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Madness in Post-war American Literature
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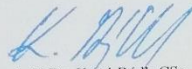
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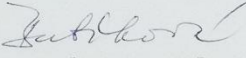
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Annotation

This diploma thesis focuses on the theme of madness in the work of Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, and Ken Kesey. The first part of the second chapter examines how the relationship between madness and society has developed over time. The second part of the second chapter concentrates on the socio-political context of post-war America. Subsequently, the theme of madness is analysed in three selected novels.

Key words

Post-war America, literature, madness, insanity, society

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá tématem šílenství v díle Josepha Hellera, Kurta Vonneguta a Kena Keseyho. První část druhé kapitoly zkoumá, jak se postupem času vyvíjel vztah mezi šílenstvím a společností. Druhá část druhé kapitoly se zaměřuje na socio-politický kontext poválečné Ameriky. Následující kapitoly jsou věnovány samotné analýze vybraných děl.

Klíčová slova

Poválečná Amerika, literatura, šílenství, bláznovství, společnost

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0 INTRODUCTION

Even though a great lot of novels and scientific studies have already been written about madness, it still remains, according to Paul Crawford et al., “a diverse and enigmatic entity or experience, defying efforts to comprehensively and adequately comprehend, categorise and manage.”¹ In literature, they write, madness can either be depicted as a state of “absolute terror, leading to horrific psychological events and potentially self-/other-destructive behaviours” or as a source of “insights that are otherwise unavailable.”² Therefore, it can be argued that the word madness can have different meanings for different people in different contexts. For instance, from the viewpoint of psychiatry, madness or insanity is normally associated “with distress and disability”³ or refers to “particular serious mental illnesses or disorders,”⁴ such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. However, it can also be perceived as a “social construction or myth.”⁵ In other words, if the values or certain attitudes of an individual are not in accordance with the social standard designed by the dominant group in a particular society, his or her deviating patterns of thinking and behaviour might be viewed by the rest of the society as strange or bizarre and such an individual may be considered by others to be mad, although one might be perfectly sane in terms of mental health. In this manner, it can be argued that, in the individual’s eyes (and in the eyes of other people with a similar mindset), the society itself could be insane or perverted. Thus, as Richard P. Bentall concludes, “the line between sanity and madness must be drawn relative to the place at which we stand.”⁶ He explains that “perhaps it is possible to be, at the same time, mad when viewed from one perspective and sane when viewed from another.”⁷

This thesis aims to focus on a depiction of madness in post-war American literature, particularly in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. More precisely, it will investigate the relationship between the novels’ protagonists and society that considers them to be mad. It will also

1. Paul Crawford, Charley Baker, Ronald Carter, Brian Brown, Maurice Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction* (AIAA, 2010), 1.

2. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 39.

3. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 4.

4. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 4.

5. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 4.

6. Richard P. Bentall, *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature* (Penguin, 2004), 117.

7. Bentall, *Madness Explained*, 117.

concentrate on the discrepancy between their personal values and the standard prescribed by society. Finally, it will examine the ways in which their different mindsets and divergent patterns of conduct (that is, their madness) influence their own lives and potentially the lives of the people in their surroundings.

The first part of the second chapter of this thesis investigates how society has perceived madness throughout history and how the relationship between reason and madness has developed over time. More precisely, it aims to trace back the moment in history when madness started to be viewed as mental illness. It also deals with the relationship between the doctor and the patient and the ways in which the inmates were treated in mental hospitals in the post-war era. The conclusions are drawn principally from studies by Michel Foucault and R. D. Laing, particularly *Madness and Civilization* and *The Divided Self*. The second part of the second chapter examines the socio-political context of post-war America. For the purposes of this investigation it uses studies by Malcolm Bradbury and James T. Patterson, *The Modern American Novel* and *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* in particular. The following chapters aim to analyse the chosen novels by Heller, Vonnegut, and Kesey. Additionally, the writers' experiences that influenced their work will be investigated. The conclusions in these chapters will be drawn principally from a study by Barbara Tapa Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction: Inmates Running the Asylum*. In order to arrive at final conclusions of this thesis, it uses a study by Lester. A. Gelb, *Mental Health in a Corrupt Society*.

1 MADNESS, SOCIETY AND POST-WAR AMERICA

1.1 History of madness

Michel Foucault writes that in the past no clear dividing line was drawn between reason and madness. Even after the process of division slowly began to take place, the man of reason still communicated with the madman and vice versa; at that time, he suggests, both “reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist.”⁸ On the contrary, “modern man no longer communicates with the madman” as he views his madness in terms of disease or mental illness. More precisely, Foucault argues:

[...] on one hand, the man of reason delegates the physician to madness, thereby authorizing a relation only through the abstract universality of the disease; on the other, the man of madness communicates with society only by the intermediary of an equally abstract reason which is order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity.⁹

Indeed, before the times of its internment took over, madness was associated not with the mere disease but with multiple meanings. For instance, people considered madness to be the gate to certain hidden spheres of knowledge – “the space of the Great Secret,” to which they are lured by pure curiosity.¹⁰ Such knowledge was thought to be inaccessible and forbidden - Foucault uses the term “formidable.”¹¹ From the viewpoint of the then society, only madmen could possess such knowledge entirely, “while the man of reason and wisdom perceives only fragmentary and all the more unnerving images of it.”¹² In the 15th century “the character of the Madman, the Fool or the Simpleton”¹³ was even depicted in farces and soties as “the guardian of truth,” who “reminds each man of his truth.”¹⁴ Shortly, while at the same time madness was to a certain extent fascinating and thus provoked curiosity, it was also highly

8. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Vintage: 1 edition, 1988), 11,

https://monoskop.org/images/1/14/Foucault_Michel_Madness_and_Civilization_A_History_of_Insanity_in_the_Age_of_Reason.pdf

9. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 11.

10. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 21.

11. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 22.

12. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 22.

13. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 14.

14. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 14.

feared because people considered it to presage “both the reign of Satan and the end of the world.”¹⁵

In the Enlightenment, which is also deservedly referred to as the Age of Reason, madness began to be perceived “on the social horizon of poverty, of incapacity for work, of inability to integrate with the group.”¹⁶ Foucault further describes the period in which the society’s attitude to madness changed completely:

A sensibility was born which had drawn a line and laid a cornerstone, and which chose-only to banish. [...] Madness was thus torn from that imaginary freedom which still allowed it to flourish on the Renaissance horizon. Not so long ago, it had floundered about in broad daylight: in King Lear, in Don Quixote. But in less than a half century, it had been sequestered and, in the fortress of confinement, bound to Reason, to the rules of morality and to their monotonous nights.¹⁷

Therefore, in order to “avoid scandal”¹⁸ the society of that age incarcerated “the debauched, spendthrift fathers, prodigal sons, blasphemers, men who ‘seek to undo themselves,’ libertines.”¹⁹ It is important to mention that during the period referred to the purpose of madmen’s internment was not exactly to treat them but rather to punish and correct “a certain moral ‘abeyance.’”²⁰ However, this attitude to madness began to change with the arrival of the second half of the 18th century as a result of “the Great Fear” of “a mysterious disease that spread, it was said, from the houses of confinement and would soon threaten the cities”²¹ – a disease that was imagined to be as contagious (and as horrifying) as the notoriously known and highly dreaded leprosy. Since the first houses of confinement happened to be the former lazar houses, where lepers were originally incarcerated, it is not difficult to trace back the true nature of “the Great Fear.” It was, of course, the evoked image of leprosy itself and its contagiousness.

Thus it is in the realm of the fantastic and not within the rigor of medical thought that unreason joins illness and draws closer to it. Long before the problem of discovering to what degree the unreasonable is pathological was formulated, there had formed, in the space of confinement and by an alchemy peculiar to it, a mélange combining the dread of unreason and the old specters of disease. [...] In the inextricable mixture of

15. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 22.

16. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 64.

17. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 64.

18. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 66.

19. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 66.

20. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 59.

21. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 202.

moral and physical contagions, and by virtue of that symbolism of Impurity so familiar to the eighteenth century, very early images rose again to the surface of human memory. And it was as a result of this reactivation of images, more than by an improvement of knowledge, that unreason was eventually confronted by medical thought.²²

The first attempts to treat particular forms of madness were truly ridiculous. For instance, in the second half of the 18th century it was recommended to treat mania by inoculating a patient with scabies.²³ It was also common to plunge a maniac “several times into water ‘until he had lost his strength and forgotten his fury.’”²⁴ Similarly, in Charenton “the insane man, fastened to an armchair, was placed beneath a reservoir filled with cold water which poured directly upon his head through a large pipe.”²⁵

Even though the methods of treatment were changing throughout time, their oppressive and alienating character remained the same. In the study *The Divided Self* R. D. Laing describes modern psychiatry as “a technique of brainwashing, of inducing behaviour that is adjusted, by (preferably) non-injurious torture.”²⁶ Although the procedures may seem to be much less drastic, their impact on the inmate’s mind is equally destructive. Laing further writes:

In the best places, where straitjackets are abolished, doors are unlocked, leucotomies largely forgone, these can be replaced by more subtle lobotomies and tranquilizers that place the bars of Bedlam and the locked doors *inside* the patient.²⁷

It is important to bear in mind Foucault’s observation, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that in most cases the psychiatrist does not really communicate with the patient. One might measure or test the patient, but, at the same time, one does not make any effort to listen to his or her story²⁸ – which is, according to Laing, essential to understanding his or her “inner self” and his or her own, perhaps deviating, perception of the world. He explains:

It is just possible to have a thorough knowledge of what has been discovered about the hereditary or familial incidence of manic-depressive psychosis or schizophrenia, to have a facility in recognizing schizoid ‘ego distortion’ and schizophrenic ego defects,

22. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 206.

23. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 164.

24. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 167.

25. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 172.

26. Ronald D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Penguin Books: Revised ed. edition, 1965), 12.

27. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 12.

28. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 31.

plus the various ‘disorders’ of thought, memory, perception, etc., [...] without being able to understand one single schizophrenic. Such data are ways of *not* understanding him.²⁹

The point Laing is expressing here is that if the psychiatrist, while facing the patient, fails to penetrate through the looking glass of the disease, one also fails to “understand what he may be trying to communicate to us.”³⁰ Because the psychiatrist, in this case, is “already imposing our categories of thought on to the patient,”³¹ one can never connect with the core of the patient’s open mind, where a secret truth might be found. It is precisely this failure of society (to treat its outsiders not as human beings but as mentally ill patients) that prevents the protagonists in the novels, which are further analyzed in this thesis, from being understood.

In view of the above, it can be stated that psychiatry of post-war America lacks empathy because its attitude is grounded in total ignorance of the patient’s “inner self.” In other words, its goal is not so much the patient’s well-being but rather the mere adjustment of his or her deviating mindset to the social standard. Laing defines the process as the creation of one’s “false self” which is in artificial compliance with that standard. According to him, such an adjusted patient truly appears, at first sight, sane and possibly even happy – “we see a model child, an ideal husband, an industrious clerk.”³² However, behind “this façade”³³ of normalcy and sanity there is the true self of that person, alienated from the outside world and slowly dying in desperation.³⁴ He further claims:

The false-self system tends to become more and more dead. In some people, it is as though they have turned their lives over to a robot which has made itself (apparently) indispensable.³⁵

Therefore, as Foucault argues, “the asylum reduces differences, represses vice, eliminates irregularities. It denounces everything that opposes the essential virtues of society.”³⁶ The psychiatrist in there is “Father and Judge, Family and Law-his medical practice being for a

29. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 33.

30. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 33.

31. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 33.

32. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 99.

33. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 99.

34. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 101-104.

35. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 104.

36. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 258.

long time no more than a complement to the old rites of Order, Authority, and Punishment.”³⁷

He concludes:

Madness escaped from the arbitrary only in order to enter a kind of endless trial for which the asylum furnished simultaneously police, magistrates, and torturers; a trial whereby any transgression in life, by a virtue proper to life in the asylum, becomes a social crime, observed, condemned, and punished; a trial which has no outcome but in a perpetual recommencement in the internalized form of remorse.³⁸

This subchapter of the thesis thus looked upon madness as it had been viewed by society from the medieval ages to the post-war era. More precisely, it traced back the crucial moments in history that led to its condemnation by society and its potential confinement behind the walls of asylums. In addition, it investigated the methods of the patient’s treatment in the post-war period and their oppressive character. The aim of the following subchapter is to focus on the socio-political context of post-war America.

1.2 Socio-political context of post-war America

Post-war America is described by Malcolm Bradbury as “affluent, [...] liberal yet conformist, technologically advanced, consumer mass society.”³⁹ Indeed, James. T. Patterson writes that in the early 1950s Americans possessed “such new items as the automatic car transmission, the electric clothes dryer, [...] the automatic garbage disposal unit, [...] vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, electric ranges and freezers.”⁴⁰ Moreover, people were even willing “to go into debt to pay for household gadgets, large new cars, swimming pools, air-conditioning,”⁴¹ etc. The early post-war years are also considered to be characteristic for the development of suburbia; at that time Americans began to move in masses to the suburbs in order to fulfill the so-called suburban dream.⁴² Even though it was highly promoted (some publicists depicted

37. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 272.

38. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 269.

39. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel: New Revised Edition* (Penguin Books, 1994), 167, <https://archive.org/details/modernamericanno00brad>

40. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974 (Oxford History of the United States /v X)* (Oxford University Press; Reprint edition, 1997), 57.

41. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 227.

42. Miller, Laura. “Family Togetherness and the Suburban Ideal.” *Sociological Forum* 10, No. 3 (1995): 394 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684782>.

the suburbs as “the most promising place for family to flourish”⁴³), many critics perceive the suburban exodus, besides other things, as a path to their conformity. According to Patterson, the subject matter of their worries resides in “the all-pervasive sameness, blandness, unventuresomeness, mindlessness and threat to individualism.”⁴⁴ He further claims:

Underlying many of these criticism of suburbia – and by extension of the “American character” in the 1950s – were deeper fears about the nation’s psychological health. Buzzwords and phrases exposed these fears: “alienation,” “identity crisis,” “age of anxiety,” “eclipse of community.” The “uprooted” peopled America. “Mass society” obliterated identity and “individualism.” Society was a “lonely crowd.”⁴⁵

Similarly, Bradbury argues that although the United States truly “emerged from the war as a nation of growing material affluence”⁴⁶ and established her role “as the great post-war superpower,”⁴⁷ the newly acquired position of her in the post-war world had also its dark sides. Being the first nation who had ever used atomic weapons, America plunged herself “in the deep disorders and conflicts of modern world,”⁴⁸ or, as Lupack calls it, “a nuclear age of fear, anxiety and distrust.”⁴⁹ The bare fact that Americans dropped their A-bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima was controversial. On one hand, Peterson claims, “most Americans [...] were glad that the bombs had been dropped” as it “hastened the end of the war, saving innumerable lives in the process”⁵⁰ (though the bombs killed approximately 265,000 people⁵¹). On the other hand, for the critics “it came to symbolize the gross and frightening discrepancy between human technical capacities and human wisdom, a horrible gap as formidable as the totalitarian adversary the bomb was supposed to quell.”⁵²

Furthermore, Patterson claims that “Cold War fears rose to the center of American society, politics, and foreign policy.”⁵³ In consequence of the so-called Red Scare (anti-

43. Miller. “Family Togetherness and the Suburban Ideal,” 394.

44. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 240.

45. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 241.

46. Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel*, 158.

47. Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel*, 158.

48. Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel*, 159.

49. Barbara Tapa Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction: Inmates Running the Asylum* (University Press of Florida, 1995), 8.

50. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 18.

51. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 82.

52. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 8.

53. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 120.

communist emotions incited “both by the government and by popular vigilantism” as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution⁵⁴) almost one hundred Communists were imprisoned and others were indicted. Besides that, not only Communists were victimized in the then American society; for example, homosexuals “could be fired from sensitive positions as ‘security risks’”⁵⁵ because they were thought to be “not only perverted but also a subject to blackmail.”⁵⁶ It can be argued that those patterns of thinking and conduct that were popular at that time in America resulted from the prevailing adjustment of the American society’s mindset to the idea of war. Patterson explains:

World War II had lasting effects in one other, less definable way: like most armed conflicts it toughened popular feelings. The fighting, people concluded, had been necessary. Sacrifice was noble. “Appeasers” were “soft.” Long after the war many Americans tended to glorify the “manly” virtues of toughness. Those, who were ‘soft’ ran the risk of being defined as deviant.⁵⁷

The latter is very well depicted in the novels by Heller and Vonnegut that are further dealt with in the following chapters of this thesis. In short, as Lupack concludes, “deviation from the national consensus, either in political views or personal styles, was considered by many an unpatriotic and thus near-criminal act.”⁵⁸

During the 1950s and 1960s American society became even more divided, primarily in consequence of U.S. military intervention in Korea and Vietnam. Especially the Vietnam War, which is often referred to as “the longest and ultimately the most unpopular war in United States history,”⁵⁹ happened to polarize the nation. On one hand, having resulted in “the most extensive protests in American history,”⁶⁰ it “ultimately enlarged widespread doubts about the capacity – indeed the honesty – of government leaders.” On the other hand, “millions of other Americans [...] deeply resented the fact that many of the young protestors ridiculed American institutions and avoided military service.”⁶¹ In any case, millions of people died during the conflict – its destructiveness is underlined by the fact that it was

54. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 129.

55. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 130.

56. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 130.

57. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 130.

58. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 10.

59. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 416.

60. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 313.

61. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 131.

fought, among others, by teenagers.⁶² Moreover, according to the soldiers' testimonies, it had a very negative impact on their minds and mental health. As Patterson observes, some of them "were revulsed by the slaughter [...] and suffered from serious personality disorders thereafter," while others "grew callous and cruel."⁶³ William Broyles, one of the soldiers, recalls his experience:

For years we disposed of the enemy dead like so much garbage. We stuck cigarettes in the mouths of corpses, put Playboy magazines in their hands, cut off their ears to wear around our necks. We incinerated them with napalm, atomized them with B-52 strikes, shoved them out the doors of helicopters above the South China Sea. In the process did we take down their dog-tag numbers and catalog them? Do an accounting? Forget it. All we did was count. Count bodies. Count dead human beings. . . . That was our fundamental military strategy. Body count. And the count kept going up.⁶⁴

In consideration of the aforesaid, it is understandable that post-war America is not depicted in the new American fiction "as a place of hope, opportunity, and humanity but as an arena of distorting-power plays, vast technological systems, conspiratorial structures, and apocalyptic threats to individual survival."⁶⁵

62. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 427.

63. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 430.

64. Originally published in *Newsweek* (*Newsweek*, Feb. 14, 1994, p.31), as quoted in Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 430.

65. Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel*, 199.

2 INSANITY IN CATCH-22

Joseph Heller was born on Coney Island in 1923 to Isaac Daniel Heller and Lena Heller. His parents, who emigrated from Russia to America, were Jewish. Nevertheless, Joseph Heller never got to know his father more closely (he said he knew “him by his absence”⁶⁶) as Isaac Heller died when his son was four. Tracy Daugherty writes that Joseph Heller “recalled his youth with fondness and nostalgia.”⁶⁷ When he reached nineteen, he enlisted in the American army and in 1944 he was sent to Corsica to serve “as a wing bombardier.”⁶⁸ According to Daugherty, he decided to do so not for the sake of patriotism but rather for pragmatic reasons.⁶⁹ Joseph Heller said at a literary symposium:

“I don’t think most of us knew what the war was about. [...] The day I enlisted was like going off to watch a baseball game.... I went with great good spirits, went with a few friends.... Had no idea what we were doing except that what we were going to do was more exciting, more romantic, more adventurous than what we were doing at home.”⁷⁰

Such a notion of war soon proved to be foolish. Samuel Hynes, one of the World War II pilots, wrote that at preflight school they learnt to hate “the nonflying, Attitude-talking martinets who commanded us, and the military system they represented.”⁷¹ He even referred to them as “our enemies.”⁷² Indeed, the military institution oppressed the pilots; it was manifested, besides other things, by the fact that mission limit was suddenly raised from fifty missions to seventy.⁷³ Therefore, after the Avignon mission during which “flak pierced his plane, tearing apart the gunner’s thigh,”⁷⁴ Joseph Heller realized that they were trying to kill

66. Tracy Daugherty, *Just One Catch: A Biography of Joseph Heller* (St. Martin’s Press, 2011), 510,

https://www.amazon.com/Just-One-Catch-Biography-Joseph-ebook/dp/B004VMV4T4/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

67. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 738.

68. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 20.

69. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1219-1226.

70. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1219-1226.

71. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1335-1343.

72. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1335.

73. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1738.

74. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1631.

him⁷⁵ and “wanted to go home.”⁷⁶ In consequence, just as the protagonist of his novel, Heller “told a doctor in Atlantic City he couldn’t fly anymore”⁷⁷ and thus avoided flying the rest of the required seventy missions. He himself admits that Yossarian’s “are based more on my own attitudes and experiences than anybody else’s.”⁷⁸ Heller recalled the moments that completely changed his attitude towards war:

“Our plane started to go straight down and I was pinned to the top of the cabin. [...] We went down and I thought I was dying. Then the plane straightened out and flew through flak and my earphones were pulled out. I didn’t know my headset was out. [...] For a while the rest of the crew couldn’t hear me, and when I did plug in I heard this guy the copilot hysterical on the intercom yelling, ‘The bombardier doesn’t answer. Help him! Help him! Go help the bombardier.’ And I said, ‘I’m the bombardier; I’m OK,’ and he said, ‘Go help the gunner.’”⁷⁹

It was exactly this haunting experience which inspired Heller to create the central event in his satirical novel *Catch-22*.

It has already been argued by many critics that *Catch-22* is not merely an anti-war novel, although it is set in the final months of World War II. For instance, Beverly Gross writes that “the war in Heller’s novel is a vehicle for bringing the essential bureaucratic systematization that rules so much of contemporary life to its highest pitch of lunacy.”⁸⁰ Another example of a similar attitude is Barbara Lupack’s claim that “Heller reserves his unqualified condemnation not for war itself but for the absurd and meaningless patterns of behaviour that sprang from American military-economic involvement.”⁸¹ Although *Catch-22* might seem to be, at first sight, a typical example of an anti-war novel following the same patterns often applied within the mentioned genre; for the main character experiences the misery of war while “trying to comprehend the madness of battle” and “discovers the violence and cruelty of death,”⁸² it is evidently not so as in the end the protagonist decides to desert after becoming aware of the futility and hopelessness of his situation, which differentiates him

75. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1639.

76. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1639.

77. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 1873.

78. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 4091.

79. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 20-21.

80. Beverly Gross. “‘Insanity is Contagious’”: The Mad World of “‘Catch-22.’” *The Centennial Review* 26, no. 1 (1982): 93

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23739660>

81. Lupack. *Insanity as Redemption*, 23.

82. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 23.

from the conventional war novel hero archetype, who tends to be rather patriotic and so much devoted to his country that he is willing to sacrifice his own life for it. In other words, Heller's novel does not really fit in the category of the standard World War II novel, as for example *The Young Lions* or *The Naked and the Dead*, considering the protagonist's attitude towards fighting as such; while in the novels by Shaw and Mailer he perceives it to be something meaningful as one's home country is worth fighting for and it is necessary to defeat the enemy, in *Catch-22* it is pointless because the borderline between the good side and the bad side is erased.⁸³ Joseph Heller himself said that he “was [more] interested in personal relationships to bureaucratic authority” that “in the subject of war.”⁸⁴

In view of the aforementioned, in *Catch-22* it is not Hitler or the Nazis who pose the biggest threat to the lives of the enlisted men and to humanity in general, but, on the contrary, it is the officers in their own ranks who oppress and exploit their fellow soldiers for the sake of promotion or economic profit.⁸⁵ The aim of this chapter is to examine the theme of madness in terms of its positive and negative character as depicted in *Catch-22*. First, it will look upon the institution as such and its leaders, who, by way of the power of bureaucracy and the system of absurd rules, enslave their victims in an apparently eternal state of senseless war for their own, hollow interests. Second, it will investigate how the protagonist of the book responds to the oppressive forces of the institution, focusing on the discrepancy between his perception of the world or patterns of thinking and the dominant values in a society, which considers him to be mad.

As Lupack further states, *Catch-22* provides insight into the military, which “becomes an entire society [...] as well as a microcosm for the larger American society and a symbol for all other organizations.”⁸⁶ The point Lupack makes here is that even though Heller uses the military institution as a sample of a society whose members can unquestioningly follow the standards established by the dominant group, the message conveyed in the novel applies not only to the military but also to any other potential society.

Colonel Cathcart, one of the antagonists of *Catch-22*, is presented as “a slick, successful, slipshod, unhappy man of thirty-six who lumbered when he walked and wanted to

83. Gross, ““Insanity is Contagious,”” 3.

84. Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 3407.

85. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 24-25.

86. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 24.

be a general”⁸⁷, although he seems to be aware of the meaninglessness of his apparently unattainable and desperate goal. For instance, when he informs Major Major about his promotion, he advises him “not to think it means anything, because it doesn’t.” He further states mockingly that “all it means is that you’re the new squadron commander.”⁸⁸ His bizarre awareness makes his behaviour even more absurd and it is precisely the foolishness of such conduct, which is exposed and ridiculed in *Catch-22*. When Yossarian asks Colonel Korn why Colonel Cathcart desires to become a general, he replies that “everyone teaches us to aspire to higher things. A general is higher than a colonel, and a colonel is higher than a lieutenant colonel. So we’re both aspiring.”⁸⁹ Thus, Colonel Korn reveals that Colonel Cathcart mindlessly follows certain prescribed patterns of behaviour; or, in other words, a social standard designated by the dominant group of the society, which indirectly manipulates him to strive for reaching the highest social status (which means more money, privileges, recognition, etc.) at any cost. Nevertheless, Colonel Cathcart fails to realize that even if he was successful in his effort, it would certainly not make him happy because the whole process leads rather to one’s alienation and loneliness as a result of the competitive character of such a game. Moreover, the desired success can never be guaranteed. Lester A. Gelb explains the foolishness of this capitalist belief:

Our children are taught the myth that in our economic system one has only to “work hard,” “save his money,” and “take advantage of opportunity” to be “successful.” In truth, however, such persistent belief is no different from the addiction of the ordinary gambler who is convinced that if he “plays his cards right” he’ll, sooner or later, “be a winner.”⁹⁰

Colonel Cathcart seems to be especially vulnerable to the power of such a desire created by the system and his blind effort to obtain promotion has a very negative impact on his personality and conduct as it makes him act in a ridiculous and destructive way. For example, in chapter 29 Colonel Cathcart gives an order to bomb an undefended village and, therefore, puts many lives in danger just to get “a good clean aerial photograph” of “a tight bomb pattern”⁹¹ to impress his superiors. It is obvious that all the absurd patterns of his acting, as

87. Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22*. (New York, 1961), 195, https://7chan.org/lit/src/catch_22.pdf

88. Heller, *Catch-22*, 58.

89. Heller, *Catch-22*, 439.

90. Lester A. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” in *Going Crazy: The Radical Therapy of R. D. Laing and Others*, ed. Dr. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (Bantam Books, 1972), 194, <https://archive.org/details/goingcrazyradica00ruit>

91. Heller, *Catch-22*, 338.

for example volunteering his subordinates for unnecessary and yet, deadly missions, are motivated by his shallow wish to be appreciated by his higher-rank colleagues or to appear in “The Saturday Evening Post,”⁹² which means to become famous across the whole country. He is even willing to use religion for the purpose of the latter as he asks the chaplain whether they could “pray for a tighter bomb pattern”⁹³ so an article on it could be published in the mentioned magazine. In other words, “not only does he keep volunteering his men for hazardous duty,” Lupack writes, “thus becoming an anti-Christ who sends innocent young soldiers in cruciform war planes to their deaths to satisfy his own venality; he even enlists the assistance of the chaplain to help him achieve his goal.”⁹⁴

On one hand, Gross writes that “the most pronounced instance of pathology among all the madmen in this novel is surely Colonel Cathcart”, who is “so seduced by The System that he is ‘tormented chronically by prolonged seizures of apprehensions over how he looks to the top brass.’”⁹⁵ On the other hand, Colonel Cathcart is not the only character in *Catch-22* who demonstrates such crazed behaviour just for the sake of “boosting his career” by means of “making the cover of The Saturday Evening Post.”⁹⁶ For instance, when Sergeant Whitcomb finds out that twelve men were killed on a mission, he “chirruped exultantly over the tragic event” as “twelve men killed meant twelve more form letters of condolence [...], giving Sergeant Whitcomb hope of getting an article on Colonel Cathcart into *The Saturday Evening Post* in time for Easter.”⁹⁷ The ludicrousness of his reaction to the unfortunate news shows that the insanity of the whole system, as dealt with further in this chapter of the thesis, is truly “contagious”⁹⁸ and therefore has an impact not only on the highest-rank officers but also on their lower-rank colleagues.

