationalist to moralistic grounds.

Although the concept of "moral treatment" signifies primarily the mood of paternalistic humanism within the Victorian psychiatric reform movement, it is similar to the notion of "moral madness" in that both stress above all the principle of "control from within"; that is, the conscious exertion of moral will and self-discipline as a means of resisting mental disorder.[29] Within the nineteenth-century

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[28] James Cowles Prichard, as quoted in Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 29. Cf. also excerpts by the same author reprinted in Skultans, Madness and Morals, pp. 180-186.

[29] For discussions of "moral treatment" in Victorian psychiatry, see Showalter, The Female Malady, pp. 30-50; Andrew

asylum, the method of "moral management" has thus been criticized on the grounds that it represents a mere replacement of mechanical contraptions by "seals of conscience": equally chafing, if less visible means of restraining the mad.[30]

A special place was reserved within the realm of Victorian psychiatry for women, who, as Elaine Showalter has shown, were believed to be twice as liable as their male counterparts to fall prey to mental disorders due to their inherently labile biological and emotional constitutions:

> The traditional beliefs that women were more emotionally volatile, more nervous, and more ruled by their reproductive and sexual economy than men inspired Victorian psychiatric theories of femininity as a kind of mental illness in itself; as the neurologist S.Weir Mitchell remarked, "the man who does not know sick women does not know women." In the first half the century, when doctors advocated the strenuous exercise of individual will in combatting lunacy, women were seen as more vulnerable since they were uneducated and untrained.[31]

T. Scull, Museums of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 67-72; and Anne Digby, Madness, Morality, and Medicine: A Study of the York Retreat, 1796-1914, Cambridge History of Medicine Series, eds. Charles Webster and Charles Rosenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), especially chapters 3 and 4.

[30] Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p. 247. Andrew Scull similarly argues that "moral treatment" sought to "remodel" the lunatic "into something approximating the bourgeois ideal of the rational individual," Museums of Madness, p. 69.

[31] Elaine Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," Victorian Studies 23 (1980), p. 180.

A majority of physicians were in agreement, therefore, that "religion and moral principles alone give strength to the female mind," and that, "when these are weakened or removed by disease, the subterranean fires become active, and the crater gives forth smoke and flame."[32]

The Victorian woman was not only a high-risk candidate for the asylum because of her ostensibly inferior and capricious intellectual and sexual nature, however, but also by the very fact of her constricted social role in a staunchly patriarchal society. In an age in which the definition of "femininity" contracted to an unbearably narrow sphere of domesticity, and in which the interpretation of "insanity" conversely expanded to ludicrous latitudes on moral bases, "women were particularly prone to be consigned to the borderland of insanity....because of mildly deviant or independent behaviour."[33] As Anne Digby has discovered, for example, females were regularly incarcerated in the York Retreat for reasons such as "ill-regulated" or "flighty and passionate" minds, undefined "eccentricities," and "overfamiliarity" with the opposite sex. One patient was admitted on the grounds that she was "remarkably stingy and ill-natured...half-starved her children and hen-pecked her husband." And "none of the male cases of moral insanity," Dig-

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[32] J.C. Bucknill and Daniel Hack Tuke, as quoted in Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 58.

[33] Digby, Madness, Morality, and Medicine, p. 96.

by concludes, "were defined by reference to such a strict behavioural code."[34]

That Charlotte Brontë, whose lifespan and artistic zenith coincided almost precisely with the rise of "moral" psychiatric Victorianism in the first half of the century,[35] was influenced by contemporary thinking on insanity, appears almost certain. Mental, moral, and emotional self-discipline, for instance, constitutes a recurrent theme in her letters, and is revealed as a key source of anxiety:

> I have some qualities that make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in, that few, very few people in the world can at all understand. I don't pride myself on these peculiarities, I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can, but they burst out sometimes, and then those who see the explosion despise me, and I hate myself for days after.[36]

Brontë's imagery of the psyche is significant: a veritable "crater," as it were, giving forth smoke and flame. And dispositional "peculiarities," of course, were rather dangerous attributes in an era in which social conventionality was becoming uncomfortably synonomous with sanity. This held true especially for young women, in whom doctors were

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[34] Digby, <u>Madness</u>, <u>Morality</u>, <u>and</u> <u>Medicine</u>, p. 96.

[35] Samuel Tuke published the first widely influential argument for 'moral treatment' in England in 1813; Brontë was born three years later. Similarly, <u>Jane Eyre</u>, <u>Shirley</u>, and <u>Villette</u> were all published around mid-century, when according to Vieda Skultans, theories of psychiatric moral individualism peaked; cf. <u>Madness</u> <u>and</u> <u>Morals</u>, p.14.

[36] Charlotte Brontë, letter to Ellen Nussey, 1836, in Wise and Symington, eds., <u>The</u> <u>Brontë's</u>, Vol. 1, p. 141.

apt to diagnose qualities such as irreligiosity, selfishness, maliciousness, and quarrelsomeness as symptoms of "miniature" states of moral insanity.[37] Brontë's own perpetual struggle was against a Hobbesian sort of madness of "too much appearing passion," and her continual efforts to stifle the "absorbing dreams" and passions which entered her mind "and rankl[ed] there like venom"[38] were endorsed by Robert Southey, who wrote to advise her that she should give up writing since, "the daydreams" in which she "habitually indulg[ed]" were "likely to produce a distempered state of mind."[39]

In Brontë's novels, the fundamental thematic tension between reason and passion or restraint and indulgence -- the "critical cliche" of Brontë studies, according to Nina Auerbach[40]-- takes on a new dimension of significance when considered in terms of the heroines' quest for the healthy, morally-managed Victorian mind. Though the emphasis is different in either case, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe must both seek the elusive plane of balance between too great an expression of unconventional thought or action, and too severe

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[37] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 56.

[38] Charlotte Brontë, letter to Ellen Nussey, 1836, in Wise and Symington, eds., The Brontë's, Vol. 1, p. 146.

[39] Robert Southey, letter to Charlotte Brontë, March 1837, in Wise and Symington, eds., The Brontë's, Vol. 1, p. 155.

[40] Nina Auerbach, "Charlotte Brontë: The Two Countries," University of Toronto Quarterly 42 (Summer 1973), p. 329.

a repression of the individualistic requirements of the mind and the body. Psychically sensitized to their own internal monitors, Jane and Lucy become in essence their own "moral managers." In the realist dimension of Brontë's novels, wise women find the means of eluding the asylum by becoming their own keepers.

For Jane Eyre, who bluntly acknowledges that she knows "no medium" "between absolute submission and determined revolt" (XXXIV,403), lessons in moral management of the self begin early in life, for her first "determined revolt," of course, occurs during childhood, when she gives way to her passionate hatred of her oppressive guardian, Mrs. Reed. Drawing on popular precepts of psychiatric Victorianism, Brontë conveys a state of what her audience would likely recognize as a form of "moral insanity," by stressing particularly her heroine's absolute lack of will. When, for instance, Jane is banished to the nursery for allegedly attacking Master John "like a mad cat," Mrs. Reed "dares" her "to utter one syllable during the remainder of the day"; prompting in Jane a passion so omnipotent that she is entirely overcome:

> "What would my Uncle Reed say to you if he were alive?" was my scarcely voluntary demand. I say scarcely voluntary, for it seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance: something spoke out of me over which I had no control (IV,29-30).

Regarded by phrenologists as a "morbid manifestation of the organ of language," involuntary utterance was closely associated with madness in the nineteenth century; indeed, the "astonishing volubility" of a great many lunatics was thought to

> result from a special excitement of the organ of language, by which certain words are called up without the assent of the patient, and sometimes even contrary to his inclination.[41]

Similarly, left with a "raw" and "stinging" mind after her initial interview with Brocklehurst (IV,38), Jane once again indulges in an eruption of unleashed emotion, turning on Mrs. Reed "like something mad or like a fiend -- no child ever spoke or looked as she did"(XXI,223). Bursting the "invisible bond" of moral restraint, Jane experiences "the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph" as she pours forth her grievances and her anger "in a savage, high voice"(IV,39) which Mrs. Reed recalls with trepidation to her dying day (XXI,241).

Half an hour's reflection, however, serves to impress upon Jane "the madness" of her "conduct": unchecked passion, "warm and racy," intoxicates like "aromatic wine," but also leaves an unhealthy acidic "after-taste, metallic and corroding"(IV,40). From these first experiences of "moral madness," the young heroine is able to conclude: "I would

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[41] George Combe, A System of Phrenology (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1836), excerpt reprinted in Hunter and Macalpine, Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, pp. 847-848.

fain exercise some better faculty than that of fierce speak-
ing; fain find nourishment for some less fiendish feeling
than that of somber indignation" (IV,40). Accordingly, the
next time Jane's mental mettle is tested, when the abhorrent
Brocklehurst unjustly places her on a "fool's stool" for ac-
cidently breaking her slate, she does not yield to the pas-
sions of "somber indignation." Initially, she is conscious
only of painful shame; of the schoolroom's collective eyes
"directed like burning glasses against [her] scorched
skin"(VII,68). But then her anger swells ominously: "an
impulse of fury against Reed, Brocklehurst, and Co. bounded
through my pulses....I was no Helen Burns." Suddenly, how-
ever,

> A pause -- in which I began to steady the palsy of
> my nerves, and to feel that the Rubicon was
> passed; and that the trial, no longer to be
> shirked, must be firmly sustained (VII,68-69).

Through her own judicious effort, Jane exercises that "bet-
ter faculty" of emotional and moral self-discipline which
she has previously abandoned. Set on her "pedestal of infa-
my," breath stifled, throat constricted, she nevertheless
maintains "perfect possession of [her] wits" : "I mastered
the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm
stand on the stool"(VII,69-70). Jane has thus taken the
first step towards becoming her own keeper. It is an impor-
tant step, for as the various parallels between the heroine
and Bertha Mason suggest, Jane carries within her that "res-
olute, wild, free thing" which can only be caged, not fully

controlled (XXVII,320) -- that potential for a full-blown insanity of the proportions of the attic lunatic's.[42]

The fundamental medium through which Brontë signals Jane's latent capacity for madness is language. For middle-class Victorian women, whose verbal range was so severely circumscribed by notions of 'propriety' that it amounted to "almost a special language" of "bland and gelatinous" diction,[43] "sane" feminine discourse meant thoroughly sanitary discourse. Bertha Mason is insane; her language is therefore decidedly obscene: "so coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile" (XVII,308) that it shocks even the libertine Rochester, who confesses abashedly, "no professed harlot ever had a fouler vocabulary than she" (XVII,310). According to Showalter, in fact, profane speech and gestures signified "the major, almost defining symptom of insanity in women," which leads her to speculate:

> Victorian madwomen were not easily silenced, and
> one often has the impression that their talkative-
> ness, violations of the conventions of feminine
> speech, and insistence on self- expression was the
> kind of behaviour that had led to their being la-
> belled 'mad' to begin with.[44]

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[42] Sandra Gilbert has perceptively pointed out the various parallels between Jane and Bertha, although she perhaps goes too far in her claim that the madwoman is Jane's "double" in all respects. Cf. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp.359-362.

[43] Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 25-26.

[44] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 74, p. 81.

Jane's periodic outbursts are certainly not as blatantly profane as Bertha's, but her words, as St.John Rivers notes with consternation, can be "violent" and "unfeminine": "They betray an unfortunate state of mind: they merit severe reproof" (XXXV,415).

To an extent, Rivers is right; Jane is adept at using language violently, as a sort of weapon. On a comparatively benign level, this skill manifests itself as a means of erotic touch; a "needle of repartee" (XXIV,275) with which Jane gingerly pricks and pokes Rochester during the playful banter of courtship. But as her betrothed observes, in an image which explicitly evokes Bertha's attack on her brother, Jane's "needle of repartee" can be quickly transformed into the more fatal "stick of the penknife" in the jugular vein (XIV,134). And as Lucy Snowe recognizes in Villette, "there are words....like knives, whose deep-inflicted lacerations never heal -- cutting injuries and insults of serrated and poison-dripping edge" (XXII,236). Indeed, Mrs. Reed never does quite recover from the tongue-lashing she receives from the young Jane; on her deathbed, those words still resonate in her ears, venomous and forceful, much as Rochester's ears are perpetually assaulted by the "curses" and "demon-hate" of the shrieking lunatic (XXVII,310).

Paradoxically enough, Jane's dexterous capacity for drawing blood with verbal daggers is revealed especially when

she is being absolutely blunt; a fact attested to by St.John's "white -- quite white" face and lips when Jane tells him point-blank: "If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now" (XXXV,415). In her characteristic rejection of euphemism and circumlocution, Jane passes beyond, as she states, "the outworks of conventional reserve," even though by doing so she frequently appalls those who cannot imagine "that a woman would dare speak so"(XXXII,377).

Just as Bertha's lewd and loud "oral oddities" (XII,113) provide a comparative standard against which the reader may gauge the heroine's own propensity to 'distempered states of mind,' so too does her history of nymphomaniac excess function as "a touchstone of sexual madness against which Jane is forced to test her own sanity."[45] For in Jane Eyre, sexual desire is identified not only as a foremost predisposing cause of "moral madness," but as the fundamental basis for its very possibility. Thus, while Showalter has observed that "Bertha suffers from the 'moral insanity' associated with women's sexual desires,"[46] she overlooks the important fact that it is a mental derangement of precisely this nature which Jane herself fears and consciously attempts to avoid.

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[45] Maynard, Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality, p. 108.

[46] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 67.

At Thornfield as at Lowood, therefore, Jane continues to monitor her potential for passionate excess, but now a young woman, it is specifically her sexual temperament which she must attempt to check. She first becomes aware of the extent of her attraction to Rochester with the arrival of Blanche Ingram, whose haughty beauty and superior social status effectively serve to shatter all the romantic "hopes, wishes, and sentiments" which Jane has been silently fostering with regard to her "master." Shocked into the recognition that she has "rejected the real and rabidly devoured the ideal," she actually arraigns her 'sanity' before a mental tribunal; objectively assessing the "general state of mind" in which she has "indulged for nearly a fortnight past" (XVI,162). Jane immediately finds herself guilty of several counts of folly, vanity, and aggravated idiocy, but more importantly, of a form of "moral insanity" as well. Hence her self-counsel: "It is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it (XVI,163). As a means of both penance and therapy, she sketches two portraits, one of the lovely Blanche and one of her own plain visage; sets them side by side, and announces with satisfaction: "the contrast was as great as self-control could desire." "Ere long, I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit" (XVI,164). By resolutely keeping her

"head and hands employed" in a strong effort to maintain "decent calm," Jane follows the best moral method of therapeutic labor; an integral component of all Victorian 'moral treatment' programs.[47]

Obviously, however, the ultimate test in moral management of the self comes with Jane's decision to leave Rochester once his legal marriage to Bertha is discovered. That Bertha begins to function, at this point, as a relative index of "moral insanity" which enables the heroine to evaluate the danger of her own situation, is suggested by the fact that Rochester's detailed narrative of his extraordinary marital experiences with Bertha has no visible effect on Jane -- until, that is, the moment at which he mentions that his wife's passionate "excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (XXVII,309). Directly after these words leave his lips, Rochester interrupts himself for the first time: " -- Jane, you don't like my narrative; you look almost sick -- shall I defer the rest to another day?" Jane requests that he continue and Rochester resumes.

There is only one other point, during this scene, at which Jane's face registers emotion so that Rochester again interrupts himself. This occurs after he has told her of his string of past mistresses: "But Jane, I see by your face you are not forming a very favourable opinion of me

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[47] Cf. for example, Digby, Madness, Morality, and Medicine, pp. 42-49; and Showalter, The Female Malady, pp. 81-84.

just now. You think me an unfeeling, loose-principled rake: don't you" (XXVII,314). Rochester's interpretation, though, is perhaps only partially correct. For like Bertha's past, the histories of Rochester's mistresses indicate not only sexual immorality but shades of mental disorder as well. Jane's mental monitor is likely sounding the alarm loudly all the while Rochester reveals Clara to have been a "quiet; but heavy, mindless, unimpressible" being much like the cretin of Villette, and Giancinta an "unprincipled and violent" embryonic version of Bertha. And it has already been disclosed, at this point in the novel, that Celine Varens was a flighty nymphomaniac and 'unnatural' mother who abandoned her child (XV,147-148). It is significant that at this moment Jane silently vows never "so far to forget [herself]" as to allow her desire for Rochester precedence over moral considerations, and she impresses upon her heart the collective history of "these poor girls" to serve her "as an aid in the time of trial"(XXVII,314).

"Sin," as Charlotte Brontë herself once put it, "is itself a species of insanity,"[48] and when the heroine of Jane Eyre actually makes her momentous decision to leave Rochester, she is dually concerned with both her spiritual and mental well-being:

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[48] Charlotte Brontë, letter to W.S. Williams, 4 January 1848, in Wise and Symington, eds., The Brontë's, Vol. 2, p. 174.

> I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad -- as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth -- so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane -- quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot (XXVII,319).

And there she plants her foot, just as at Lowood she mastered the rising hysteria, lifted her head, and took a firm stand on the stool. By viewing the ethical position which Jane assumes as a decision based as much on the sanity of the mind as the sanctity of the soul, the criticism of the novel which Barbara Hardy offers -- that there exists a "gap" between "internally established and dramatized morality" -- is considerably weakened; for far from being "unconvincing," as she contends, the scene is entirely congruent with the pattern of moral management which Brontë has established.[49]

Thus far throughout the novel, then, "sense would resist delirium; judgement would warn passion" (XV,155). But at Marsh End, the pendulum of Jane's personality of extremes is in danger of swinging too far in the opposite direction: to

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[49] Barbara Hardy, The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel (University of London: Athlone Press, 1964), p. 65, p. 68.

a complete negation of the passions of the mind and body. With St.John Rivers, she falls "under a freezing spell" (XXXIV,400), and is tempted to give in to his repeated marriage proposals; "to cease struggling with him," and simply "rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose [her] own"(XXXV,421). But at the same time, she is aware that "to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment" rather than of "principle," because, quite simply, she does not love him as a husband (XXXV,421). Even if she could "endure" all the "forms of love" which St.John would no doubt "scrupulously observe" after his own mechanical fashion, Jane foresees that her "spirit" would be "quite absent" from any such union (XXXIV,407). "Such a martyrdom would be monstrous," she concludes, for in attempting to repress her physical aversion to Rivers, and her continuing desire for Rochester, she will also sacrifice her mental and spiritual well-being.

Ultimately, Brontë's heroine insists on a relationship which will fulfill both mind and body; like the missionary's God, she simply will not rest content with "half an oblation" or a "divided allegiance: it must be entire" (XXXIV,409). Jane's marriage to Rochester at the end of the novel represents, though, a temperate medium between the preceding proposals of excess passion and utter dispassion; the extremes of fire and ice finally coming together in a warm admixture of subdued and mature love. Brontë thus pro-

vides Jane with all the requirements for a happy enjoyment of "mens sana in copore sano": for her judicious moral management of the mind and the body, she is rewarded with the attainment of that elusive niche of "perfect concord" (XXXVIII,454).

If the art of self-government is necessary to preserve the heroine from the brink of "moral insanity" in Jane Eyre, then in Villette, Brontë approaches the problem from the opposite angle. For Lucy Snowe is a tyrant of ruthless repression, unwilling to allow for the expression of almost any emotional or sexual passion, and this leads to various mental afflictions in itself. Unlike Jane, Lucy must progressively unlearn that censorship of self which reduces her to a transparent presence "as inoffensive as a shadow" (XXVII,304).

Of all the assessments of Lucy's personality by characters in the novel, M. Paul's is perhaps the most radically incorrect, for he perceives her as a fiery and potentially profligate being who requires constant paternal surveillance and "much checking, regulating, and keeping down" (XXXI,348). As John Maynard notes, M. Paul tends to regard Lucy as a sort of "amateur....version of the full Vashti passion."[50] But indeed, while the great actress Vashti is marked by her liberal abandonment to emotion; transforming

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[50] John Maynard, Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality, p. 196.

herself through passion into "Hate, Murder, and Madness incarnate" (XXIII,247), Lucy Snowe is entirely capable of "checking" any desires and passions; in fact, she seems to derive a measure of masochistic pleasure from doing so. At one point, for example, beginning to "long achingly" for something to "fetch" her out of her dreary "present existence" and "lead [her] upwards and onwards," Lucy suddenly invokes her psychic censor, who in this instance is depicted as "Jael, the stern woman," from Judges 4:7-22.

> This longing and all of a similar kind, it was
> necessary to knock on the head; which I did, fig-
> uratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera,
> driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sis-
> era, they did not die: they were but transiently
> stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail
> with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples
> bleed, and the brain thrill to its core (XII,103).

In another instance, she "thrill[s] in the certainty" that she is one of the number elected by God "to deeply suffer while they live" (XV,149). Unsurprisingly enough, Lucy's perverse acceptance of pain and suffering, and her instinctive urge to stun and kill all passion or animating thought, results in a physical condition of resigned passivity, and a psychological state of abject lethargy.

The heroine's self-willed mental and physical paralysis is attested to by her numerous claims that "self-reliance and exertion" have always been "forced" upon her by "circumstance" (IV,32). Pathetically, she confesses that she would have willingly "crawled on" with the crippled invalid, Miss

Marchmont, "for twenty years longer," had not fate unluckily intervened by suddenly terminating Miss Marchmont's life, and with it, Lucy's temporary livelihood: "It seemed I must be stimulated into action, I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy" (IV,34). Passive, cold, and often silent, Lucy Snowe "studiously" holds the "quick" of her nature "in catalepsy and a dead trance"(XII,102): "A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion," she reflects morosely, "why not I with the rest?" (IV,31). As Karen Chase has pointed out, Lucy's utter lack of motivation threatens not only her own well-being, but the entire structure of the plot with "narrative ataraxy" as well.[51]

Permeated with such a joyless and resigned attitude, it is inevitable that Lucy's mind should eventually fall prey to severe depression, and this occurs when she is left alone in charge of Marie Broc, the cretin, during the long school vacation. Just as in the case of her experience with Miss Marchmont, the afflictions of the cretin act as additional ballast on a mind already dangerously weighed down. Lucy finds that she can neither eat nor sleep, and she confesses sadly: "My heart almost died within me" (XV,148). Although Elaine Showalter maintains that the cretin is an "external-ized representation" of the "hungering, restless, untamed

[51] Karen Chase, Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Per-sonality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot (New York; London: Methuen, 1984), p.68.

part of the self that Lucy has tried unsuccessfully to cage and starve,"[52] Brontë actually emphasizes that Marie Broc is a lethargic and mute "heavy charge," who sits about "for hours" "moping and mowing and distorting her features" (XV,149); suggesting rather that she is intended to serve as an inert reflection of a heroine who has been so successful in "caging" and "starving" her desires that she has become apathetically suicidal:

> Even to look forward was not to hope: the dumb fu-
> ture spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no
> inducement to bear present evil in reliance on fu-
> ture good. A sorrowful indifference to existence
> often pressed on me -- a despairing resignation to
> reach betimes the end of all things earthly
> (XV,148).

Lucy's apparent desire to surrender to the currents of her mental malady, her aimless drifting through life with only vague hopes of death, is clearly conveyed by the numerous images of shipwreck which she evokes -- a recurrent image of drowning at sea which Virginia Woolf, in Mrs. Dalloway, will also consistently associate with mental disturbance and illness. And the sustained length of this oppressive, pathological mood indicates the serious extent of Lucy's depression. It is an enduring impulse to self-destruction which is in pointed contrast, for example, to Rochester's fleeting urge to shoot himself over his catastrophic marriage to Bertha, which comes as a dramatic flash of madness: "I only entertained the intention for a moment; for, not being in-

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[52] Showalter, The Female Malady, p.71.

sane, the crisis of exquisite and unalloyed despair which had originated the wish and design of self- destruction, was past in a second" (XXVII,310).

And as Lucy's mind is afflicted, so her body cannot remain unaffected either: "At last a day and night of peculiarly agonizing depression were succeeded by physical illness" (XV,151). Lucy takes to her bed "perforce" and lies in a feverish delirium. A dazed trek through the streets of Villette and a desperate confession to a Roman Catholic priest ensue before she wanders back out into the night and falls unconscious on the steps of a "great building." From this perilous situation she is fortunately rescued by Dr. John Bretton, who carries her to his home. Significantly, Lucy later explains her bizarre confessional behaviour to him in terms of a psychic "aneurism"; a build up of mental pressure so concentrated that it "would make its way, rush out" through any "abnormal channel" "or kill me" (XVII,176). The good doctor promptly diagnoses Lucy's problem as a psychosomatic disorder of the "nervous system," "which," as he concludes, "disables me from helping you by pill or potion":

> Medicine can give nobody good spirits. My art halts at the threshold of Hypochondria: she just looks in and sees a chamber of torture, but can neither say nor do much. Cheerful society would be of use; you should be as little alone as possible; you should take plenty of exercise (XVII,175).

It is important to note that in its nineteenth-century context, "hypochondria" did not denote, as it does today, an

exaggerated propensity to imaginary illnesses. Rather, it signified "a chronic disease of the whole person"; a legitimate constitutional disorder of the mind and the body.[53]

According to Bruce Haley, most cases of hypochondria were regarded as "moral illnesses,"[54] which is, after all, the essential thrust of Dr. John's cursory clinical advice: through the volition of her own will, Lucy must "cure" herself. It is in this sense, then, that the concept of "moral management" becomes relevant in Villette ; not as a means of restraint to check passionate excess, but as a form of conscious mental and physical exertion: exercise to strengthen the heroine's atrophied will.

Initially, Dr. John attempts to launch his patient's process of recovery by entering into correspondence with her, but this step has drastic consequences; resulting in what Lucy only half-jokingly refers to as a "grovelling, groping monomania" (XXII,236). A parallel to Brontë's own experience during her desperate correspondence with her former teacher in Brussels, M. Heger, Lucy's ailment is a "one idea'd nature" which she has ever held to be "the most unfortunate with which man or woman can be cursed" (II,10) -- a sentiment with which Austen's Dashwood sisters, and perhaps even Emma, would likely concur. A single lifeline cast

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[53] Haley, The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture, p. 28.

[54] Haley, The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture, p. 30.

to Lucy, the doctor's letters become her only source of psychological sustenance; "nourishing and salubrious meat" (XXI,229) for an emotionally and sexually starved woman.[55]

After witnessing her hysterical agitation over temporarily misplacing one of his letters, Dr. John becomes concerned and underscores more emphatically the onus of the individual in combatting "long-continued mental conflict" (XXII,239): "Happiness is the cure -- a cheerful mind the preventative: cultivate both" (XXII,240). Lucy's immediate reaction to this counsel is one of supreme skepticism:

> No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to _cultivate_ happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure (XXII,240).

Lucy scoffs at a word which she considers a malapropism, but Dr. John perhaps offers it in the specific context of a program of moral management of the mind; the prime component of which, in the words of one psychiatric historian, was "the cultivation of self- control."[56] Just as Jane learnt to control her excess passion, so too must Lucy learn to actively contend against her innate predisposition to melancholia by making conscious attempts at enthusiasm, stimulation, and satisfaction.

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[55] For the sexual significance of the letters, see Russell Goldfarb, _Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature_ (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1970), pp. 150-151.

[56] Skultans, _Madness and Morals_, p. 11.

And, despite her initial sardonicism, she does. It quickly becomes apparent that the doctor's words have indeed been taken to heart, for no sooner has this exchange taken place than Lucy boldly informs us, at the beginning of the next chapter: "A new creed became mine -- a belief in happiness" (XXIII,242). The heroine of Villette does not, as Robert Bledsoe attempts to argue, remain idiotically reliant on fate and completely unwilling to accept personal responsibility for herself throughout the novel.[57] Henceforth, she makes at least tentative attempts to become more assertive, vocal, and courageous; and moreover, she begins to resist her impulse to stifle sexual desires.

Lucy thus successfully 'treats' her monomania by confronting the fact of Dr. John's romantic disinterest in her, and ceremoniously burying her letters from him -- and her grief with them. She makes an effort to lead a less cloistered life, especially after the arrival of Paulina de Bassompierre: "From this date," as she asserts, "my life did not want variety; I went out a good deal" (XXVI,280). Similarly, when she encounters the 'nun' for the second time, she actually attempts to carry out the doctor's former instructions to "give her a shake of the hand, if she comes again" (XXII,241). She thus neither flees nor shrieks but

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[57] Robert Bledsoe, "Snow Beneath Snowe: A Reconsideration of the Virgin of Villette," in Gender and Literary Voice, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), p. 214.

instead reaches out her arm "to touch her" (XXVI,285). By the time of her final meeting with the 'nun,' Lucy is able to assert firmly, "my nerves disdained hysteria"; "I defied spectra." Far beyond a tentative touch this time, she unhesitatingly tackles the "haunted couch" upon which the 'nun' rests, rending 'her' apart into "shred and fragments," and trampling upon 'her' remains triumphantly (XXXIX,451). Lucy thus exhibits in the latter half of the novel a new "inward courage, warm and resistant" (XXVII,305).

She begins to manifest, as well, a new found sense of integrity and self-esteem, flatly rejecting a well-paid position as a companion to Paulina, for, as she sniffs: "I was no bright lady's shadow" (XXVI,286). She prefers instead to remain in her current capacity as a teacher in Madame Beck's school, where her relationship with that mistress of intrigue also begins to alter substantially. At first meekly complacent and even vaguely bemused by her employer's suspicious mistrust and violations of personal privacy, Lucy becomes increasingly resentful of -- and resistant to -- the diminutive woman's constant surveillance and quiet machinations. This is particularly so when Madame Beck's interference threatens to jeopardize Lucy's progressing romance with M. Paul, for it is at this point that their mutual antagonism culminates in a jealous confrontation. Madame Beck, insisting vaguely but emphatically that M. Paul "cannot" and "must not" marry, finally succeeds in stirring a potent pas-

sion of sexual possessiveness in Lucy, and she begins to lash out at the older woman: "Let me alone. Keep your hand off me, and my life, and my troubles."