The character of Milo Minderbinder also demonstrates in his conduct symptoms of “pathology,” although the motives of his ridiculous behaviour are rather economical. Milo Minderbinder is portrayed as an aspiring businessman who is completely seduced by the possibilities of the free market. He establishes an enterprise, which he calls the syndicate and

92. Heller, *Catch-22*, 388.

93. Heller, *Catch-22*, 199.

94. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 49.

95. Gross, ““Insanity is Contagious,”” 12.

96. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 49.

97. Heller, *Catch-22*, 388.

98. Heller, *Catch-22*, 11.

in which “everybody has a share.”⁹⁹ He often flies to far away countries to purchase various commodities that he is willing to share with the men in the squadron. On one hand, Milo really seems to intend to provide them with “the best meals in the world”¹⁰⁰ and so quickly becomes popular even among the higher-rank officers. On the other hand, most of the purchased commodities he subsequently sells again or trades them for different goods just to make more money. As Vojtěch Březík argues in his thesis, Milo’s constant effort to give his fellow soldiers “the best meals” can be also viewed as the act of bribery.¹⁰¹ This is well reflected in the conversation he has with Major-de Coverley:

“I have a weakness for fresh eggs,” Major-de Coverley confessed. “If someone put a plane at my disposal, I could fly down there once a week in a squadron plane and bring back all the fresh eggs we need.”¹⁰²

Indeed, his apparently selfless effort to serve the needs of the community earns him certain privileges. First, he has all the planes in the squadron constantly at his disposal.¹⁰³ Second, he is not obliged to fly any more missions, and thus put his life in danger; for Colonel Cathcart makes other, not so privileged men, fly them instead of him. In consideration of the aforesaid, it can be stated that through his economic power Milo reaches the same social status as the highest-rank officers who also profit from the syndicate, which shows that he follows, though indirectly, the same “social rules,”¹⁰⁴ as defined by Lester A. Gelb, of the hierarchically structured society.

Furthermore, Heller soon reveals that in order to earn his money and privileges he also commits absurd and destructive acts. For example, in chapter 24 he signs a business contract with the Nazis that requires him to bomb his own camp and shoot at his fellow soldiers, thus being responsible for the death of one man and the wounds of many others. As expected, he is “supervising the action”¹⁰⁵ from the safety of the control tower. Similarly, in chapter 28 Orr almost drowns in the ocean after crashing his plane because Milo “removed the twin carbon-dioxide cylinders” from the life jackets “to make the strawberry and crushed-pineapple ice-

99. Heller, *Catch-22*, 238.

100. Heller, *Catch-22*, 66.

101. Vojtěch Březík, “Post-War Capitalism and Ethical Flexibility in Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22*” (BA thesis, Masaryk University in Brno, 2014), 14.

102. Heller, *Catch-22*, 140.

103. Březík, “Post-War Capitalism,” 14.

104. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 198.

105. Březík, “Post-War Capitalism”, 22.

cream sodas”.¹⁰⁶ Milo is also partly to blame, though indirectly, for Snowden’s agony as he takes all the morphine from the flight kit, in consequence of which Yossarian cannot apply it to ease his pain.¹⁰⁷ Milo justifies his conduct claiming: “I didn’t start this war. [...] I’m just trying to put it on a businesslike basis.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, all the ridiculous acts he commits are subsequently forgiven once those who previously find him guilty realise that “everybody has a share” of profit. As Vojtěch Březík writes in his thesis, “there is no single instance where Milo would literally share the profit with anyone.”¹⁰⁹ He further argues that the others are simply intoxicated by “the promise of the future profit”¹¹⁰ and so they never complain and keep following his orders no matter how absurd they are. The way they act again points to the contagiousness of insanity in *Catch-22*. In addition, the lunacy of Milo’s conduct shows that the impact of the competition-oriented system on the human mind can be very negative indeed as he obviously tends to “value profit more than human lives.”¹¹¹

According to Lupack, Milo is “the false god of a society whose only value is the bottom line, a sinister serpent who poisons innocence and good.”¹¹² She further argues that his role is already exposed in his name as “he achieves his success by binding and by shackling thought and decent human feelings.” The scene in which Yossarian is sitting naked on the branch of a tree and Milo sits beside him and offers him the chocolate-covered cotton ball can thus be interpreted in a symbolic way; Yossarian might represent the innocent creature, being naked as a newborn child, while Milo could stand for the Evil Spirit trying to lure him in his kingdom, which is obviously a metaphorical image of the syndicate. Ironically, he is offering him a sweet made of the same Egyptian cotton that made him sign the contract with the Germans about bombing his own camp. Nonetheless, Yossarian proves to be resistant to his temptations and rejects his offer by means of “spraying his big mouthful of chocolate-covered cotton right into Milo’s face.”¹¹³

106 Heller, *Catch-22*, 316.

107. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 51.

108. Heller, *Catch-22*, 263.

109. Březík, “Post-War Capitalism”, 31.

110. Březík, “Post-War Capitalism”, 30.

111. Březík, “Post-War Capitalism”, 17.

112. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 50.

113. Heller, *Catch-22*, 268.

Considering the aforementioned, both Colonel Cathcart and Milo Minderbinder (as well as many other characters who are not thoroughly investigated in this thesis) are presented in the novel as mechanized figures who, being subdued to the insanity of the so-called “capitalist ethic,”¹¹⁴ unquestioningly follow standards of success (that is, material welfare, social status, etc.) prescribed by a society, which tends to put material values above the basic principles of humanity. They embody the “competitive, business orientation of the military-economic complex” as they “try to profit by others’ losses and blatantly hope to advance their careers at the expense of their subordinates.”¹¹⁵ The fact that the military institution devaluates individual lives and perceives human beings as the mere “military quantities”¹¹⁶ or “commodities”¹¹⁷ is well reflected in chapter 18, particularly in the scene with the dying soldier. The background of the scene is that Yossarian is made pretend to be one of the dead soldiers in order for his relatives to say goodbye to their dying son. When Yossarian shows his bewilderment, one of the doctors responds: “As far as we’re concerned, one dying boy is just as good as any other, or just as bad. To a scientist, all dying boys are equal.”¹¹⁸ As Lupack claims, Colonel Cathcart also demonstrates his disrespect for individual lives through “the all-purpose form letter of sympathy he commissions”¹¹⁹ every time someone’s “husband, son, father or brother” is “killed, wounded, or reported missing in action.”¹²⁰

Nonetheless, the supreme form of madness in *Catch-22* is mirrored in the bureaucracy governing the whole institution, which is so powerful that it can literally kill or “disappear”¹²¹ a living person by means of paperwork. It is demonstrated in chapter 31 when Doc Daneeka is proclaimed to be “KILLED IN ACTION”¹²² despite his evident and vivid presence:

“You’re dead sir,” repeated the other.

“That’s probably the reason you always feel so cold.”

“That’s right, sir. You’ve probably been dead all this time and we just didn’t detect it.”

114. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 49.

115. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 49.

116. Heller, *Catch-22*, 224.

117. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 195.

118. Heller, *Catch-22*, 190.

119. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 46.

120. Heller, *Catch-22*, 287.

121. Heller, *Catch-22*, 376.

122. Heller, *Catch-22*, 352.

“What the *hell* are you both talking about?” [...]

“The records show that you went up in McWatt’s plane to collect some flight time. You didn’t come down in a parachute, so you must have been killed in the crash.” [...]

“Have you both gone crazy?” he demanded. “I’m going to report this whole insubordinate incident to Sergeant Towser.”