> "Dog in the manger!" I said; for I knew she se-
> cretly wanted him, and had always wanted him....In
> the course of living with her....I had slowly
> learned, that, unless with an inferior, she must
> ever be a rival. She was _my_ rival, heart and soul,
> though secretly, under the smoothest bearing, and
> utterly unknown to all but her and myself
> (XXXVIII,429).

And after their explosive exchange of words, Lucy exults: "Two minutes I stood over Madame, feeling that the whole woman was in my power" (XXXVIII,429).

Brontë's heroine, then, does emerge as a much more vibrant, aggressive being than she began as. Though at Faubourg Clotilde she claims that "the secret" of her successful fulfillment, "did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances," Lucy's "relieved heart" is as much a product of her own volition as it is of fate. The three years of M. Paul's absence are "the three happiest years" of her life because, as she states, "I worked -- I worked hard" (XXXXII,472). At this plateau of her life, few things "vex," "intimidate," or "depress" her because she has adopted a more positive creed of life and striven to nurture it. "Happiness" may not indeed be a potato; but it is significant that one of the final images Brontë leaves us with is that of Lucy carefully tending to the blooming plants which

she has "cultivated" "out of love" for the absent M. Paul (XXXXII,473).

Villette, however, is a much more complex, and less optimistic novel than Jane Eyre, for in her last work, Brontë goes beyond an exploration of mental health from the perspective of psychiatric moral individualism, to probe the psychological consequences of larger socio-cultural values and defintions of 'femininity.' By encouraging women in irrationality or shaming them into silence, these nineteenth-century societal influences are seen to render the concept of "mens sana in copore sano" an especially ephemeral ideal for women. In this sense, Villette represents a profound Victorian study of what Showalter terms the "fundamental alliance" of women and madness within Western culture. As she states:

> within our dualistic systems of language and representation, [women] are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind.[58]

This is precisely the case within Brontë's text, wherein such a differentiation between 'masculine' discourses of 'reason' and Lucy's 'feminine' voice of 'unreason' is clearly evident, and revealed as a key source of the heroine's psychological anxieties.

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[58] Showalter, The Female Malady, pp. 3-4.

For unlike Jane Eyre, the heroine of <u>Villette</u> harbours an intense inferiority complex about her command of words and knowledge, and is extremely leery of "trespassing" beyond the sacrosanct linguistic and intellectual "limitations" which she feels are "proper" to her sex (XXX,337). It is true though, that to an extent, she purposely adopts a measure of "passive feminine mediocrity" (XXX,340) for pragmatic economic reasons: she has learned an important lesson from the history of a former teacher, Madame Panache; a "learned woman" with an "unlimited command" of "words and confidence" (XXX334), who so threatened M. Paul's ego and eminent status within the school that he harassed her "vindictively....till she was fairly rooted from the establishment" (XXX,335). "A woman of intellect," as M. Paul informs Lucy, "was a sort of 'lusus naturae,' a luckless accident"(XXX,340). As well as presenting an intolerable source of competition, therefore, Madame Panache also stands in M. Paul's eyes as an intellectual mutant; a cretin of womanhood.

But Lucy also fervently disclaims any such "contraband appetite for unfeminine knowledge" (XXX,337) because the cultural beliefs which held women's mental 'inferiority' to be divinely ordained and in fact 'normal' have become an ingrained conviction within her own mind. Thus, she is acutely aware of her own "woman's" "rather obscure and stammering explanation[s]" (XIX,197) and "bad grammar" in speech (XVII,177), as opposed to the "lucid intelligence" and flu-

id elegance of men such as M. Paul and Dr. John. When Lucy
and M. Paul begin a "close and serious" conversation, for
instance, it is presented almost in terms of two gender-dis-
tinct monologues of reason and unreason:

> He pleaded, he argued. I could not argue -- a
> fortunate incapacity; it needed but triumphant,
> logical opposition to effect all the director
> wished to be effected; but I could talk in my own
> way -- the way M. Paul was used to -- and of which
> he could follow the meandering and fill the hia-
> tus, and pardon the strange stammerings, strange
> to him no longer. At ease with him, I could defend
> my creed and faith in my own fashion (XXXVI,401).

The fitful, convoluted, and undisciplined nature of Lucy's
speech is illustrated even as she narrates. Interestingly,
the language of 'femininity' thus manifest in the novel cor-
responds closely to Michel Foucault's description of the
marginalized discourse of madness within Western culture:
"all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax,"
which, as he maintains, constitute a dialogic opposition to
the hegemonic discourse of reason.[59]

While Lucy Snowe disavows ability in argumentative modes
of logic and manifests a genuine belief that her mind is
weak and sluggish, there rankles in M. Paul's mind a "chron-
ic suspicion" that she is in fact covertly concealing "the
privleges of a classical education" "as monkies are said to
have the power of speech if they would but use it"
(XXX,339). His comparision of Lucy to a monkey is in itself
telling, for Brontë apparently had her finger on the pulse

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[59] Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p. x.

of the emerging field of Victorian craniology; perhaps as a result of her earlier interest in the sphere of phrenology. As Elizabeth Fee has shown, nineteenth-century craniologists attempted to "prove" differential racial and sexual psychologies and mental aptitudes; formulating elaborate calculations of the skull to show how the brains of women, along with those of negroes and children, were underdeveloped to the extent that they could be classed with lower species of life, "in the backwaters of the evolutionary tide."[60] As far as the craniologists were concerned, then, even 'normal' women represented something of a "lusus naturae."

At any rate, in his own perverse way, M. Paul compels Lucy to an examination before a small panel of "professors." It is a humiliating trial for her:

> They began with the classics. A dead blank. They
> went on to French history. I hardly knew Merovee
> from Pharamond. They tried me in various 'ologies,
> and still got only a shake of the head, and an un-
> changing "Je n'en sais rien" (XXXV,384).

Drilled in the masculine preserves of classical and scientific knowledge, Lucy responds in the only way possible for the nineteenth-century woman: with no response. But Brontë implies that psychic as well as intellectual barriers are at work here, for even when Lucy's mind begins to respond inwardly to familiar subjects, she is rendered mute: "ideas were there, but not words. I either could not or would not

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[60] Elizabeth Fee, "Nineteenth-Century Craniology: The Study of the Female Skull," Bulletin of the History of Medicine 53 (1979), p. 424.

speak" (XXXV,384).

During a scene which in itself carries the symbolic force of Charcot's theatrical display of hysterics at the Salpetriere later in the century, Lucy's temporary aphonia certainly appears as a form of psychosomatic hysterical paralysis, similar to the famous silence of Freud's patient, 'Dora,' or to the speechlessness and linguistic eccentricities of Breuer's 'Anna O.' According to Dianne Hunter's interpretation, hysterical cases such as these represent a "discourse of femininity addressed to patriarchal thought"; a discourse in which "the body signifies what social conditions make it impossible to state linguistically."[61] Her "nerves shaken" and her "humour crossed," Lucy cannot or will not frame rational, coherent answers even when she is intellectually capable of doing so, and her muteness reflects not only a fundamental estrangement from a monologue of 'reason' which is "blank," "cold," and "unsuggestive" to her (XXXV,385), but represents as well, a means of expressing her terror and disgust of the whole "show-trial" (XXXV,383) through a somatic symptom of aphonia. A hysterical voicelessness is thus Lucy's means of rebelling against an intolerable situation which she can neither endure nor escape from. But nevertheless, her sustained silence leads

[61] Dianne Hunter, "Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: The Case of Anna O.," in The (M)Other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation, eds. Shirley Nelson Crane, Clare Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 114.

one of the examiners to suspect a different sort of mental malady: "Est elle donc idiote? (XXXV,384). They might just as well indeed have interviewed a monkey.

As though to allay his own psychological insecurity, then, M. Paul succeeds in effectively displaying Lucy before the representatives of male 'rationality' as an exemplum of feminine 'unreason.' As one would expect, the episode only serves to reinforce Lucy's already heightened sense of mental and sexual inferiority. When she does come to find her "traitor tongue" again, for instance, her problems with womanly incoherence are exacerbated by the French language which seems newly foreign to her, and all her previously acquired "fluency and freedom" (IX,177) is reduced to nervous stuttering. And similarly, when she bursts into a "fit of choking tears," she thinks to herself, "had I been a man and strong, I could have challenged [the examiners] on the spot." That not being the case, however, she makes only one frustrated bid to end the questioning: "Gentlemen, you had better let me go; you will get no good of me; as you say, I am an idiot" (XXXV,384).

It is a mark of Lucy's increasing psychic stamina, however, that she perseveres despite her deep shame and anger, and even manages to "challenge" the examiners on her own womanly terms. Hence, although she is mortified by her tears -- "I would rather have been scourged," she confesses

(XXXV,384) -- she begins to overcome some of the inbred con-
tempt for her feminine weakness of emotion when she trans-
lates her abstract essay topic into a personal allegory,
distinctly female in its imagery. The upper-case authority
of her subject, "Human Justice," is thus promptly trans-
formed by her into a type of Miltonic Sin-figure: " a red,
random beldame with arms akimbo" and a "swarm of children,
sick and quarrelsome" crawling about her (XXXV,386).

It is only once Lucy stops defining herself against es-
tablished male standards of rationality, and finds the cour-
age to accept and utter a language of the 'heart' -- a lan-
guage which Brontë deems part of a valid emotional dimension
of human nature -- that her impediments to speech are fully
resolved. Thus, when at the end of the novel she passion-
ately acknowledges her love for M. Paul, words, once "brit-
tle and unmalleable, and cold as ice" (XXXXI,467), become
for her as fluid and natural as blood, "running with haste
and heat through [her] veins" (XXXXI,469). And only now
that language begins to feel organic does Lucy truly break
her silence, confessing now, not from despair and delirium,
but from desire. "I want to tell you something," she says
to M. Paul, "I want to tell you all":

> I spoke. All leaped from my lips. I lacked not
> words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale;
> it streamed on my tongue....the whole history, in
> brief, summoned to his confidence, rushed thither,
> truthful, literal, ardent, bitter (XXXXI,470).

By punctuating her heroine's long travail through a miscel-
lany of mental afflictions with Lucy's self-induced narra-
tion of her own story, Brontë not only achieves a neat,
cyclical plot, but seems to anticipate yet another develop-
ment of later Victorian psychiatry; namely, the evolution of
the "talking cure" or "cathartic method" as an essential
therapeutic strategy for the treatment of hysterics.[62] In
Mrs. Dalloway, Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith also attempts
such cathartic utterance at one point, but he is not des-
tined to be as successful in purging the painful conflicts
of the psyche as Brontë's Lucy Snowe. For Lucy, however,
the narrative scene is the proper culmination of a process
of self-treatment initiated long ago by a discussion of po-
tatoes and happiness. True, she never does attain the idyl-
lic bliss that Jane Eyre does, but the relative mental and
physical tranquility she does achieve is won against far
more adverse odds.

In her portayal of mental illness, then, Charlotte Brontë
has descended considerably from the sensational heights of
Bertha's attic. But in an ironic way, the strength of that
first gothic portrait of insanity constitutes something of a
liability, for the 'madwoman in the attic' has become in-
vested with such powerful metonymical significance that it

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[62] The "talking cure," actually 'discovered' by Bertha Pap-
penheim (Anna O.), was first discussed by Josef Breuer
and Sigmund Freud in their seminal work, Studies on Hys-
teria (1895).

tends to eclipse Brontë's serious concerns with afflictions of the mind. Ultimately, her work with Romantic prototypes of madness is good, but her realist treatment of the subject is better. For while Bertha in her attic and the ghostly nun in the garret remain identifiable 'storageroom' images, so to speak, which Brontë dusts off and mends to suit her narrative needs, it is in the realist dimension of her texts that her true powers of originality and vision are exercised.

Chapter III

Madness in Virginia Woolf's
<u>Mrs.Dalloway</u>:
Echoes of Eternal Laughter in a 'Well of Tears'

The urgent fact remains that, whether we laugh or not, the 'comic' attitude may be present in any genre of play. The best jokes are not only compatible with the most solemn intention, but are likely to be the best jokes for that reason.

As the gap narrows so that what remains incongruous is still funny, but too close to the bone to laugh at, then we move swiftly across the frontier into the realms of the tragic.

-John L. Styan, The Dark Comedy

Be cheerful; wipe thine eyes:
Some falls are means the happier to rise.
-Cymbeline, IV,iii,404-405

In the history of women's literature, Virginia Woolf may be regarded in many respects as a direct successor of Jane Austen, whom she admired very much indeed. Nevertheless, her depiction of insanity in Mrs.Dalloway (1925) is in fact more similar to that of Charlotte Brontë's in Jane Eyre and Villette in that Woolf's mad Septimus Warren Smith also represents a composite portrait drawn from an admixture of generic traditions. But whereas Brontë always contains her realist and gothic- romantic portrayals of mental illness in relatively distinct spheres, Woolf blends the conventions she draws upon in one figure, so that while Septimus Smith remains a primarily realistic madman throughout the novel, he also evinces unmistakeable overtones of the carnivalesque tragi- comic figure, the Wise Fool. Moreover, in Woolf's novel, the canivalesque concepts and images incorporated into the depiction of insanity serve a more extensive the-

matic function than do Brontë's gothic and romantic tropes of madness.

In a realist context, Woolf not only dramatizes Septimus Smith's aberrant psychology with striking verisimilitude by employing an innovative stream-of-consciousness technique, but traces with detailed accuracy, as well, the complex etiology and symptoms of his pathology. And as the character of Septimus reflects Woolf's great comprehension of the nature of both 'war neuroses' and more malignant forms of psychoses, so her delineation of the Edwardian medical establishment reflects a similarly acute critical awareness of a psychiatric age, which, though slowly making the transition to modern Freudian theories, still remained firmly rooted in Darwinian, and even mid-Victorian, convictions about the nature and treatment of mental illness. It is in her portrayal of Septimus Smith as a victim of ineffective and excessively authoritarian medical intervention that Woolf's prose reveals a barely controlled, caustic bitterness.

And yet the character of Septimus Smith, after all, represents only one half of the whole that Virginia Woolf was attempting to accomplish in Mrs.Dalloway, for as she announces in a diary entry for October 14, 1922: "I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side -- something like that."[1]

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[1] Virginia Woolf, diary entry for 14 October, 1922, in A Writer's Diary: Being Excerpts from the Diary of Virginia

And two days later, she reiterated these structural and thematic intentions: "Suppose it to be connected this way: Sanity and insanity. Mrs. D[alloway] seeing the truth. S[eptimus] S[mith] seeing the insane truth."[2] Though "something like that," to be sure, the novel published in 1925 actually embodies a far less schematic and more ambiguous binary structure than Woolf had perhaps originally intended. The fundamental reason for this is that as a purveyor of 'insane truth,' Septimus is often, as critics have noted, "sane in his insanity, lucid in his vision."[3] Indeed, "some of his visions," as Phyllis Rose points out,"express a truth or psychological reality which could be expressed in no other fashion."[4] And Woolf herself once wrote: "The insane view of life has much to be said for it -- perhaps its [sic] the sane one after all: and we, the sad sober respectable citizens really rave every moment of our lives."[5]

Woolf, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), p.52. Hereafter cited in footnotes as WD.

[2] Virginia Woolf, holograph notes, 16 October 1922, Berg Collection, quoted by Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf (1978, rpt; London and Henley: Pandora, 1986), p. 135.

[3] Suzette Henke, "Mrs Dalloway: The Communion of Saints," in New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), p. 140.

[4] Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters, p.136

[5] Virginia Woolf, letter to Emma Vaughan, 23 April 1901, in The Letters of Virginia Woolf: The Flight of the Mind, Vol. 1 (1888-1912), eds. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth , 1975), p. 42. Hereafter cited in footnotes by volume and page numbers, as Letters.

Woolf's fundamental ambivalence over the validity of 'sane' and' 'insane' truths or perspectives is primarily evident in <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u> through her depiction of Septimus Smith as a poet or prophet figure with a transcendent capacity for numinous insight; and indeed, in the midst of his messianic delusions, he is sometimes capable of almost Blakean flashes of brilliancy. This dimension of his character reflects Woolf's disconcerting tendency to romanticize or mythicize mental illness -- a tendency which evolved, perhaps, in the context of her own experiences of intermittent mental breakdowns. In any case, at the same time that the ostensibly 'insane' flows into a form of higher truth, the 'sane' world of the novel is also apt to recede into the abnormal or meaningless. This is a movement illustrated within the text by the theme of language and communication, as well as by the various characters themselves: for not only does Septimus's 'sane' doppelgänger, Clarissa Dalloway, herself share many of the anxieties and psychological characteristics of the madman; but Woolf also indicates manifest neurosis and potentially criminal pathology in other major characters such as Doris Kilman and Peter Walsh. Thus "the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side" becomes a world fraught with uncertain relativity, and from a readerly perspective, it is often difficult to judge precisely from which 'side' one is viewing the world.

In accordance with the sobering trend noted in Jane Austen's treatment of mental illness in Chapter One, Virginia Woolf once speculated that, had Austen lived longer, "Her sense of security would have been shaken. Her comedy would have suffered."[6] It is perhaps from an awareness of her own failing sense of comedy and security that Woolf was led, in her "study of insanity and suicide," to incorporate elements of the carnivalized serio-comic genre.[7] Certainly, the recurring textual reference to Shakespeare's "hybrid tragicomedy,"[8] _Cymbeline_, would appear to indicate that at least at some level, she had such a model in mind. Viewed as a tragi-comic figure, Woolf's madman represents an early modernist resurrection, as it were, of the Shakespearean Wise Fool; a dualistic carnivalesque entity especially popular during the Renaissance. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains in _The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics_, this figure united within himself the cardinal antipodes of King and Jester, as well

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[6] Virginia Woolf, "On Jane Austen," in _The Common Reader_, 1st series (1925, rpt; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1938), p. 144. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[7] According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the serio-comic literary tradition is a "profoundly" carnivalized one, whose origins, as such, may ultimately be traced to ancient literary forms of Menippean satire, Socratic dialogue, and carnival folklore. Cf. Bakhtin, _The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics_, trans. by Caryl Emerson and intro. by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 132, pp.106-109. Hereafter cited in footnotes as, _Problems_.

[8] Harley Granville-Barker, _Prefaces to Shakespeare_, Vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 502.

as 'mesalliances' of all sorts: the high and the low, the sacred and the profane, the wise and the stupid.[9] Such carnivalesque mesalliance is manifest, for example, even in Septimus Smith's ludicrously incongruent name, which is both extraordinary, yet ordinary, mystical, yet mundane. Woolf's lunatic is at once the epic poet's tragic hero and the realist novelist's Everyman.

The carnivalesque overtones evident in Woolf's serio-comic depiction of madness in Mrs.Dalloway represent a distinctive generic note, which, on the most immediate level, serves to mitigate the bitter and painful reality of Septimus's mental illness and medical treatment in a realist context. By portraying him as a partially fantastic fool who is to be gently mocked as well as pitied and admired, Woolf salvages a sense of that assured comedy which she envied in Jane Austen -- a sense of what she said her predecessor appreciated as the "eternally laughable in human nature."[10] Similarly, at a second and perhaps more remote level, the essentially positive and joyful carnivalesque images and themes which are embodied in Septimus as a Wise Fool or Tragic Clown, extend beyond his character to help buoy and balance an authorial vision of the postwar milieu which threatens to sink into a sense of existential despondency;

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    Bakhtin, Problems, pp. 123-124.

[10] Virginia Woolf,"On Jane Austen," The Common Reader, p. 135.

diluting the tears of a despairing modern world with echoes of reverberating laughter.

The realist presentation of psychological derangement in Mrs.Dalloway begins, on the most fundamental level, with the simple facts of Septimus's sex and personal history as an ex-soldier, for as Elaine Showalter has demonstrated, in the aftermath of the Great War, madness temporarily assumed a male form: alarming numbers of shell-shocked war veterans now began to replace middle-class females in the offices of nerve specialists and psychiatrists.[11] Woolf's Septimus Smith is initially a "shy, stammering," and lonely youth, "anxious to improve himself," as the narrator remarks, and thus "one of the first to volunteer" for military service.[12] "There in the trenches," he appears to cope with the horrors of industrial warfare exceptionally well: "He developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name"(77). So well does this formerly sensitive young man learn the lessons of British combat stoicism that,

> when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself on feeling very little and very reasonably(77-78).

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[11] Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 195ff.

[12] Virginia Woolf, Mrs.Dalloway (1925, rpt; London: Grafton Books, 1976), pp. 76-77. All subsequent references are taken from this edition and will hereafter be cited by page number within the text of the essay.

Indeed, it is not until he has watched the last shells explode "with indifference," has witnessed "the truce signed, [and] the dead buried," that Septimus begins to experience "sudden thunder-claps of fear" : "He could not feel"(78).

Vacillating between states of utter emotional and physical vacuity or numbness and periods of acute anxiety, Septimus represents a classic example of a victim of 'war neurosis' in the form of male hysteria. According to Showalter, this disorder resulted from soldiers' sustained repression of "fear, tension, horror, disgust, and grief," and expressed an insoluable psychic conflict between "the instinct for self-preservation and the prohibitions against deception or flight which were 'rendered impossible by ideals of duty, patriotism, and honor.'"[13] Thus, Septimus's sense of personal invincibility during combat -- his conviction that "he was bound to survive"(78) -- and his seemingly heroic indifference to exploding shells and dying comrades, may be viewed as a form of psychic defense; a desperate attempt to

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[13] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 170. Suzette Henke, in "Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith: An Analysis of 'Paraphrenia' and the Schizophrenic Use of Language," Literature and Psychology 31 (1981): 13-23, speculates that Smith's eventual schizophrenic breakdown is precipitated by his repression of homosexual desire for his officer, Evans, which is certainly plausible, given the homoerotic relationship Woolf sketches (p.77). However, in a fascinating chapter on 'Neuroses and War,' Eric J. Leed maintains that one of the "lessons" psychiatrists were taught by WWI was that, "the repression of fear could constitute a more powerful engine of neurosis than the repression of sexuality." Cf. No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 185.

evade consciousness of traumatic emotion and the sense of his own overwhelming vulnerability. After the war, this repressed psychic content appears to be converted into a hysterical symptom of emotional and physical anesthesia, for Septimus believes that, "he could not taste, he could not feel"(79). Like the "boys in uniform" whom Peter Walsh witnesses marching mechanically down the street, it is as though Septimus has been "drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse" as a result of his experience of military "discipline" (47).

The young war veteran's sporadic but keen attacks of "appalling fear," however, belie his real problem which is, as Showalter claims, precisely that he feels too much, especially for a male.[14] In truth, he is hopelessly deficient in what Virginia Woolf once described as a "universal" "screen-making habit"; a psychic mechanism which preserves sanity : "If we had not this devise for shutting people off from our sympathies we might perhaps dissolve utterly; separateness would be impossible."[15] This account of a pathological sense of the dissolution of selfhood is directly applicable to Septimus Smith, who sits alone on a park bench, attempting to explain to himself, rationally, precisely this sort of maddening sensibility of diffuse disembodiment and raw sensitivity:

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[14] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 193.

[15] Virginia Woolf, WD, p. 97.

> Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off
> the world. His body was macerated until only the
> nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil
> upon a rock....He lay very high on the back of the
> world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flow-
> ers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves
> rustled by his head (62).

A sense of individual "separateness" becomes impossible for Septimus, for he feels himself to be merely a tiny connective component of a vast organic network: "leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves [were] being connected by millions of fibres to his own body"(22). Indeed, the only type of "screen" Septimus is consistently associated with in the novel is not a protective psychic one, but rather Mrs. Filmer's ornamental room divider, around which he regularly conducts his dialogues with the dead.

Woolf thus indicates that what began directly after the war as a form of treatable neurosis has rapidly accelerated to an advanced state of psychotic disorder, for Septimus's repressed hypersensitivity is now reasserting itself to the point that it has begun to efface his sense of personal existence. It may well be, then, that the "double conscience" or "splitting of the mind into two relatively independent portions," which Breuer and Freud discovered in "rudimentary form in all hysteria,"[16] has now progressed in Septimus to the level of schizophrenia -- literally, "split-mindedness."

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[16] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, Studies on Hysteria, trans. and ed., James and Alix Stratchey (1895; rpt. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1956), p. 227.

As Suzette Henke points out, Septimus's "inability to maintain adequate boundaries" between the self and the external world -- his frightening sense of being "porous and malleable"-- is one of the more "striking" characteristics of schizophrenics.[17] And Woolf, who based some of the details of Septimus's insanity on personal experience,[18] powerfully conveys other symptoms common to schizophrenia as well; the most evident of which, perhaps, are his frequent visual and auditory hallucinations. To Septimus's deranged consciousness, the world is a terrifying one in which a dog is capable of transmogrifying into a man; in which the "agonies" of "miracles,[and] revelations," are compounded by incessant hallucinations of "falling through the sea, down, down into the flames"(127). Similarly, a bird's song is for him an important message communicated from beyond the earthly realm:

> A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death (23-24).

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[17] Henke, "Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith," _Literature and Psychology_, 31 (1981), p. 17.

[18] Cf. Quentin Bell, _Virginia Woolf: A Biography_ (London: Hogarth Press, 1972), Vol. 1, pp. 89-90. Roger Poole, _The Unknown Virginia Woolf_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), offers a rather extreme biographical reading of psychology and illness in the novels of Woolf, but points out all the pertinent connections, cf. especially pp. 138-47, 161-66, 176-97.

Septimus becomes in his insanity an oracular medium for the voices of the dead, often listening to them "with his hand up" (125), and dictating their words to his distraught wife, Rezia: "do not cut down trees; tell the Prime Minister. Universal love: the meaning of the world"(131).

As Harvena Richter notes, Septimus's schizophrenic disorder appears to be of a manic-depressive sort, for he is prone to radical vicissitudes of mood, ranging from messianic delusions of grandeur to paranoid delusions of persecution.[19] "Greatest of mankind" and "the Lord who [has] come to renew society," Septimus is yet also "the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer"(24) who envisions "faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names"(60). Past "sins" and "crimes" rise to torment him in the form of impish, phantasmagorical spirits, who shake "their fingers at him" and jeer and sneer(81). From self-apotheosis to self-prostration before the sense of his own "degradation" as a man "pocked and marked with vice" (82), Septimus is both the "happiest man in the world, and the most miserable"(75) -- an oxymoronic combination of qualities whose carnivalesque potential Woolf will come to exploit in another generic context within the novel.

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[19] Harvena Richter, _Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 88n.

As a subsequent, and more malignant phase of mental disturbance than his initial 'war neurosis,' then, Septimus's psychotic disorder represents, as Suzette Henke suggests, "a thoroughly realistic and convincing portrait of schizophrenic breakdown."[20] And the course of pathology which Woolf traces, moreover, is realistic not only in its presentation within the novel, but in its congruency with the postwar British experience. For as Eric J. Leed has shown, psychiatrists of the age quickly recognized that if shell-shock could serve the functional purpose of "provid[ing] an exit from the trenches," it could also serve to protect "the soldier from a more permanent psychoses." However, for those men who, like Septimus, successfully repressed neurotic maladies until the bloodshed ceased; for those that appeared, that is, to emerge from the trenches psychologically unscathed, the later development of anxiety neurosis or hysteria was far more likelier to constitute,

> a way-station on the road to a more fundamental
> break with reality. While the war was going on it
> appeared that the large numbers of neuroses had a
> great deal to do with the surprisingly few psycho-
> ses of combat. In peacetime, this ratio was re-
> versed ....there are numerous examples of men com-
> ing home either 'normal' or with a slight hysteria
> to end up, four years later, as schizophrenics.[21]

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[20] Henke, "Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith," _Literature and Psychology_, 31 (1981), p. 13.

[21] Leed, _No Man's Land_, pp., 189-190.

It is perhaps a rather minute point, but Woolf indicates a similar time lapse of approximately "five years," from the time of Septimus's marriage to Rezia directly after the war, to the point at which he takes his final "step into the pit" and "surrender[s]" himself to medical authorities: "now other people must help him. People must be sent for. He gave in" (80-81).

With Septimus's "surrender," Woolf's realist examination of mental pathology extends to merge with the novel's larger attempt at comprehensive social criticism.[22] It is an attempt which, nevertheless, remains for the most part concentrated in a forceful condemnation of the Edwardian medical profession. As both Roger Poole and Stephen Trombley have shown, much of the portrayal of doctors and medical practices in Mrs.Dalloway may be attributed to Woolf's own, largely frustrating, encounters with physicians.[23] And yet despite the autobiographical element of bitterness sometimes detectable in them, the medical scenes in Mrs.Dalloway may still

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[22] As Woolf stated one of her aims for Mrs.Dalloway: "I want to criticize the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense." Diary entry for 19 June 1923, in WD, p. 57.

[23] Poole, The Unknown Virginia Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1978); Stephen Trombley, All That Summer She Was Mad: Virginia Woolf, Female Victim of Male Medicine (New York: Continuum, 1981).Both studies are valuable insofar as they challenge a long tradition which has uncritically accepted Woolf's alleged 'madness' and the circumstances surrounding her illnesses. However, both authors assume concepts of modern psychology and 'phenomenology' which sometimes lead them to unfair assessments of the physicians involved.

be regarded as primarily accurate reflections of a psychiatric age in which, as Showalter states, "therapeutic practises took on a new urgency, and psychiatrists were granted unprecedented powers of domination, intervention, and control."[24] And although the "unexpected phenomenon of wholesale mental breakdown among men"[25] during and after the war had served to shatter many of the fundamental tenets of Darwinian psychiatry, and thus accelerate the acceptance of Freudian analytic practices in Britain, the tenacious Victorian interrelationship between medicine, madness, and morality continued to influence the therapeutic reality of the early decades of the twentieth century.[26]

Septimus Smith's experiences in the hands of Mrs. Filmer's hopelessly ineffectual family physician, Dr. Holmes, as well as the expensive, ostentatious Harley Street 'nerve specialist,' Sir William Bradshaw, reflect a non-analytic, authoritarian approach to the treatment of mental disorder which, in effect, was not unlike the 'moral management' of Brontë's mid-Victorian era, or the punitive medical treatment of hysterical women in the late nineteenth century.