“Sergeant Towser’s the one who told us about it,” said either Gus or Wes.”¹²³

The ludicrousness of the dialog between Doc Daneeka and the crazed doctors, who are trying to make him aware of the fact that he is dead, manifests the sheer lunacy of the situation. Moreover, not only do they intend to persuade Doc Daneeka that he was killed but the War Department even informs Doc Daneeka’s wife about his “administrative”¹²⁴ death. Mrs. Daneeka very soon accepts the fact together with all the money she receives from her insurance, despite his effort to disprove it by way of sending her letters with a message that he is still alive. Gross writes in his essay:

A bureaucratic death is as final and irrefutable as any other kind. After Doc Daneeka’s feeble objections get nowhere, he is never seen again in the novel [...]. Colonel Cathcart has a chance to send one of the sympathy form letters that he hopes will get him into the *Saturday Evening Post*.¹²⁵

Similarly, Dunbar is “nowhere to be found”¹²⁶ after he discovers the soldier in white’s secret; or, more precisely, he is consequently “disappeared:”

“They’re going to disappear him,” she said.

[...] “Who?”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t see them. I just heard them say they were going to disappear Dunbar.”

“Why are they going to disappear him?”

“I don’t know.”¹²⁷

But above all, the most powerful, though also the most absurd, invention of bureaucracy in Heller’s novel is the paradoxical law of Catch-22, which ironically does not “exist”¹²⁸ despite the fact that everybody is aware of its existence. In her study Lupack writes:

123. Heller, *Catch-22*, 351.

124. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 47.

125. Gross, “‘Insanity is Contagious,’” 17.

126. Heller, *Catch-22*, 377.

127. Heller, *Catch-22*, 376.

128. Heller, *Catch-22*, 422.

Catch-22 is the unwritten loophole in every written law, the rider attached to every code of the rights of men that gives those in authority the power to revoke those rights at will. Because its ellipsism defeats perception and ultimately frustrates all sense by rendering absurd an otherwise coherent universe, Catch-22 defies solution and ends in paradox [...].¹²⁹

In other words, it gives those in charge of the whole institution the ultimate power to keep the enlisted men under their command and, therefore, trapped in seemingly everlasting military service. *Catch-22* has many clauses, one of which is explained by Doc Daneeka in chapter 5 after Yossarian asks him whether Orr could be discharged from active duty as a result of his insanity:

“Is Orr crazy?”

“He sure is,” Doc Daneeka said.

“Can you ground him?”

“I sure can. But first he has to ask me to. That’s part of the rule.” [...]

“That’s all he has to do to be grounded?”

“That’s all. Let him ask me.”

“And then you can ground him.”

“No. Then I can’t ground him.”

“You mean there’s a catch?”

“Sure there’s a catch,” Doc Daneeka replied. ‘Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn’t really crazy.’¹³⁰

As it is further explained by the narrator, “Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn’t, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn’t have to; but if he didn’t want to he was sane and had to.”¹³¹ There is thus no way for the enlisted men how to avoid flying more and more obligatory missions. Moreover, another clause of Catch-22 enables Colonel Cathcart to raise constantly the number of required missions that everyone has to fly in order for one to be discharged from combat duty. It is demonstrated in the conversation Yossarian has with ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen and Doc Daneeka:

“How many did he say?”

129. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 26.

130. Heller, *Catch-22*, 45-46.

131. Heller, *Catch-22*, 46.

“Forty” [...]

Yossarian was jubilant. “Then I can go home, right? I’ve got forty-eight.”

“No, you can’t go home,’ ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen corrected him. ‘Are you crazy or something?’”

“Why not?” [...]

“Catch-22,” Doc Daneeka answered patiently [...], “says you’ve always got to do what your commanding officer tells you to.”

“But Twenty-seventh Air Force says I can go home with forty missions.”

‘But they don’t say you’ve to go home. And regulations do say you have to obey every order. That’s the catch. Even if the colonel were disobeying a Twenty-seventh Air Force order by making you fly more missions, you’d still have to fly them, or you’d be guilty of disobeying an order of his. And then Twenty-seventh Air Force Headquarters would really jump on you.’¹³²

The apparently endless power of *Catch-22* lies in its ultimate absurdity that governs all the principles of sane thinking. It is the preeminent invention; means by which the system subdues reason and logic to its own “institutionalized insanity”¹³³. As Gross writes, “*Catch-22* is the ultimate weapon, check, control of the military, perhaps the universe. There is nothing more imprisoning than the impasse of circularity, nothing more frustrating.”¹³⁴

Yet, Heller’s novel is also full of hope because the system is not omnipotent. Even though it is sufficiently dehumanising and manipulative to twist the minds of the many, it is not able to entirely destroy the human spirit and suppress the power of free will. In other words, despite the fact that the system has completely absorbed many characters, as for example Colonel Cathcart or Milo Minderbinder, it has not managed to gain control over the ones, whose integrity is much more stable and who thus happen to be “immune”¹³⁵ to its destructive power.

Yossarian, the protagonist of the novel, questions all the principles indoctrinated either by the military establishment or by society as a whole right from the beginning. Throughout the entire novel, he demonstrates patterns of thinking and conduct that are deviating from all the standards designed by the institution, as a result of which the majority of his fellow

132. Heller, *Catch-22*, 58-59.

133. Gross, ““Insanity is Contagious,”” 3.

134. Gross, ““Insanity is Contagious,”” 5.

135. Gross, ““Insanity is Contagious,”” 11.

soldiers consider him to be “crazy”¹³⁶ or to have “antisocial aggressions.”¹³⁷ In other words, his different mindset “puts him outside the system.”¹³⁸ Such a clash between Yossarian’s distinctive attitude and the one of the mainstream is reflected, for instance, in his passionate quarrels with Clevinger:

“You’re crazy!”

“They’re trying to kill me,” Yossarian told him calmly.

“No one’s trying to kill you,” Clevinger cried.

“Then why are they shooting at me?” Yossarian asked.

“They’re shooting at *everyone*,” Clevinger answered.¹³⁹

Here Clevinger seems to be totally reconciled with the fact that the war is going on. In his opinion, it is perfectly alright that people shoot at each other to protect the interests of their countries. He is so blinded by the ideology of patriotism, which is just another tool the system uses to “seize control of the men’s lives,”¹⁴⁰ that he does not even question the meaning of particular missions and simply follows every order of his superiors with a conviction he is doing the right thing. According to Clevinger, “there are men entrusted with winning the war who are in much better position than we are to decide what targets have to be bombed.”¹⁴¹ Therefore, Clevinger believes it is absolutely necessary to strive for winning the war no matter the cost and so he obeys his commanding officers, without being aware of their own, selfish interests, because the Nazis are his only enemies. However, Yossarian claims “it doesn’t make a damned bit of difference *who* wins the war to someone who’s dead.”¹⁴² He further argues that “the enemy [...] is anybody who’s going to get you killed, no matter *which* side he’s on, and that includes Colonel Cathcart.”¹⁴³ In other words, Yossarian is not willing to risk his life just “because the colonel wants to be a general”¹⁴⁴ and his attitude

136. Heller, *Catch-22*, 18.

137. Heller, *Catch-22*, 17.

138. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 52.

139. Heller, *Catch-22*, 14.

140. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 23.

141. Heller, *Catch-22*, 128.

142. Heller, *Catch-22*, 128.

143. Heller, *Catch-22*, 129.

144. Heller, *Catch-22*, 128.

is viewed by the other men, who are still devoted to their country, as perverted or twisted. The symptoms of his madness, as viewed by the institution, are described by Major Sanderson:

“You’ve been unable to adjust to the idea of war.” [...]

“You have deep-seated survival anxieties. And you don’t like bigots, bullies, snobs or hypocrites.” [...]

“You’re antagonistic to the idea of being robbed, exploited, degraded, humiliated or deceived. Misery depresses you. Ignorance depresses you. Persecution depresses you. Violence depresses you. Slums depress you. Greed depresses you. Crime depresses you. Corruption depresses you. You know, it wouldn’t surprise me if you’re a manic-depressive!”

“Yes, sir. Perhaps I am.” [...]

“Then you admit you’re crazy, do you?”

“Crazy?” Yossarian was shocked. ‘What are you talking about? Why am I crazy? You’re the one who is crazy!’¹⁴⁵

It is clear from this dialog that Major Sanderson, just as Clevinger, accepts the distorted values of society affected by war; he is perfectly reconciled with the fact that “humans are, by instinct, aggressive, competitive, predatory, narcissistic, ‘territorially acquisitive,’ etc.”¹⁴⁶ From his point of view, it is a criterion of normalcy and sanity to be adjusted to the world in war. Therefore, Clevinger and Sanderson believe Yossarian is insane because he has not let society impose her “bias”¹⁴⁷ on him. In other words, he has not let the system distort his own principles as he still values human lives more than material welfare or social status of someone else. Mary Boyle suggests that our society’s tendency to deny any unconventional beliefs is a mechanism of its defence. She explains:

It is as if such beliefs and experiences are so threatening to our rational image of ourselves and our society that we deal with them by denying that their occurrence and content can be understood within rational, scientific and technologically sophisticated Western culture. So such experiences can only be made intelligible by seeing them as a product of brain dysfunction.¹⁴⁸

145. Heller, *Catch-22*, 311-312.

146. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 198.

147. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 198.

148. Mary Boyle, “‘Schizophrenia’ Re-Evaluated,” in *Mental Health Matters: A Reader*, ed. Tom Heller, Jill Reynolds, Roger Gomm, Rosemary Muston, and Stephen Pattison (Palgrave, 1996), 30.