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[24] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 190.

[25] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 169.

[26] Cf. Showalter, The Female Malady, pp. 164-190, and Leed, No Man's Land, pp. 170-180 for the moral or 'disciplinary' and analytic therapeutic practices during the period of WWI, and Trombley, All That Summer She Was Mad, for the moral therapeutic approach taken by some of Woolf's physicians.

Indeed, the diagnoses and treatments adumbrated by Holmes and Bradshaw in the novel continue to emphasize the cardinal role of individual volition in resisting insanity, and the important ethical ramifications of mental and physical incapacitation in relation to the patient's familial and public responsibilities and obligations. Thus, Dr. Holmes, greeting Septimus with his invariably disagreeable, "In a funk, eh?"(132), proceeds to remind his patient that, "health is largely a matter in our own control"(82). Accordingly, Septimus need only involve himself in "outside interests," or "take up some hobby" -- Holmes himself restores "old furniture"(82), but for Septimus he recommends the "music hall" or a "nice out-of-door game" like cricket(24). And his patient's talk of suicide is addressed by Holmes on strictly moral grounds, for, "Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife?" The "next time" Dr.Holmes plans to see his patient, he sincerely "hope[s] to find Smith out of bed and not making that charming little lady his wife anxious about him"(82).

Holmes' moral therapuetic approach is echoed by the imposing Bradshaw, who on the topic of suicide reminds Septimus: "Nobody lives for himself alone"(88). Despite his gently murmured questions and pink note pads, however, Bradshaw's method of dealing with derangement is even less subtle than that of his colleague, for he is not so much interested in stimulating the volition of the patient to exert

himself as he is in ensuring the pliancy of the patient's will to that of the physician. For Bradshaw, Septimus's threats of suicide are not only a moral but a legal issue.[27] As he brusquely informs Rezia, there is "no alternative" but to incarcerate Septimus -- in a "delightful home down in the country," of course -- for because her husband has "threatened to kill himself," his medical condition has become "a question of law"(87-88). Clearly then, Septimus's guilty sense throughout the interview, that he is a "criminal" who must "confess" to his "judge" (87-88), is not entirely a symptom of insane delusion, but is intended to convey as well the actual powerlessness of the individual mental patient within a corporate professional body endowed with a tremendous degree of autonomy from lay intervention.[28]

Bradshaw, for all his prestigious reputation and ostensible expertise (and Woolf captures wonderfully well the petty inter-professional rivalries and jealousies between the general practitioner and the Harley Street 'specialist'), does not, in one important regard, make such a radically differ-

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[27] According to Stephen Trombley, doctors incarcerated potentially suicidal patients as a measure of legal self-protection.See, All That Summer She Was Mad, p. 101.

[28] For a good history of medical professionalization and and the growth of the medical profession as an autonomous body, see M. Jeanne Peterson, The Medical Profession in Mid-Victorian London (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Andrew T.Scull, in Museums of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1979), specifically focuses upon the medical profession's steady monopolization of the mental health care sphere.

ent diagnosis of Septimus from that of his colleague. Although it is true that Bradshaw recognizes that Septimus is "very seriously ill"(86), whereas Holmes had dismissed his case as "nerve symptoms and nothing more"(82), both concur in their belief of the essentially organic etiology of his disorder: "It was a case of complete breakdown -- complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage"(85). Thus, although Septimus clearly manifests symptoms which would today likely be recognized as a form of schizophrenia, he is destined to be treated, according to the Darwinian principle of the organic origin of all mental pathology, for neurasthenia -- as, indeed, Woolf herself was.

Accordingly, Bradshaw proceeds to "invoke" Weir Mitchell's famous 'rest cure'; the standard late-nineteenth century treatment for the nervous ailments of soldiers, businessmen, and, most often, middle-class females. As Woolf has it in Mrs Dalloway, the procedure consisted mainly of,

> rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve(89).

Although the Mitchell rest cure varied in length and intensity (Mrs.Dalloway's "hours' complete rest after luncheon"(107), on doctor's orders, is in fact a mild application of the cure prescribed for her cardiac condition), Woolf's description is hardly an exaggeration of the nature of the

treatment in its most extreme or "pure" form. Besides absolute rest and isolation from family and friends, the rest cure entailed an excessive diet, chiefly of milk, which was intended to supply the "surplus fat" required to combat nervous debility, as well as "passive exercises," such as massage and electricity, necessary to prevent muscular atrophy.[29]

Woolf, who endured a relatively moderate form of the rest cure in 1904, later confided to her friend Violet Dickinson that she had, "never spent such a wretched eight months in [her] life," and accused her physician, Dr. George Savage, of being "shortsighted" and tyrannical.[30] Principally frustrated by the "eternal resting and fussing, and being told not to do this and that," Woolf revealed obliquely some months after the treatment that it had left her feeling "completely demoralised."[31] Woolf's specific focus on the rest cure in Mrs.Dalloway, however, represents far more than

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[29] Cf. Suzanne Poirier, "The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctor and Patients," Women's Studies 10 (1983), pp. 15-40, and Ellen L. Bassuk, "The Rest Cure: Repetition or Resolution of Victorian Women's Conflicts?" in The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 139-151.

[30] Virginia Woolf, letter to Violet Dickinson, 30 October 1904, in Letters, Vol. 1, p. 147.

[31] Virginia Woolf, letters to Violet Dickinson, 30 October 1904 and 5 April 1905, in Letters, Vol 1, p. 147, p. 184. Taken out of context, the entire sentence from which the latter quote is extracted, reads: "I feel completely demoralised, as though I were going through another rest cure."

a merely gratuitous allusion to a personal authorial grievance, for it is intended to carry symbolic weight as an emblem of all that is "tyrannical" in the exercise of medical authority. Significant in this regard, for example, is Bradshaw's imperative and vaguely menacing declaration to Septimus: "[You will be going to] one of _my_ homes, Mr. Warren Smith....where we will teach you to rest"(87). The Mitchell rest cure is indeed an apt form of medical treatment for Woolf to highlight, for as many feminist critics have pointed out, it was designed to encourage a process of infantile regression in the patient, while maximizing the physician's influence and authority over her recovery of 'nervous' equilibrium as well as her 'moral re-education.'[32] It is as a protest against this sort of "complete demoralisation" that the lengthy and indignant passage on Bradshaw's "goddesses" of "Conversion" and "Proportion"(89-91), which immediately ensues his "invocation" of the rest cure, may be understood -- even though it is a passage which evinces a type of passion-fired prose which Woolf critized in Charlotte Brontë's work.[33] Thus, if Elaine Showalter is correct in her assertion that the lesson taught by both hysterical women of the late-nineteenth century and shell-shocked soldiers of WWI,

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[32] Cf. Ellen Bassuk, "The Rest Cure," in _The Female Body in Western Culture_, pp. 142-144 and 146-150; and Showalter, _The Female Malady_, p. 139.

[33] Cf. Virginia Woolf, _A Room of One's Own_ (London: Hogarth Press, 1935), pp. 102-104.

was that "powerlessness could lead to pathology,"[34] then the psychiatric scene in Woolf's Mrs.Dalloway illustrates most clearly how pathology only reinforces powerlessness, for the final fact of the matter is, "that Sir William was master of his own actions, which the patient was not"(90).

Whether in the trenches or in the posh consulting room of an eminent specialist, then, the focal point of Woolf's realist depiction of mental illness remains Septimus's tragic victimization -- by his own psychic demons and by more tangible bogeys in the forms of Holmes and Bradshaw, as well as the society which sanctions their power. In a sense, therefore, the madman's hallucinatory fears of persecution by a collectively relentless "Human Nature," represented specifically by the two physicians, are not quite so delusive as they may first appear to be. In fact, Septimus's recurrent image of "Human Nature" as a "repulsive brute" with "blood-red nostrils"(82-83) actually signifies an interesting inversion of the eighteenth-century image of the madman as beast, for in Woolf's novel, it is the 'sane,' civilized, and educated doctors who are now viewed by a lunatic as atavistic creatures driven by primal and instinctual impulses. The beastial image which operates in Woolf's novel thus marks a direct reversal, not only from Charlotte Brontë's portrayal of Bertha Mason as a wild and crazed Lucia figure, but also, for example, from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's very

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[34] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 190.

dissimilar fictional protest against the 'rest cure' in "The Yellow Wallpaper" -- where the nameless protagonist also degenerates to the level of a pathetic creature who crawls round and round the attic room she has finally defaced of its maddening wallpaper.[35]

Significantly, Woolf also indicates that Septimus's sometimes virulently misanthropic perspective of the world cannot simply be discounted as a wholly insane sense of scatological disgust. For although his visions of humankind as a "breed of....lustful animals," "obscene little harp[ies]," and otherwise vice-riddled beings(80) are , to say the least, extreme, the novel does explore the latent potential in all men and women to succumb to wholly irrational and inhumane impulses and emotions. Peter Walsh is a character highly significant in this respect, but even the charming, cultivated, and petite Clarissa Dalloway acknowledges within herself a painful and trampling "brutal monster" of inexplicable, undiluted hatred for Doris Kilman(13). Indeed, Septimus's vision of the essential aggressive animality beneath the polished veneers of his fellow beings reflects Woolf's conscious intention to endow him with the capacity to "somehow see through human nature -- its hypocrisies and insincerity."[36] It is an ability to penetrate beyond the artifi-

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[35] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Yellow Wallpaper, afterword by Elaine R. Hedges (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1973).

[36] Virginia Woolf, holograph notes for Mrs.Dalloway, 22 July

cial appearances and surfaces, which for example, Septimus's "glittering and tinsely"[37] double, Clarissa Dalloway, strives her best to sustain. The authorial implication, as Barbara Hill Rigney suggests, is that 'the insane' are merely people who "grapple with monsters that 'sane' people repress."[38] The 'insane truth' thus begins to manifest itself.

Always combining within himself antithetical qualities, even in a realist context, Septimus is an extremely vulnerable target in some respects, and yet far from impotent in others. And indeed, just as he is able to gauge objectively the lower limits of human reality, evaded by those 'saner' than he, so too he is sometimes able to perceive higher truths unattainable for others. And it is the point at which Woolf endows her madman with a partially legitimate, as opposed to delusory, capacity for transcendent poetic and prophetic insight, that the depiction of insanity in Mrs.Dalloway reaches into a romanticized realm which is not unproblematical in itself. In an important respect, this dimension of the novel may be seen to stem from Woolf's per-

1923. Cited by Henke, " Mrs.Dalloway: The Communion of Saints," in New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, p. 143.

[37] Virginia Woolf, diary entry for 15 October 1923, WD, p. 61.

[38] Barbara Hill Rigney, Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 56.

petually ambivalent attitude toward her own mental break-
downs; those "curious intervals" in her life, which she both
feared and yet tended to regard as, "the most fruitful ar-
tistically":

> one becomes fertilised -- think of my madness at
> Hogarth -- and all the little illnesses -- that
> before I wrote The Lighthouse, for instance. Six
> weeks in bed now would make a masterpiece of Moths
> [later, The Waves].[39]

Besides regarding her periodic mental and physical debility
as states of creative gestation, Woolf also believed that
they "could yield spiritual dividends"[40] -- an idea tenta-
tively expressed in a letter to E.M. Forster:

> Not that I haven't picked up something from my in-
> sanities and all the rest. Indeed, I suspect
> they've done instead of religion. But this is a
> difficult point.[41]

It is indeed a "difficult point," for the conceptual links
Woolf forges between insanity and illness as potential
sources of art and forms of mystical fulfillment come very
close to the sort of "valorization" of madness which R.D.
Laing espoused during the anti-psychiatry movement of the
1960s.[42]

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[39] Virginia Woolf, diary entry for 10 September 1929, WD, p.
146.

[40] Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography, Vol. 2, p.
148.

[41] Virginia Woolf, letter to E.M. Forster, 21 January 1922,
in Letters, Vol. 2, p. 499.

[42] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 219 and ff. This aspect
of Woolf makes her work, particularly Mrs.Dalloway, espe-
cially amenable to Laingian critical approaches such as
Barbara Hill Rigney's Madness and Sexual Politics in the

In <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u>, Septimus's insanity is frequently repre-
sented as a poetic and mystical phenomenon, for he experi-
ences life metaphorically, as a series of profound revela-
tions. Some of the revelatory insights which flash upon
him, of course, are undoubtably insane, as when, for in-
stance, leaves, trees, a sparrow's song, a child's cry, and
a car horn form for Septimus's a "pattern" which, "All taken
together, meant the birth of a new religion"(22). On the
other hand, however, as an interpreter of the symbolic sig-
nificance embedded in the common world about him, Septimus's
sensibility is honed to an acute pitch unparalleled by that
of any other character. Thus, as Phyllis Rose points out,
the difficult passages which describe his perceptions of the
world are often also the occassion of the most beautiful im-
agery and prose in the novel.[43] The poetic beauty of Septi-
mus's consciousness is revealed, for instance, as he sits in
Regent's Park:

> To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was
> an exquisite joy. Up in the sky, the swallows
> swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and
> out, round and round, yet always with perfect con-
> trol as if elastics held them; and the flies ris-
> ing and falling; and the sun spotting now this

<u>Feminist Novel</u> (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,
1978). It is also extremely interesting to contrast Vir-
ginia Woolf's attitudes to illness and art to those of
her father, Leslie Stephen, who presupposed rigorous men-
tal, moral and physical fitness as the fundamental re-
quirement of the great artist. Cf. Bruce Haley, <u>The
Healthy Body and Victorian Culture</u> (Cambridge, Mass.;
London, England: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp.
46-68.

[43] Phyllis Rose, <u>Woman of Letters</u>, pp. 136-137

> leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft
> gold in pure good temper; and now again some chime
> (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on
> the grass stalks -- all of this calm and reason-
> able as it was, made out of ordinary things as it
> was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth
> now. Beauty was everywhere (63).

Septimus's hellish hallucinations, then, are offset by envi-

able states of supreme bliss in a realm of sustained Keat-

sian epiphany.

Similarly, as Rezia perceptively observes of her hus-

band's scraps of writing and doodles, while some are "sheer

nonsense," others are "very beautiful" and worth preserv-

ing(125,131).   Suzette Henke argues, however, that, as a

poet or visionary, Woolf's madman is irrevocably limited by

his 'schizophrenic' use of language: a fundamentally "aso-

cial" or "autotelic" form of discourse characterized by

highly private and idiosyncratic symbolism, metonymy, conno-

tation, and syntactical irregularities, which demarcate it

from the realm of "consensual validation."[44] In other words,

Septimus's language means little to anyone but himself.