Nevertheless, Yossarian directly demurs to Major Sanderson's diagnosis because, from his perspective, the adjustment of the human mind to "the idea of war"¹⁴⁹ is a symptom of true madness, and, therefore, he perceives himself to be sane; real insanity, as depicted by Heller and as perceived by Yossarian, is reflected either in the conduct of McWatt, who "flew his plane as low as he dared over Yossarian tent as often as he could, just to see how much he could frighten him;"¹⁵⁰ or, in the actions of Aarfy, who raped and killed a girl because she was just a maid and who subsequently justified his crime saying that "'so many thousands of lives are being lost every day;'"¹⁵¹ or, finally, in the decision of Colonel Cathcart to volunteer his group for Avignon in attempt to have some casualties as soon as possible so he could appear in "the Christmas issue"¹⁵² of the Saturday Evening Post. James Nagel argues in his essay:

It is clear that Yossarian's mind is not in harmony with the established thinking around him. Either he is maladjusted to a logical world, or the world is itself insane. The structure of the novel moves systematically to a demonstration that the latter is the case.¹⁵³

Therefore, he "is 'mad' only in terms of his inability to accept the absurdity of war and in his compulsive desire to remain alive."¹⁵⁴ Indeed, he does not belong to a society, which could quite easily "turn vice into virtue and slander into truth, impotence into abstinence, arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honor, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice."¹⁵⁵

Similarly to Dunbar, "who dropped his bombs hundreds of yards past the village," Yossarian thus "no longer gave a damn where his bombs fell."¹⁵⁶ As Gross writes, he truly "exhibits bizarre behavior"¹⁵⁷ throughout the whole novel; first, he poisons the food so he and

149. Heller, *Catch-22*, 311.

150. Heller, *Catch-22*, 16.

151. Heller, *Catch-22*, 431.

152. Heller, *Catch-22*, 289.

153. James Nagel, "'Catch-22' and Angry Humor: A Study of the Normative Values of Satire." *Studies in American Humor* 1, no. 2 (1974): 6.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42573658>.

154. Nagel, "'Catch-22' and Angry Humor", 7.

155. Heller, *Catch-22*, 373.

156. Heller, *Catch-22*, 340.

157. Gross, "'Insanity is Contagious,'" 2.

his fellow soldiers do not have to fly a mission to Bologna; second, he “accepts the Distinguished Flying Cross stark naked”¹⁵⁸ after Snowden bleeds all over his uniform, which he “associates with his official role as an agent of destruction and death”¹⁵⁹ and he “sits in a tree, naked, after the bombing of Avignon and watches the funeral of a man killed in his plane;”¹⁶⁰ third, “after his friend has been killed in the bombing of Spezia he marches ‘backward with his gun on his hip and refuses to fly more combat missions;’”¹⁶¹ and, finally, he liberates himself through the act of desertion, thus following Orr’s example after becoming aware of the futility of his struggle with the system.

Thus, it can be concluded that Heller depicts the world which itself is mad and in which everybody is insane, in one way or another; for, as Gelb argues, nobody “can be truly mentally healthy” if one lives “passively in a morally destructive society.”¹⁶² Yossarian’s insanity, being a manifestation of the uprising of the human spirit against the military institution and its dehumanising power, is therefore presented in a positive way as it is, according to Gelb, “a reaction against corrupt social existence.”¹⁶³ Unlike the indoctrinated madness of the other characters investigated above, which leads to suffering and death, his lunacy is not destructive. In contrast, his insanity is “creative”¹⁶⁴ as its consequences are liberating and “life-affirming.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, “he not only finds salvation himself but also offers hope for Danby”¹⁶⁶ and provides a positive example for many other victims of the system. For instance, Chaplain Tappman follows Yossarian “into the hospital with a disease of his own invention”¹⁶⁷ and swears to challenge his superiors. As Lupack writes, “a doer rather than a contemplative, he personifies the qualities of intelligence and endurance that make possible the survival of humanity under the worst conditions of oppression and exploitation.”¹⁶⁸

158. Gross, “‘Insanity is Contagious,’” 2.

159. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 44.

160. Gross, “‘Insanity is Contagious,’” 2.

161. Gross, “‘Insanity is Contagious,’” 2.

162. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 196.

163. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 196.

164. Gross, “‘Insanity is Contagious,’” 9.

165. Gross, “‘Insanity is Contagious,’” 28.

166. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 60.

167. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 60.

168. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 58.

3 LUNACY IN SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse- Five* exposes madness of "the dehumanizing world at war"¹⁶⁹ and its impact on the human mind and one's conduct in all the potential forms. As Lupack writes, its full title "Slaughterhouse-Five; or, The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death," besides referring directly to "the actual address of the one hundred American prisoners of war in Dresden,"¹⁷⁰ contains different metaphorical meanings. First, it is a symbolic depiction of the world at war, which transforms "young men like Vonnegut himself" into "the meat that feeds the war machine."¹⁷¹ Second, the first subtitle obviously points to the fact that "wars were fought by babies" for "causes they usually are unable to understand."¹⁷² Finally, the second subtitle represents, according to Lupack, not only "the actual deaths of soldiers and civilians exterminated in war" but also "the moral and spiritual death attendant upon the purveyors of a technology whose only purpose is to kill."¹⁷³ This chapter of the thesis aims to investigate the madness of the protagonist Billy Pilgrim and its causes. It will mainly focus on the way he responds to the lunacy of his surroundings and it will also investigate the positive aspects of his partial detachment from reality.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr., "a child of the Great Depression,"¹⁷⁴ was born in 1922 in Indianapolis to Kurt Vonnegut Sr. and Edith Lieber. It is obvious that Kurt's ancestors were of German origin – John Tomedi writes that they "had arrived in America not long before the Civil War."¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, as a result of the anti-Germanism that developed in America after the First World War his parents decided to deprive their son of the ties with the German culture. Kurt Vonnegut Jr. states that "they volunteered to make me ignorant and rootless as proof of their patriotism."¹⁷⁶

169. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 104.

170. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 104.

171. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 104.

172. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 105.

173. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 105.

174. Kurt Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage* (Dial Press Trade Paperback, 1999), 1679,

[https://www.amazon.com/Palm-Sunday-Kurt-Vonnegut-](https://www.amazon.com/Palm-Sunday-Kurt-Vonnegut-ebook/dp/B004D4Y1TU/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=)

[ebook/dp/B004D4Y1TU/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=](https://www.amazon.com/Palm-Sunday-Kurt-Vonnegut-ebook/dp/B004D4Y1TU/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=)

175. John Tomedi, *Kurt Vonnegut (Bloom's Great Writers)* (Chelsea House Publications, 2004), 5.

176. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 414.

The impact of the Great Depression on Kurt Vonnegut's life was huge. Although Kurt Sr. (a successful architect) and Edith Lieber (daughter of a successful brewer) were initially "reasonably affluent – had servants, governesses for their children, and lived well,"¹⁷⁷ in the 1930s their economic situation was much worse. On one hand, due to the financial crisis Kurt Vonnegut Sr. did not want Kurt Vonnegut Jr. to follow his father's steps and become an architect, which he deeply desired. Instead, he sent him to Cornell University "with specific instructions"¹⁷⁸ to study chemistry.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, the Great Depression had also, according to Richard Giannone, its positive meaning. He claims:

The essential poverty of the depression, Vonnegut came to learn, was spiritual. People were made to feel useless; their hardship was to generate a self out of their feelings of inadequacy. This mood of inner deprivation pervades Vonnegut's writing and underlines his concept of the self.¹⁸⁰

By all means, Kurt Vonnegut Jr. writes that he "had no talent for science"¹⁸¹ and "soon forgot what they tried to teach me."¹⁸² Moreover, he was always pretty much skeptical about scientific progress and critical of the way America approaches it. He expressed himself, quite emotionally, in Washington, D.C., on May 6, 1979:

We have discovered a brand-new method for committing suicide [...]. What is the method? To say nothing and do nothing about what some of our businessmen and military men are doing with the most unstable substances and the most persistent poisons to be found anywhere in the universe. The people who play with such chemicals are so *dumb*. They are also vicious. How vicious it is of them to tell us as little as possible about the hideousness of nuclear weapons and power plants! And, among all the dumb and vicious people, who jeopardizes all life on earth with hearts so light? I suggest to you that it is those who will lie for the nuclear industries, or who will teach their executives how to lie convincingly – for a *fee*.¹⁸³

In other words, as Giannone points out, Kurt Vonnegut was aware of the fact that the development of technology was motivated by profit or "professional advancement" and its "necessity or desirability"¹⁸⁴ was never questioned – simply, Kurt Vonnegut knew that

177. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 810.

178. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 810.

179. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 901.

180. Richard Giannone, *Vonnegut: A Preface to His Novels* (Kennikat Press, 1977), 4,
<https://archive.org/details/vonnegutprefacet00gian>

181. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 923.

182. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1041.

183. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1025.