Henke's argument is perceptive to a point, but she neglects

to observe how language reflects the ambiguous collusion of

the 'sane' and 'insane' worldviews in Mrs.Dalloway, and how

the whole novel, in fact, tests the very existence of a

realm of "consensual validation" in the first place.   For

one of the central problems in the relationship between cre-

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[44] Henke, "Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith," Literature and
Psychology, 31 (1981), pp. 15-22 passim.

ativity and madness which Woolf is probing in the text is the uncertain point at which the genius of originality becomes the unintelligibility of lunacy; and conversely, at what point the banal and trite also become meaningless. If, as Henke suggests, Septimus Smith's symbolic discourse is self-referential to the extent that it becomes devoid of significance for others, then the eminently "sensible" and unimaginative (67) Richard Dalloway, who cannot, "in so many words," bring himself to tell his wife that he loves her, and so relies instead on the conventional cliche of roses to do so for him, definitely represents the other end of the spectrum -- the extreme at which language becomes irrelevant, anyhow:

> He must be getting off, he said, getting up. But he stood for a moment as if he were about to say something; and [Clarissa] wondered what? Why? There were the roses (106).

Indeed, one of the prophetic truths that Woolf's inspired but occasionally incoherent visionary manages to mutter, is that: "Communication is health; communication is happiness"(84). And though Septimus's attempts to utter his profound messages for humanity are largely doomed to failure, Woolf also implies -- in a novel filled with scenes of bourgeois socializing and urban, commercial bustle -- that the vast majority of humanity fares little better than her schizophrenic war veteran: Lady Bruton requires the help of two men to write a letter, Clarissa Dalloway can talk

"oceans of nonsense" without saying anything (109), an old
woman's lyrical song is "absent of all human meaning" except
for what by-passers imaginatively project into it (73), and
a city crowd gapes at an aeroplane spewing ephemeral, unin-
telligible letter sequences into the sky, venturing such ab-
surd and meaningless guesses as "Blaxo" and "Kreemo"(20).
And surely Woolf is being ironic at the expense of Clarissa
Dalloway when she has her reflect on the "enormous resources
of the English language," having only just greeted some par-
ty guests with the line: "It is angelic -- it is delicious
of you to have come!"(157). The novel's concerns with human
ability to convey meaning through language, and with the
referentiality of language itself, are concerns which extend
far beyond the figure of Septimus alone, and reflect a fun-
damental authorial uncertainty about the viability of a pub-
lic and shareable reality to which words unambiguously cor-
respond. Jane Austen could afford to flirt with such
problems before swiftly reinstating an ordered, and inher-
ently meaningful world, but for Woolf such solutions were
untenable. Indeed, in a world in which mute, rose-bearing
husbands replace spoken endearments, and in which words come
apart in the sky, Septimus's uneasy suspicion that, "It
might be possible....it might be possible that the world it-
self is without meaning"(79) represents a fundamentally le-
gitimate concern.

Woolf's disclosures of the relativity of language as a barometer of sanity and the essential difficulty of all meaningful utterance, as well as her exploration of the 'truths' immanent in the 'insane view of life,' begin to indicate the extent to which her binary narrative structure coalesces in uncomfortable ambiguity. This is an aspect of the novel perhaps most overtly illustrated at the level of characterization; for while Septimus Smith certainly represents the focal point of Woolf's study of mental pathology, he does not constitute its extent. Though in less potent degree, other characters share Septimus's basic anxieties; suggesting, as Phyllis Rose asserts, that the novel gauges quantitative rather than qualitative psychic differences amongst its characters, thus confirming that sanity and insanity, rather than representing "two radically different states" are indeed "merely two points on the same continuum."[45]

Indeed, far from reflecting the dramatically contrasting view of the world one might expect from Septimus's 'sane' counterpart, Clarissa Dalloway, as James Naremore observes, "also feels that trees are like people,....also longs to communicate through a kind of universal love,....[and] also has a theory about death."[46] Her "transcendental theory"

[45] Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters, p. 136-137.

[46] James Naremore, The World Without A Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 107.

about human mortality (135), in fact, amounts very much to Septimus's disbelief in such a state, with the only difference being that Woolf's fashionable society hostess lacks the madman's absolute certitude. For Clarissa can only fervently hope that "somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there," she will survive after death,

> part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself (10).

Clarissa's imaginative image of a diffuse, disembodied consciousness after death vividly recalls Septimus's experience of the self, which, "spread like a veil," formed part of a larger organic entity (62); but in her actual daily life, too, she shares her double's sense of the unreality of individual identity: her body, "with all its capacities, seemed nothing -- nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown" (11). It requires a conscious effort on Clarissa's part to summon the vaporish, disparate "parts" of herself "together" into a "pointed dart-like, definite being" (34); an effort she usually manages to accomplish for her parties, where she feels herself, equally unreal, as "a stake driven in at the top of her stairs"(151). And if as a young woman, Clarissa has already "felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'" (135) -- a specific person, in a specific place and time -- then as

"this being Mrs.Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (11), her sense of personal identity is yet more radically undermined.

Moreover, Clarissa's fervid involvement with the social activities of daily life; habitually "fritter[ing] her time away, lunching, dining, giving these incessant parties of hers" (71), is a behaviour only motivated by a deeper and profound feeling of emotional vacuity akin to Septimus's shell-shocked numbness, for as she reflects solemnly: "There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room" (29). Afraid to confront fully the stale stagnancy of her life, Clarissa fills it with a never-ending social agenda, and her world, rather than risking insane unintelligibility, risks an almost insane triviality.[47] Her self-willed social rounds and functions represent Clarissa's attempts to screen from herself the same sense of overwhelming loneliness and fear that plague Septimus; for, while the latter frequently likens himself to "a drowned sailor on a rock"(62), the former is also dogged by the "perpetual sense.... of being out, out far out to sea and alone"(9). As less extreme counterparts to Septimus's psychotic hallucinations, Mrs.Dalloway's psychic vagaries function throughout the novel to highlight the essential similarilites between the 'sane' and the 'insane' consciousness. With only indefinite gradations of degree to define itself against the 'mad,'

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[47] Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters, p. 139.

sanity becomes a very tenuous state indeed; a truth which Clarissa, as a representative of that state, acknowledges: "She always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day"(9).

Like Mrs.Dalloway and Septimus Smith, Doris Kilman and Peter Walsh may be regarded as paired characters within the novel, for both manifest neurotic personalites who compulsively attempt to compensate for feelings of loneliness and overwhelming personal insecurity; the former through religion, the latter through romantic love. As Clarissa, who is sometimes a "far better judge of character" than her "surface" personality would seem to suggest (68), perceives, both Kilman and Walsh believe they have "solved" the "supreme mystery" (113) of life, or "the art of living" (50), through their respective forms of surrogate fulfillment, and she scoffs at their futile attempts to overcome what the novel steadily reveals to be the human condition of individual isolation: "Here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love?"(114).

For her part, Doris Kilman, despite her rather ominous name, remains a relatively "harmless neurotic."[48] A religious fanatic who is prone to substitute the sensual pleasures of eating for sexual love, Kilman ultimately endangers only her own cholesterol level. Nevertheless, she is a char-

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[48] Henke, "Mrs.Dalloway: The Communion of Saints," in New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, p. 137.

acter who seethes with "hot and painful feelings," and who nurses a formidable "grudge against the world"(111), for she is poor, unattractive, and discriminated against as a female scholar and as a German expatriate. Her attitude to the wealthy Dalloways is similar to, though less extreme than, Septimus's alternate impulses to 'universal love' and misanthropy: "she pitied and despised them from the bottom of her heart"(110). It is true, however, that her "pity" is often apt to constitute no more than a form of self- righteous indignation or jealousy. Kilman is suspiciously hostile toward the world beyond the cathedral, and contemptuous especially of the socialite, Mrs.Dalloway, with whom she engages in a possessive rivalry for the affection and loyalty of Elizabeth Dalloway, Clarissa's only child. Her aim is to make a 'protege' of Elizabeth; to turn the young woman against the middle-class lifestyle and society of her parents, and "make her hers absolutely and for ever"(117). Particularly in regard to her clinging relationship with Elizabeth, who is apparently one of the only people able to tolerate her effusive self-pity, Doris Kilman represents a portrait of a woman driven to diseased retribution: like Dickens' Miss Havisham in Great Expectations, her sick goal is to palliate her own sufferings by extracting revenge through a younger person. In Woolf's novel, however, unlike in Dickens', the twisted design of the embittered, older woman is thwarted before it results in permanent damage; for as Kilman herself

soon realizes, Elizabeth's loyalties lie ultimately with her parents: "Mrs.Dalloway had triumphed. Elizabeth had gone"(118).

Peter Walsh is altogether a more sinister figure. As Woolf once noted of his character, "there is something helpless, [and] ridiculous about him, as well as terrifying."[49] Suzette Henke points out that Walsh is "helpless" in much the same way as Mr. Ramsay in Woolf's To The Lighthouse is, for he thrives on "feminine nurturance to soothe his battered ego," and his "ideal woman," as the dream scene in Regent's Park suggests, is a "great nurse, who comforts and soothes."[50] But Walsh's "dependen[cy] on women"(140) is only partially a pathetic, infantile need for maternal reassurance and warmth, for he is also chronically -- and comically -- "susceptible" to attractive younger women. Thus, at the same time that he seeks mature women like Clarissa for a comforting pat on the knee and kiss on the cheek (43), he also feels compelled to assert his virility by pursuing younger women and thus reassuring himself that, "He was not old, or set, or dried in the least"(46).

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[49] Virginia Woolf, holograph notes for Mrs.Dalloway, 22 July 1923, cited by Henke, "Mrs.Dalloway: The Communion of Saints," in New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, p. 131.

[50] Henke, "Mrs.Dalloway: The Communion of Saints," in New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf, p. 131.

Beyond commenting on the possible phallic significance of Walsh's "extraordinary habit"(40) of continually fingering and opening his pocket knife, though, critics have generally neglected that dimension of his character which Woolf called "terrifying." But indeed, latent in Walsh is a pathology potentially more destructive than that of Septimus, for although Woolf's 'real' madman is capable of some extremely vituperative, misanthropic verbiage, his hostility, and his despair, is ultimately directed inward against the self, and eventually culminates in suicide. Peter Walsh's compulsive "need" of women, on the other hand, conceals a deeper fear and hatred of them, and in this respect, his knife embodies both a specifically Freudian relevance as a sexual symbol, as well as a more literal significance as the symbol of a hostile impulse which seeks expression through outward aggression.

This latent and potentially dangerous misogyny is most clearly illustrated when Walsh spots an "extraordinarily attractive" young woman in Trafalagar Square, and "straitening himself and stealthily fingering his pocketknife," begins to pursue her through the streets, all the while fantacizing that she is whispering his "private name....saying it with her white gloves and her shoulders"(48):

> But she's not married; she's young; quite young,
> thought Peter, the red carnation he had seen her
> wear as she came across Trafalgar Square burning
> again in his eyes and making her lips red....Was
> she, he wondered, as she moved, respectable?
> ....She moved; she crossed; he followed her. To

embarrass her was the last thing he wished. Still
if she stopped he would say 'Come and have an
ice,' he would say, and she would answer, perfect-
ly simply, 'Oh yes'(48-49).

Walsh consciously justifies "this escapade with the girl" as
merely a "diversion" which one "must allow oneself"(49),
but if it is a form of "exquisite amusement," it is also
"something more" (50), and reveals his deeply ambivalent
conception of women as seductive but dangerous "sirens" or
Loreleis, "lolloping away on the green sea waves" like "pale
faces which fishermen flounder through floods to embrace"
(52). Women are sexually alluring but fatal beings for
Walsh and his knife is potentially both an offensive and de-
fensive weapon. It is ominously offensive in that one re-
calls the red carnation which "burns" in Walsh's eyes and
makes the young woman's lips red when he later remarks of
the "delicious and apparently universal habit of paint":
"Every woman, even the most respectable, had roses blooming
under glass, [and] lips cut with a knife" (64-65). The im-
age of "lips cut with a knife" is indeed "terrifying," com-
ing as it does from a man who loves the feel of such a weap-
on in his hand, and from a man, who is, moreover, capable of
feeling "a little glow of pleasure, a sort of lust too, over
the visual impression" of "doctors [and] dead bodies"(134).

The hostile aggression subtly perceptible in Walsh, how-
ever, may be primarily veiwed as a form of defense, for
Clarissa Dalloway, likely the only woman he has ever really

loved, has wounded him terribly . Throughout the novel, his
mind reverts obsessively to the one focal point in his past
-- the moment at Bourton when "he had spoken for hours, it
seemed, with the tears running down his cheeks," and had fi-
nally proposed, only to have Clarissa, as "unyielding" as
"iron" or "flint," reject him: "it was as if she had hit
him in the face. She turned, she left him, she went
away"(58). Repudiated by Clarissa just as Doris Kilman is
forsaken by Elizabeth, Peter Walsh feels that, "It was im-
possible that he should ever suffer again as Clarissa had
made him suffer"(71). Worse yet, as the scene of their
first reunion dramatically illustrates, Clarissa still has
the power to reduce Walsh to "a whimpering, snivelling old
ass," for while he "burst[s] into tears," Clarissa sits back
calmly, "extraordinarily at her ease with him and light-
hearted" (43). Both the great anger and the great apprehen-
sion contained within Peter Walsh, then, may be viewed as
the result of a traumatic, emasculating experience at the
hands of Clarissa Dalloway, who, as Walsh gravely notes,
"had sapped something in him permanently"(141).

Essentially "despairing of human relationships" (171-172)
in the midst of a teeming metropolis, many of Woolf's char-
acters are thus driven to varying degrees of aberrant behav-
iour in their urgent attempts to mitigate a collective "emp-
tiness about the heart of life." It is an authorial vision
of human unfulfillment and suffering in a rather uncertain

and frightening world which Clarissa Dalloway is led to muse
upon privately, while gazing through a bookshop window at a
text opened to a page of Shakespeare's <u>Cymbeline</u>:

> This late age of world's experience had bred in
> them all, all men and women, a well of tears.
> Tears and sorrows, courage and endurance, a per-
> fectly upright and stoical bearing (10).

Although at least one critic regards this scene as an ironic
exposure of Clarissa Dalloway's excessively "romantic and
maudlin" sensibility[51]-- which to an extent, it undoubtably
is -- her somber observation is at least partially justified
by the genuinely tragic vision embodied in Woolf's "study"
of both 'sane' and 'insane' worlds in <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u>. The
bleak view of modern reality within the novel, however, is
offset or lightened to a significant extent by both Woolf's
portrayal of Septimus Smith as a tragi-comic figure, and by
her depiction of the 'mad scenes' as serio-comic or "seri-
ous- smiling"[52] episodes.

As a tragi-comic figure, the character and appearance of
Woolf's madman are marked by subtly contrasting elements of
the pathetic and the ludicrous. In an initial presentation
of Septimus which is noteworthy for the objective distance
posited between narrator and character, for instance, Woolf
highlights the former of these qualities, for Septimus's
profound sense of cosmic persecution manifests itself as a

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[51] Henke, "<u>Mrs.Dalloway</u>: The Communion of Saints," in <u>New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf</u>, p. 130.

[52] Bakhtin, <u>Problems</u>, p. 106n.

pitiably anxious physical demeanor from which an aura of tense unease emanates:

> Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too. The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?(15).

And yet if Septimus, with his characteristically tentative, shuffling gait, and hound-dog appearance of vulnerability and exposure, is often portrayed as pathetic, then his "queer" and "awfully odd" (25) mannerisms also embody an antithetical element of comic flamboyancy and inappropriateness. And indeed, sitting in the park alone, "in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud," and frantically scribbling his messages for the Prime Minister on the backs of envelopes (23), Septimus does present both a conspicuous and a ludicrous figure. As a tall, thin, pale, shabby, and gawkily awkward man given to "melodramatic gesture[s]" like dropping his head in his hands (81), threatening to throw himself under a cart (23), fussily dictating voices from the dead with his hand up in best orator fashion (125), or fitfully waving and yelling in wild excitement (to Rezia's mortification) that, "he knew the truth! He knew everything! (124), Woolf's madman is shown to have a flair for a dramatic style which is inescapably amusing even as it is seriously disconcerting. And it is in the sense that his behaviour blends the laughably incongruous with the grieviously distressing and touching that Septimus Smith may be

regarded as a Tragic Clown; a figure who evokes deep respon-
ses from our sense of pathos, but who gently touches our
sense of humour as well.

"Humour, after all," Virginia Woolf once stated, "is
closely bound up with a sense of the body,"[53] and the comic
element perceptible particularly in Septimus's eccentric
gesticulations and unconventional deportment points to the
fact that his transcendent role in the novel as poet-prophet
constitutes only one half of a dualistic carnivalesque para-
digm which also embodies its antithesis, for as a Wise Fool
or Tragic Clown, he unites the possibilities of high and low
within him.   Thus, as a visionary of the high truth of
"communication" as the means to health and happiness in a
world itself unhealthily and unhappily inarticulate, Septi-
mus is yet also the comic scapegoat; a fool who can be der-
ided by even the lowly servant girl whom Rezia and he dis-
cover convulsed in "fits of laughter" over one of his scraps
of profound truth (125).   In this sense, Woolf's Septimus
Smith strongly resembles a figure like Dostoevsky's 'Ridicu-
lous Man': a figure who, as Bakhtin observes, "is alone in
his knowledge of the truth and who is therefore ridiculed by
everyone else as a madman," and a figure who, as he also
notes, pervades the carnivalized Menippean genre.[54] And by

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[53] Virginia Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek," in The Common
Reader, p. 45.

[54] Bakhtin, Problems, p. 151.

the same token, Septimus is very much like one of the "maimed file of lunatics" he hallucinates being "exercised and displayed for the diversion of the populace (who laughed aloud)"; lunatics who "ambled and nodded and grinned past him....each half apolegetically, yet triumphantly" (81). "Lord of men" yet "for ever the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer" (24), defeated yet triumphant, ridiculed and shunned in his wisdom, the madman of <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u> clearly reflects both the antipodes of King and Jester. And as such a carnivalesque figure, the qualities that in a realist context constitute symptoms of a manic-depressive disorder -- Septimus's happiness and misery (75), his laughter and tears (61) or his laughter and rage (125), his alternate self-apotheosis and self-debasement throughout the novel -- all become a function of the ambivalent world of carnival "mesalliance," which, to reiterate Bakhtin's central statement: "brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid."[55]

The comic component which constitutes a major feature of Septimus's dualistic nature as a Wise Fool, however, is perhaps so easily overlooked because so much of his character is revealed through a stream-of-consciousness technique confined to his own aberrant perspectives of the external world. Because this narrative technique predominates

[55] Bakhtin, <u>Problems</u>, p. 123.

throughout <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u>, the reader is given relatively few outside views of Septimus, which as a result, inevitably tends to de-emphasize the comic realm of the body. Instead, Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique enables her to render Septimus's pathological hallucinations and visions as vividly for the reader as Septimus himself does for Rezia -- who actually looks about for a fire when her husband imagines he is falling down into flames (125). Nevertheless, there is usually a subdued undercurrent of humour detectable in the 'mad scenes' of the novel; often the result of the objective distance which Woolf is careful to establish and maintain between Septimus and the narrator, and which reflects an emotional authorial distancing which is presupposed by comic modes, and moreover, which is not evident to the same degree with regard to any other character in the novel. Thus, both Septimus's profoundly epiphanic and hellishly frightening visions are frequently but subtly undercut by direct or parenthetical narrative interjections, comments, or observations. As he sits on the park bench "fumbling for his card and pencil" and mumbling to himself about "no crime" and "love," for instance,

> a Skye Terrier snuffed his trousers and he started
> into an agony of fear. It was turning into a man!
> He could not watch it happen! It was horrible,
> terrible to see a dog become a man! At once the
> dog trotted away"(61).

In this passage, a sense of ironic incongruity stems from the juxtaposition of Septimus's extreme terror at a gro-

tesquely distorted vision on the one hand, and from what appears to be a controlling narrative perspective on the other. Thus, the cumulative exclamatory emphasis of Septimus's psychological experience is deflated by the short, factual last sentence, and the reader is never allowed to fully lose sight of the objective reality of the situation -- which is, that a specifically small and obviously disinterested dog is trotting and "snuffing" harmlessly about the park.

At other times, the same sort of carnivalesque narrative blend of the grotesque or terrible and the laughable is more overtly manifest and is a direct result of Septimus's own view of the world; as, for instance, is the case when he considers suicide:

> So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; and this killing oneself, how does one set about it, with a table knife, uglily, with floods of blood; -- by sucking a gaspipe? (83).

Septimus's abrupt swing from metaphysical considerations of messianic martyrdom to thoughts of food and sensual pleasure, his matter-of-fact deliberation of an insane act, and his humourously melodramatic yet horrid images of "floods of blood" and "sucking a gaspipe," all reflect components of the ambivalent and oxymoronic serio-comic tradition which informs his portrayal within the novel.

The most striking illustration of both Woolf's depiction
of Septimus as the carnivalesque figure of the Tragic Clown
and the serio-comic blending of tone manifest in her 'mad
scenes,' however, occurs with the actual suicide of Septi-
mus.   Significantly, as the most gruesome scene in the nov-
el, it is also the most funny; for in Mrs.Dalloway, the com-
ic element, for the most part subdued or "muffled" to the
level of what Bakhtin calls "reduced laughter," exists in
"gradations of volume"[56] which correspond in proportion to
the tragic element in any given scene: the more painful a
scene, the more Woolf "turns up," so to speak, the sound of
laughter.   Thus, at the most desperate moment of his life,
Septimus is also at his most clownish:

> Holmes was coming upstairs.   Holmes would burst
> open the door. Holmes would say, "In a funk, eh?"
> Holmes would get him. But no; not Holmes, not
> Bradshaw. Getting up rather unsteadily, hopping
> indeed from foot to foot, he considered Mrs. Fil-
> mer's nice clean bread-knife with 'Bread' carved
> on the handle. Ah, but one musn't spoil that. The
> gas fire? But it was too late now.   Holmes was
> coming. Razors he might have got, but Rezia, who
> always did that sort of thing, had packed them.
> There remained only the window, the large Blooms-
> bury lodging-house window; the tiresome, trouble-
> some, and rather melodramatic business of opening
> the window and throwing himself out.

The tragi-comic quality of this passage, with its image of
Septimus hopping about like a man treading coals, desperate-
ly seeking some less dramatic means of death, and yet still
politely considerate of Mrs. Filmer's private property, il-
lustrates the "ambivalent logic of carnival" which can com-

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[56] Bakhtin, Problems, p. 165.

bine an element of muted laughter with the serious subject
of death or suicide.[57] It is a clownish image of Septimus
which does not violate the integrity and heroic defiance
also embodied in his act, but does serve to establish a de-
gree of emotional distance between the reader and Septimus
at the most poignantly painful moment of the book:

> (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the
> very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was
> good. The sun was hot. Only human beings? Coming
> down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and
> stared at him. Holmes was at the door. 'I'll give
> it you!' he cried, and flung himself vigorously,
> violently down onto Mrs. Filmer's area railings
> (132).

The horrific violence and painfulness of the madman's death
by impalement, however, is similarily mitigated, not only by
the fact that Woolf defers a detailed description of "the
rusty spikes" flashing up from the ground until much later,
when Clarissa imagines the death (163), but also by a swift
reinstatement of what approaches the realm of farce, the mo-
ment after Septimus has executed his leap:

> 'The coward!' cried Dr. Holmes, bursting the door
> open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she un-
> derstood. Dr. Holmes and Mrs. Filmer collided
> with each other. Mrs. Filmer flapped her apron
> and made her hide her eyes in the bedroom. There
> was a great deal of running up and down stairs.
> Dr. Holmes came in -- white as a sheet, shaking
> all over, with a glass in his hand. She must be
> brave and drink something, he said (133).

Rezia, who sees and understands at a glance the motive and
meaning of her husband's suicide, is given a sedative which
the hysterically panicking Dr. Holmes and Mrs. Filmer could

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[57] Bakhtin, _Problems_, p. 168.

certainly use, but which is entirely unnecessary for her, since Septimus's sudden death fills Rezia with a sense of serenity rather than sadness: "of her memories," she calmly reflects, "most were happy" (133). As Septimus significantly states to himself just prior to his jump: "It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's" (132).

And certainly, in terms of the carnivalesque themes which inform his portrayal as a Tragic Clown or Wise Fool, the suicide of Septimus does not constitute a tragedy: for by falling downward to the earth, from the high to the low, he enacts the primary carnival ritual of decrowning the King; a ritual which embodies, as Bakhtin states, "the very core of the carnival sense of the world -- the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal."[58] In this regard, Septimus's death represents an act of kingly abdication which his previous self-apotheosis or 'crowning' as "greatest of mankind" (24) has already entailed as inevitable, for "crowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning; it is ambivalent from the very start."[59] At the same time that it is foreordained in the topsy-turvy world of carnival, however, it is also an essentially positive act which expresses "the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all author-

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[58] Bakhtin, Problems, p. 124.

[59] Bakhtin, Problems, p. 124.

ity, and all (heirarchical) position."[60] Virginia Woolf would go on to explore this concept of the eternal "pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal," in her next novel, The Waves, as well, although in that novel the theme is not informed by a specifically carnivalesque frame of reference as it is in Mrs.Dalloway.

Because, as a Wise Fool, Septimus embodies a dualistic carnival perspective which posits a "laughing aspect" to all that is tragic, the ultimate act of defeat can also be a triumphant act of defiance, and death, similarly, is not his "idea of tragedy." Death is, as he says, "their" idea of tragedy and by the indefinite pronoun Septimus refers to representatives of the status quo who do not share his sense of carnival levity and relativity: representatives like Holmes, who thinks the suicide inexplicable and can only pity "the poor young woman" who "would have the inquest to go through" (133), and the Bradshaws, for whom the madman's death serves as a tragic example of "the deferred effects of shell-shock," and altogether, "a very sad case" to talk about in properly modulated undertones at Clarissa Dalloway's party (162). This is perhaps what Septimus means by his cry, "I'll give it you!" just before his leap, for he recognizes that tragedy is "that sort of thing" which Holmes and Bradshaw "like" (132). In other words, Woolf's lunatic is aware that his suicide will furnish an occassion for al-

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[60] Bakhtin, Problems, p.124.

most everyone but Rezia (who thinks the English too "seri-
ous" anyway (80)), to indulge in that sense of unrelieved
tragedy which threatened to overcome Clarissa Dalloway at
the bookshop -- that modern sensibility of the "well of
tears" which Woolf both implies her characters are somewhat
morbidly attracted to, yet which her novel as a whole works
to legitimatize. For if on the one hand Woolf sometimes
mocks her characters' propensities or predispositions for
the dramatic and the tragic, then on the other, there is
much in Mrs.Dalloway which is indeed dramatic and tragic.
The author herself, in fact, suspected that the Edwardian
milieu was genuinely susceptible to tragic attitudes and
outlooks: reading Cervantes' very carnivalesque work, Don
Quixote, she was perturbed by the number of times she spoke
of "sadness" in relation to it, which led her to speculate:
"Is that essential to the modern view?"[61]

It is precisely Septimus's function as a tragi-comic rep-
resentative of the carnivalesque world, however, to reins-
till a measure of comic balance in Woolf's fictional micro-
cosm, and it is through Clarissa Dalloway's response to the
madman's suicide that she is able to extend the consoling
themes inherent in the carnivalesque beyond the immediate
figure of the Wise Fool to her novel as a whole. For unlike

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[61] Virginia Woolf, diary entry for 5 August 1920, in The Di-
ary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (1978; rpt.
Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1981), Vol. 2, p.
56.

its effect on almost every other character except for Rezia, Septimus's death does not plunge Clarissa Dalloway into a "well of tears," but functions conversely to rekindle in her a tiny pilot light of comic hope and optimism; "an illumination" very much like the epiphanic "match burning in a crocus" she had once felt as a young woman (30). This is despite the fact that Clarissa's first impression on hearing the news is a snobbish and selfish resentment that such a gravely unpleasant topic as suicide should intrude upon the gaiety of her social gathering: "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (162). "What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party" (163). With sudden insight, however, she swiftly perceives that rather than constituting fundamentally antithetical acts, Septimus's suicide and her party are in fact very similar; for his leap is only a far more profound parallel to her own shallow attempts to overcome the same condition of human isolation and unfulfillment:

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death (163).

In this revelatory moment, Clarissa is inducted into the carnivalesque knowledge that voluntary death does not pre-

clude an element of heroic triumph any more than death it-
self precludes the sound of celebratory laughter; for as an
"embrace," death is fraught with possibilities of new
birth[62]-- just as, indeed, the fact of Septimus's physical
death appears to precipitate a sort of psychic renewal or
rebirth in Clarissa herself. For "odd[ly], incredib[ly]; she
had never been so happy":

> Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too
> long. No pleasure could equal, she
> thought....this having done with the triumphs of
> youth, lost herself in the process of living, to
> find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose,
> as the day sank (164).

The "ashen pale" sky which Clarissa sees from her window at
this point clearly recalls the image of the "white dawn"
which she had tried to "recover" while reading the lines
from Shakespeare's Cymbeline: "Fear no more the heat o' the
sun/ Nor the furious winter's rages" (10). Like Septimus,
who with "laughing hints" from "Nature" understood the mean-
ing of Shakespeare's words and "was not afraid" (124), Clar-
issa now comes to comprehend the truth of a dualistic per-
spective in which "the pathos of shifts and changes, of
death and renewal," constitute a sphere of eternal becoming;
a sphere where "all endings are merely new beginnings."[63]

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[62] Like all other carnival concepts and images, death is a
dualistic entity which unites within it its own antithe-
sis. As such, carnivalesque images of death are always of
a state that is "pregnant" with regenerating potential.
Cf. Bakhtin, Problems, p. 126; and also Bakhtin's Rabe-
lais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington:
University of Indiana Press, 1984), p. 352.

[63] Bakhtin, Problems, p. 165.

The feeling of joyful and youthful vitality which Claris-
sa recaptures at this point in the novel suggests that Sep-
timus's death has somehow reawakened that "exquisite sense
of comedy" which Clarissa has always had, but which she has
always "needed people, always people," to "bring out" (71).
For many years she has felt this lacking in her as "an emp-
tiness about the heart of life" (29), but now, "odd[ly]" and
"incredib[ly]" happy, it is as though she has recovered the
animated spirit of her youth at Bourton, where -- very much
like Septimus at the window ledge -- she had "burst open the
French windows and plunged....into the open air," thinking,
"What a lark! What a plunge!" (5). Death, she discovers, is
not her idea of tragedy either: "The young man had killed
himself; but she did not pity him....She felt glad that he
had done it; thrown it away while they went on living"
(165).

Indeed, Clarissa does feel "somehow very much like him --
the young man who had killed himself" (165), and in one
sense, the epiphanic moments which succeed her knowledge of
Septimus's death and which unite her pyschically to him at
the end of the novel, may be seen to represent the estab-
lishment of a specifically carnivalesque type of relation-
ship between individuals; a form of special contact between
two people once "self-enclosed, disunified, [and] distanced
from one another by a noncarnivalistic, hierarchical world-

view."[64] It is a mode of contact which, as Bakhtin states, "liberat[es] one from fear" by "bringing the world maximally close to a person and bringing one person maximally close to another."[65] This is precisely the sense of close, communal interrelationship which Clarissa Dalloway attempts to retrieve through her parties, but they are of the noncarnivalistic, hierarchical realm: it is only when she is alone in a room with only the idea of the late Septimus that Clarissa drops the outer facade of the social self she always dons along with her evening gowns -- that "tissue of vanity and deceit" which Doris Kilman had wanted to "unmask" her of (113,115) -- and enjoys a genuine sense of kinship and "maximal closeness" with a young ex-soldier from a Bloomsbury rooming-house, whom she would otherwise be irrevocably separated from by socio-hierarchical barriers.

It is in death, then, that Woolf's tragi-comic prophet of "communication" ultimately succeeds in conveying to another some of the truths of his eternally relative and ambivalent realm, for the meaning of his suicidal gesture speaks from beyond the threshold of life to be renewed in Clarissa, who can now appreciate that the "laughing aspect" of the end of a tragic life is its potential for new beginnings. It is this carnivalesque theme of a sphere of eternal becoming -- inimical not only to notions of finalizing death but to "any

[64] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 123.
[65] Bakhtin, *Problems*, p. 160.

sort of conclusive conclusions"[66]-- which Woolf emphasizes at the end of her novel, for <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u> ends upon an image of critical but incomplete and ambiguous transition:

> 'I will come,' said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? What is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was (172).

It is an image of Clarissa as "she came into a room.... as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people around her"; an image Peter has visualised before, and which he conceives of as reflecting "that extraordinary gift, that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be" (69). If so, then Woolf may be indicating that the isolating barriers and hierarchical distances between individuals, suspended during Clarissa's moments of psychic unity with Septimus, have been sadly re-established.

On the other hand, one senses in this final threshold image -- for there are many throughout the novel -- the suspense and tension of a far more momentous imminent occurence, and in this regard, it may be seen to carry a specifically carnivalesque significance similar to that of the threshold scenes of windows, doors, stairs, and foyers which Bakhtin explores in Dostoevsky's work: for in the carnivalesque context, thresholds are "crisis points" of passage or becoming, where "radical change, an unexpected turn of fate takes place, where decisions are made, where the

[66] Bakhtin, <u>Problems</u>, p. 165.

forbidden line is overstepped, where one is renewed or perishes."[67] Indeed, in her early plans for the novel, Woolf intended to have Clarissa Dalloway die or commit suicide at the end of her party,[68] and there are subtle indications throughout the festive final scene that this is perhaps the case. Clarissa appears to Peter Walsh, for example, "as if she wished the whole world well, and must now, being on the very verge and rim of things, take her leave," and she herself, in her excitement, feels a "dilation of the nerves of the heart"; a "tingle and sting" which is ominous, given her cardiac condition (154). And yet conversely, of course, Peter's final sentence, "For there she was," may be, and has often been, viewed as an indisputable affirmation of existence; a reflection of Clarissa's ultimate commitment to rejoin the realm of the living from her interior dialogue with the dead. The crucial point, however, is that Woolf refuses absolute affirmation as much as she refuses absolute negation. Wholly endorsing neither the antipodes of life or death, comedy or tragedy, she insists instead, after the manner of carnival, on sustaining the notion of the eternal relativity of all things. For as Clarissa Dalloway rejoins her guests through the doorway, the end of Mrs.Dalloway, like the end of the clownishly tragic Septimus Smith, only marks a new beginning.

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[67] Bakhtin, Problems, p. 169.

[68] Cf. Rose, Woman of Letters, p. 132; and Richter, The Inward Voyage, p. 112.

At the same time, the ultimately uncommitted authorial position which Woolf assumes allows her to end a novel which has powerfully exposed the painful realities of two worlds of 'sanity' and 'insanity,' distinguishable only by uncertain degrees, on a mood which does not yet cancel all possibility -- or at least hopeful expectancy -- for a vision of "white dawn" after "this profound darkness" (164) of hollow hearts and scarred psyches. The end of <u>Mrs</u>.<u>Dalloway</u> represents in fact a remarkable achievement of tonal equilibrium in a novel which has struggled throughout to keep in perpective the "laughing aspect" of its own story. It is a conclusion which reflects a balanced and neutral artistic sensibility facilitated largely by Woolf's innovative generic admixture: for it is because of her ridiculous prophet or Wise Fool, and the carnivalesque themes he draws with him into the novel, that Woolf can avoid stifling altogether the faint but resonant sounds of laughter in her modern world of tears, sorrows, and stoic endurance.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Whether a writer conceives the exemplary figure of 'mad-
ness' to be a swooning heroine of sensibility, a ghostly
Ophelia, a battle-fatigued soldier, a tragic clown, or even
simply a distressed governess set upon a resolute program of
moral management, clearly depends upon the type of liter-
ary, socio-cultural, scientific, and autobiographical fac-
tors which have been examined. In this sense, all of the
literary representations of insanity in the novels of Aus-
ten, Brontë, and Woolf resemble the sort of optical 'prisms'
evoked by empiricist theorists of the seventeenth and eight-
eenth centuries; for even as the minds of the authors assess
and delineate the mind warped by fancy or passion, or the
mind afflicted with more debilitating forms of disorder,
they issue visions filtered or uniquely 'colored' through a
composite layer of subjective and temporal variables. For
this reason, images of mental illness are apt to vary widely
not only amongst the three writers, but also within the cor-
pora of their individual works. The collective perspectives
of mental disorder encountered in these writers thus tend to
defy attempts at neat resolution -- for indeed, as even the
noun "disorder" implies, it is in the very nature of the
thematic concept to resist logical synthesis. Multifaceted,
these visions of madness create a rather chaotic mosaic of
contrasting fabrics, uneven textures, and unstructured pat-
terns. There are, however, some fundamental and continuous
trends discernable in the images, forged by themes which all

three authors explore,   and these may be clearly traced at this point.

Perhaps the most overt of these trends is the shift, previously noted in Chapter Three, in the gender most likely to be associated with insanity. After the long line of mad and nervous females which Austen and Brontë, as well as other nineteenth-century writers like Wilkie Collins and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, invariably focus upon, Woolf's madman marks a watershed in this study.   Perhaps somewhat ironically, some feminist critics appear to regard Woolf's deflection from issues specifically related to women as rather problematic, which leads to awkward claims that although Septimus is a male, he is essentially "female in psyche" or "feminine" in his "victimization by male society."[1] Instead, however, Woolf's decision to expose and explore the wartime prevalence of male mental disorder should be positively acknowledged as a deliberate attempt to negate the sort of "cultural conflation of femininity and insanity" which Elaine Showalter demonstrates has existed in Western culture, especially from the late-eighteenth century to the present.[2] In this respect, for example, Septimus Smith's initial hysterical disorder -- the totemic "woman's" disease

[1] Barbara Hill Rigney,   Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p.122, p.42.

[2] Showalter, The Female Malady (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p.204.

of the nineteenth century -- takes on a certain feminist relevance. By clearly revealing that all forms of mental illness can prey indiscriminately upon all vulnerable human beings, regardless of sex, Mrs.Dalloway works to break down the myth of the invincibly rational male and his innately unstable and subnormal counterpart -- a myth which is implicitly propagated through Austen's almost exclusive focus on mentally weak and impressible women,[3] and which is explicitly dealt with but not wholly discounted by Brontë in Jane Eyre and Villette. In the early twentieth century, then, the sex-specific connotations of madness, prevalent throughout the Victorian era, begin to weaken; although as Showalter argues, many such stereotypes continued to persist and thrive in the climate of renewed conservatism after World War I.[4]

As well as evincing an awareness of the part which sexual roles and stereotypes play in the production and treatment of mental disease, the novels of all three authors reflect an acute sensitivity to language and modes of discourse, although the emphasis of its significance differs in each case. For words, as the primary medium through which humans represent and construct reality, are necessarily accorded a

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[3] To my knowledge, the single exception to this rule is the foppish and deluded Sir Edward in the fragment Sanditon, although Emma Woodhouse's father may arguably constitute a second.

[4] Showalter, The Female Malady, p. 196ff.

special status in relation to the study of disorders of the mind. In the work of Jane Austen, as George Levine maintains, the fundamental relevance of language lies in its public function as "the natural instrument of social relations."[5] This is precisely the dimension affected by Marianne's morbid cocoon of silence in Sense and Sensibility, for example, which foists upon Elinor the responsibility of maintaining civil conversations at the dinner table and observing polite attentions in the drawing room. And if for Austen an unhealthy silence is also an uncomfortably asocial one, then coded discourses or language with private or eccentric meanings are suspiciously subversive. Hence, Emma's predilection for secretive puns, riddles, and word games is seen as an instrumental factor in her progressive process of delusion and is decisively frowned upon by Mr.Knightley, the voice of rationality within the novel, who functions to some extent as Austen's mouthpiece.

In the novels of Charlotte Brontë and Virginia Woolf, language is endowed with a more specifically psychological significance as an audible manifestation of inner disturbance. Both authors explicitly test words as potential gauges of an individual's sanity -- with the important difference being that in Brontë, "oral oddities," violent or explosive language, broken stammering and stuttering, and

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[5] George Levine, The Realistic Imagination (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.62.

temporary aphasia do indeed denote degrees of mental unsoundness, while in Woolf, conversely, language proves an inherently unreliable indicator of lucidity: both Septimus's private symbolic lexicon and the symbols of established public discourse, like the letters of the alphabet or Richard Dalloway's roses, become alike devoid of coherence and meaning. Either fragmented like the words in the sky or stifled like Richard's message of endearment, 'sane' communication is as drastically impeded as 'insane' attempts at articulation, which fatally undercuts the function of language as "the natural instrument of social relations," and brings one, with Woolf, full circle from Austen. In this respect, language is closely allied to the ultimate collapse of Austen's empirical world in the scientifically and technologically revolutionized post-Darwinian era. For by the time of modernist writers such as Woolf, Conrad, and Joyce, the theme of human inability to communicate has become part of a larger ontological and existential insecurity, which reflects the replacement of a shareable external reality with one irrevocably locked in individual subjectivity.

Perhaps the major thematic pattern to emerge from the works under examination, however, involves the problematic relationship between madness and morality; the ethical dimension of illness explored in specific detail by all three writers. The historical association of mental and moral defect, of course, extends far beyond the period encompassed

by this study, back to the antediluvian notion of insanity as a form of divine retribution or the work of demonical spirits; but nevertheless, madness has perhaps never before or since been defined so primarily and pervasively in moralistic terms as in the nineteenth century. This is strikingly reflected in the work of Austen and Brontë, where forms of madness are apt to be explicitly linked with forms of moral delinquency: in <u>Love and Friendship</u>, Laura and Sophia are caricatured as deliberate malingerers; in <u>Jane Eyre</u>, Bertha's dementia is the price of a licentious past. And although, as the characters of Catherine Morland and Lucy Snowe suggest, both authors were sympathetically aware of circumstances influencing women's mental health which were beyond their control, they ultimately identify individual will and stringent self-discipline as the key agents in the maintenance of sanity. Thus, the mental tribulations and defects of characters such as Marianne, Emma, Jane Eyre, and even, to an extent, Lucy Snowe, are all capable of being ameliorated through regimens of moral rectitude and self-regulation of the passions and the imagination. Although both these nineteenth-century novelists opt in the end for a moderate balance of 'Reason' and 'Passion,' however, there is a subtle chord of difference discernable between their works; namely, for Brontë, the personal costs of madness emerge as a distinctly paramount concern, while for Austen, the social implications of deviant behaviour are equally pressing considerations.

Once again, it is Virginia Woolf who marks a dramatic reversal of the established pattern, for in <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u>, the optimistic Victorian notion of health as largely a matter of individual volition is flatly ridiculed, and Septimus Smith is mad but morally unblemished; the innocent scapegoat, in fact, of a society and medical profession themselves morally culpable. The question raised now is not one of the individual's "duty" to family and community, but rather one of society's responsibilities for its mentally maladjusted members. And though certainly not limited to the sphere of mental health care, it is a question which reflects the contemporary political mood; for it was during Woolf's Edwardian era that the British welfare state began to emerge as the modern product of cumulative Victorian reforms. At the same time, however, Woolf also inverts in another way the the question previously raised by Austen, for the cardinal issue in <u>Mrs.Dalloway</u> does not involve the "duties" forfeited by the mentally incapacitated person, but the more controversial one of the rights he or she should be allowed to retain -- another current subject which was being hotly debated during the early decades of the century, and which was the focus of a much-publized investigation by a Royal Commission on Lunacy and Mental Disorder which convened a year prior to the publication of Woolf's novel.[6]

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[6] Cf. Kathleen Jones, <u>A History of the Mental Health Services</u> (London; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.237ff.

Woolf's negative attitude toward the medical and social structures designed to care for the mentally ill reflects the direction which modern "revisionist" criticism has taken in the wake of the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and the early 1970s. This type of social criticism, which views the history of the modern psychiatric establishment primarily as an institution of social control, designed to function in a custodial rather than therapeutic capacity, tends, as Gerald Grob has cautioned, to undervalue the benefits derived from medical and scientific professionalization; resulting in as inaccurate a critical portrayal of mental health care history as earlier Whig readings which uncritically lauded the humanitarian reforms of the Victorian age.[7] One further, and perhaps more invidious, liability of this critical school is that by purveying the concept of mental illness exclusively as a form of disruptive behaviour, penalized by an intolerant society, it risks "endorsing madness as a desirable form of rebellion rather than seeing it as the desperate communication of the powerless"[8]-- as, indeed, Woolf's Mrs.Dalloway does to an arguable extent. Thus, although madness may be many things in literature, from the mild and amusing to the monstrous and shocking, the

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[7] Cf. Gerald N. Grob, "Rediscovering Asylums: The Unhistorical History of the Mental Hospital," in The Therapeutic Revolution, eds. Morris J. Vogel and Charles E. Rosenberg (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), pp. 135-176.

[8] Showalter, The Female Malady, p.5.

mistake of misrepresenting it actually occurs only in life; when we falsify in our own minds the realities of such a disease, and imbue it with romantic elements of vicarious excitment and heroic challenge. Ultimately, the mentally ill are not glorious rebels, and to attempt to view them as such testifies only to our own unwillingness to look at the faces of pain.

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