184. Giannone, *Vonnegut*, 6.

scientific progress took place “in a moral vacuum”¹⁸⁵ and he also thought it to be “responsible for the dreary sameness of American life that he had always decried.”¹⁸⁶

Even though he was, at first, publicly against U.S. intervention in World War II, Kurt Vonnegut finally enlisted in the American army. Being “a battalion scout in the 106th infantry,”¹⁸⁷ he reached the front in “November of 1944.”¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, despite the fact he participated in the Battle of the Bulge, he never shot anybody in the war.¹⁸⁹ Instead, he was captured during the battle and together with the other prisoners shipped to Dresden (he said that “probably in the same boxcars that had delivered Jews and Gypsies and Jehovah’s Witnesses and so on to the extermination camps”¹⁹⁰). He thus witnessed the bombing of Dresden that took place between 13 and 15 February 1945 and that was, according to David Irving, “the largest massacre in European history.”¹⁹¹ Kurt Vonnegut recalls the moments he lived through after the city had been burned to the ground:

“Every day we walked into the city and dug into basements and shelters to get the corpses out, as a sanitary measure. When we went into them, a typical shelter, an ordinary basement usually, looked like a streetcar full of people who’d simultaneously had heart failure. Just people sitting there in their chairs, all dead.”¹⁹²

On one hand, Kurt Vonnegut admitted he never argued the point that the Dresden massacre had been “correct and quite minimal revenge for what had been done by the cams.”¹⁹³ On the other hand, he was pretty much aware of the fact that “the death penalty was applied to absolutely anybody who happened to be in the undefended city”¹⁹⁴ and, at the same time, he realized that nobody “benefited from the raid,”¹⁹⁵ which “didn’t shorten the war by half a

185. Giannone, *Vonnegut*, 6.

186. Giannone, *Vonnegut*, 6.

187. Tomedi, *Kurt Vonnegut*, 55.

188. Tomedi, *Kurt Vonnegut*, 55.

189. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1206.

190. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1240.

191. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1292.

192. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1262.

193. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1315.

194. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1314.

195. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1324.

second, didn't weaken a German defense or attack anywhere, didn't free a single person from a death camp.”¹⁹⁶

As Tomedi writes, the war story of Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, is obviously based on the war story of his creator. He happens to be “intermittently institutionalized”¹⁹⁷ as a result of the traumatic events that he experienced during the World War II. Billy Pilgrim is portrayed as “a figure of fun in the American army, [...] powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends.”¹⁹⁸ He is further depicted as “a valet to a preacher”, who “had no friends, expected no promotions or medals, bore no arms, and had a meek faith in a loving Jesus which most soldiers found putrid.”¹⁹⁹ In short, having “no helmet, no overcoat” and wearing “low-cut civilian shoes which he had bought for his father’s funeral,”²⁰⁰ Billy is scarcely a competent soldier. As Lupack points out, Billy is “out of sync with the cruelty of his environment.”²⁰¹ It is obviously a mere coincidence or just “bad timing”²⁰² that plunges him straight onto the battlefield. Even though he survives the Battle of the Bulge, his life is subsequently, and pretty much ironically, endangered not by the Nazis but by his fellow soldier Roland Weary. His motive for trying to “beat the living shit out of”²⁰³ Billy was to punish him for the break-up of “The Three Musketeers,”²⁰⁴ which was a group Roland Weary imagined to form with another two American soldiers:

He dilated upon the piety and heroism of ‘The Three Musketeers’, portrayed, in the most glowing and impassioned hues, their virtue and magnanimity, the imperishable honor they acquired for themselves, and the great services they rendered to Christianity.²⁰⁵

196. Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 1324.

197. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 116.

198. Kurt Vonnegut. *Slaughterhouse-Five, or, The Children’s Crusade: a Duty-Dance with Death* (New York: Dial Press, 1999), 15,
http://www.kkoworld.com/kitablar/kurt_vonnequt_sallaqxana_n_5_ve_ya_ushaqlarin_selib_yurushu-eng.pdf

199. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 15.

200. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 16.

201. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 109.

202. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 109.

203. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 23.

204. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 23.

205. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 23.

Billy is not at all responsible for its disintegration as the two scouts are consequently ambushed by German soldiers and killed. On the contrary, he saves Roland's life seeing that thanks to their slowness they are only taken as prisoners. Roland Weary's patriotism and his notion of heroism are thus portrayed in the same negative way as in *Catch-22*; his blind faith in such principles makes him commit an act of cruelty on his fellow countryman. Even more paradoxically, Billy's life is saved by their German captors whose "blue eyes were filled with bleary civilian curiosity as to why one American would try to murder another one."²⁰⁶ The ridiculousness of this situation shows that in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, as well as in *Catch-22*, the borderline between the ally and the enemy does not really exist.

While being a prisoner of war, Billy does not cease to see the lunacy of the world at war. For instance, the deportation of American soldiers to Dresden truly evokes the image of cattle being transported to a slaughterhouse.

Even though Billy's train wasn't moving, its boxcars were kept locked tight. Nobody was to get off until the final destination. To the guards who walked up and down outside, each car became a single organism which ate and drank and excreted through its ventilators. It talked and sometimes yelled through its ventilators, too. In went water and loaves of blackbread and sausage and cheese, and out came shit and piss and language. Human beings in there were excreting into steel helmets, which were passed to the people at the ventilators, who dumped them. Billy was a dumper.²⁰⁷

The fact that their final destination was a real slaughterhouse in Dresden provides the scene with further, metaphorical meaning. In Dresden Billy lives through many other traumatic events that lead him to his hospitalisation after the war. For example, he witnesses "the execution of poor old Edgar Derby,"²⁰⁸ which takes place after the city has been bombed. Kurt Vonnegut describes the absurdity of the situation:

"The irony is so great. A whole city gets burned down, and thousands and thousands of people are killed. And then this one American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for taking a teapot. And he's given a regular trial, and then he's shot by a firing squad."²⁰⁹

As Lupack writes, "that memory reverberates in Billy's consciousness like the chorus of a Greek tragedy and causes him to weep quietly to himself for years."²¹⁰ But above all, Billy happens to see "the greatest massacre in European history," which is "the firebombing of

206. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 24.

207. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 32.

208. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 4.

209. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 4.

210. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 108.

Dresden.”²¹¹ As he tells Montana Wildhack in the Tralfamadorian zoo, the landscape of the city in ruins “was like the moon.”²¹² Luckily, and perhaps ironically, Billy survives (thanks to his shelter in the meat locker) while most of his guards are “killed with their families” in “the comforts of their own homes,”²¹³ together with other 135 000 victims. The first living people that the survivors meet on their way from the bombed-out city are “a blind innkeeper and his sighted wife [...] and their two young daughters”, who live in “a suburb untouched by fire and explosions.”²¹⁴ Their strange conduct is described by the narrator:

Those with eyes had seen it bum and bum, understood that they were on the edge of the desert now. Still-they had opened for business, had polished the glasses and wound the clocks and stirred the fires, and waited and waited to see who would come.²¹⁵

After the war Billy voluntarily undergoes treatment in a hospital as a consequence of being “alarmed by the outside world.”²¹⁶ He is thought to be “crazy” not only by himself but also by the people around him, who treat him accordingly. For instance, Professor Bertram Copeland Rumfoord of Harvard, “official Historian of the United States Air Force”²¹⁷ and “a retired brigadier general in the Air Force Reserve,”²¹⁸ considers “Billy a repulsive non-person who would be much better off dead.”²¹⁹ When Billy interrupts his conversation about the bombing of Dresden saying that he was there, Rumfoord does not believe him. Instead, he thinks Billy has a mental illness called echolalia, “which makes people immediately repeat things that well people around them say.”²²⁰ Even though Rumfoord’s diagnosis is subsequently disproved by the doctors, he does not want to talk about Dresden anymore as a testimony of a plain inmate does not mean anything to him. The narrator writes:

There in the hospital, Billy was having an adventure very common among people without power in time of war: He was trying to prove to a wilfully deaf and blind enemy that he was interesting to hear and see.²²¹

211. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 45.

212. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 79.

213. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 79.

214. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 80.

215. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 80.

216. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 45.

217. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 54.

218. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 82.

219. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 85.

220. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 85.

221. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 86.

Billy's daughter Barbara also perceives her father as an incompetent person who needs to be taken care of, thus "taking his dignity away in the name of love."²²²

Drawing attention to his failure to turn the heat, change from his nightwear, answer the doorbell, or listen to people when they talk to him, she treats him altogether condescendingly and attempts to reverse their parent child roles.²²³

Nevertheless, Billy's apparent insanity and isolation are related to his effort to "re-invent" himself and his "universe"²²⁴ by means of science-fiction novels, time travel and imaginary worlds. Laing argues that through "the figures of phantasies, thought, memories, etc."²²⁵ one intends to liberate his or her self from the harsh reality of this world. He explains that "in phantasy, the self can be anyone, anywhere, do anything, have everything. It is thus omnipotent and completely free."²²⁶ Although the fact that in his imagination Billy lives through truly bizarre experiences ("he has come unstuck in time, [...] had been kidnapped by a flying saucer [...] and taken to Tralfamadore, where he was displayed naked in a zoo"²²⁷) might appear to a sane person as a symptom of a mental illness, his stories cannot be, according to Laing, "proved or falsified."²²⁸ He writes:

I have had a patient whose notion of the horizons of his own being extended beyond birth and death: 'in fact' and not just 'in imagination' he said he was not essentially bound to one time and one place. I did not regard him as psychotic, nor could I prove him wrong, even if I cared to.²²⁹

Billy Pilgrim is, of course, not able "to persuade Barbara and everybody else that he was far from senile."²³⁰ However, although "it was generally believed that he was a vegetable,"²³¹ Billy's "outward listlessness was a screen" that "concealed a mind which was fizzing and flashing thrillingly. It was preparing letters and lectures about the flying saucers, the negligibility of death and true nature of time."²³² Indeed, his space trips provide him with

222. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 59.

223. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 115.

224. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 45.

225. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 84.

226. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 84.

227. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 12-13.

228. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 26.

229. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 26.

230. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 14.

231. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 84.

232. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 84.

special insights into the mad world around him;²³³ or, in other words, they make him “see things others cannot.”²³⁴ For example, on the imaginary planet called Tralfamadore he learnt:

When a person dies he only appears to die. He is still much very alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist.²³⁵

Billy further explains that “when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadoreans say about dead people, which is ‘so it goes.’”²³⁶ Moreover, while having a conversation with a Tralfamadorean guide, Billy is wondering how it is possible that “the inhabitants of a whole planet can live in peace”²³⁷ seeing that his planet “has been engaged in a senseless slaughter since the beginning of time.”²³⁸ He is subsequently baffled by the guide’s response after expressing his will to share “the secret” with the Earthlings:

“So, [...] I suppose that the idea of, preventing war on Earth is stupid, too.”

“Of course”

“But you have a peaceful planet here.”

“Today we do. On other days we have wars as horrible as any you’ve ever seen or read about. There isn’t anything we can do about them, so we simply don’t look at them. We ignore them.”²³⁹

Nonetheless, Billy obviously does not share with the Tralfamadoreans their ignorance and “apocalyptic”²⁴⁰ indifference. According to Lupack, “since Billy is human and caring, sometimes too human, too caring, he finds it impossible to be as dispassionate as his Tralfamadorean hosts.”²⁴¹ She further argues that “rather than emulate the Tralfamadoreans’ icy detachment, Vonnegut advises us to recognize ourselves in them”²⁴² Therefore, Billy’s

233. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 52.

234. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 116.

235. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 13.

236. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 13.

237. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 52.

238. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 52.

239. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 53.

240. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 120.

241. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 120.

242. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 121.

seeming insanity is a manifestation of his clairvoyance and enlightenment as thanks to his sense he is able “to perceive the madness around him.”²⁴³

Furthermore, Billy also acquires new insights through the science-fiction novels by Kilgore Trout. One of them is about “a money tree”, which “had twenty-dollar bills for leaves. Its flowers were government bonds. Its fruit was diamonds. It attracted human beings who killed each other around the roots and made very good fertilizer.”²⁴⁴ Another one, “The Gutless Wonder”, tells a story about “a robot who had bad breath” and who dropped “burning jellied gasoline on human beings.”²⁴⁵ After his halitosis was cured “he was welcome to the human race” and nobody seemed to complain “that he dropped jellied gasoline on people.”²⁴⁶ Therefore, in both novels Kilgore Trout criticises contemporary society that clearly put material values over human lives; or, in other words, a society that “considers killing acceptable while bad breath is not.”²⁴⁷ Lupack further argues:

Similarly, a woman’s spinsterhood (Valencia’s big worry before her engagement to Billy) is deemed reprehensible, whereas dropping bombs on innocent citizens (especially when unreported in the press, as was the case initially with events in Dresden) is not. ‘Gutless wonder’ is for Vonnegut, a description not just of the robot programmed to commit such crimes but also of the people who build and then use him to cover up their own unconscionable acts and of the anonymous institutions that glorify technology at the expense of humanity.²⁴⁸

Finally, in *The Gospels from Outer space* Kilgore Trout provides a potential answer to the question “why Christians found it so easy to be cruel.”²⁴⁹ The novel is about “a visitor from outer space”²⁵⁰ who “made a serious study of Christianity”. He found out that “the New Testament Gospels taught this: Before you kill somebody, make absolutely sure he isn’t well connected.”²⁵¹ The visitor also said:

Christ, who didn’t look like much, was actually the Son of the Most Powerful Being in the Universe [...], so, when they came to crucifixion, they naturally thought [...]: Oh,

243. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 116.

244. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 74.

245. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 74.

246. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 74.

247. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 129.

248. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 129.

249. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 49.

250. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 49.

251. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 49.

boy-they sure picked the wrong guy to lynch that time! And that thought had a brother: 'There are right people to lynch.' Who? People not well connected.²⁵²

The message Vonnegut's fictional character tries to convey here is that people tend to worship power and if a person does not have it, one is simply expendable.

In consideration of the aforesaid, as Crawford et al. argue, "Billy Pilgrim is presented by Vonnegut as a philosopher, a man given life-affirming insights into time, existence, and emotions."²⁵³ They interpret his madness as "life-saving."²⁵⁴ In contrast, what Vonnegut portrays in a negative way is, as Lawrence R. Broer states, "the insane world of soulless materialistic lust for fame and money, of suicidal wars and self-serving religions;" or, in other words, "a world of our own lunatic invention."²⁵⁵ According to Lupack, the destructive insanity of such a world is reflected in the patterns of thinking and behaviour of the "hopelessly programmed glamorizers of war."²⁵⁶ For example, it is the madness of Bertram Copeland Rumfoord who believes that bombing Dresden "was such a wonderful thing to do"²⁵⁷ and who tells Billy to "pity the men who had to do it."²⁵⁸ Similarly, it is the lunacy of Howard W. Campbell, Jr., an "American who had become a Nazi"²⁵⁹ and who describes his countrymen as "the most self-pitying, least fraternal and dirtiest of all the prisoners of war."²⁶⁰ Having "risen high in the German Ministry of Propaganda,"²⁶¹ Campbell intends to recruit his compatriots "for a German military unit called 'The Free American Corps'"²⁶² to fight against the Russians. Likewise, it is the insanity of the British prisoners of war who are adored by their German captors because "they made war look stylish and reasonable, and fun"²⁶³ even after having spent at least four years in the prison camp. It is also the ludicrousness of the execution of Edgar Derby for taking a teapot and, equivalently, it is the absurd and violent

252. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 49.

253. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 50.

254. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 51.

255. Lawrence R. Broer, "Images of the Shaman in the Works of Kurt Vonnegut," in *Dionysus in Literature: Essays on Literary Madness*, ed. Branimir M. Rieger (Popular Press, 1994), 198.

256. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 133.

257. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 85.

258. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 88.

259. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 71.

260. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 59.

261. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 57.

262. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 72.

263. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 42.

behaviour of Roland Weary that he demonstrates after his heroic dream about “The Three Musketeers” falls into pieces. Finally, it is Valencia’s romantic notion of war, which is reflected in the conversation she has with Billy after the conception of their son. As the narrator says, “it was a simple-minded thing for a female Earthling to do, to associate sex and glamor with war,”²⁶⁴ while at the same time “in her great body she was assembling the materials for a Green Beret.”²⁶⁵ In short, all the people mentioned above become, according to Broer, “the ready slaves of whatever anonymous bureaucracies, computers, or authoritarian institutions take hold of their minds.”²⁶⁶ Their madness, which resides in the adjustment of their mind to the reality of war, is destructive as it is “life-destroying.”²⁶⁷

On the contrary, the madness of Billy Pilgrim, as interpreted by David Simmons, is a demonstration of his unwillingness to accept “the rules of an unjust society; in his case refusing to fight just because society orders him to.”²⁶⁸ As Crawford et al. suggest, “his ethereal psychotic reality and journey inward provide preferable and desirable alternatives to the traumas of ‘real’ life.”²⁶⁹ Thus, it can be concluded that Billy’s insanity is creative and life-preserving; for him, it is the only possible way of how he can, perhaps paradoxically, “retain his sanity in the time of otherwise widespread madness.”²⁷⁰

264. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 54.

265. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 55.

266. Lawrence R. Broer, *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (University Alabama Press, 1994), 91.

267. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 51.

268. David Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut (American Literature Readings in the 21st Century)* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 123.

269. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 51.

270. Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*, 123.

4 IDENTITY AND REDEMPTION IN ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is set in an Oregon mental hospital, where voluntarily institutionalised inmates are isolated from the outside world and subdued to dehumanizing processes under the guise of their treatment and protection. "Rather than as a therapeutic environment," Elaine Ware writes, "Kesey exposes the hospital as a chamber of tortures."²⁷¹ Or, Crawford et al. define it as "a place of absolute power in which patients are ruled with an iron fist."²⁷² Being run by dreaded and apparently omnipotent Nurse Ratchet, the institution seizes the inmates' identities and converts them into mere material for the Combine - a metaphorical image of American society. This chapter of the thesis focuses on the oppressive character of the mental clinic as depicted in the novel, Nurse Ratchet's methods of treatment and the impact of both on the patients' state of mind. It further aims to examine the ways in which Randall Patrick McMurphy, one of the mad protagonists of the novel, responds to the mechanizing and destructive power of the ward and how his response inspires the other inmates.

Ken Elton Kesey was born in Colorado in 1935 to Fred and Geneva Kesey. Rick Dodgson describes his childhood, which he mostly spent playing with his older brother Chuck, as "happy and secure."²⁷³ Young Ken was a frolicsome and roguish child. When he was seven years old, he had already lived through his first sexual experience; his mother, writes Dodgson, "once caught him making out with a neighbor girl in the old chicken house that the boys used as a den."²⁷⁴ Several times he also got into a little trouble; for instance, he unintentionally set on fire "seven hundred acres of land"²⁷⁵ while attempting to smoke out a hive of bees.²⁷⁶ Besides playing with Chuck, he would also enjoy the presence of Grandma Smith who would read to the boys one of the old nursery rhymes, which would later become a source of inspiration for the title of the writer's most famous novel.

271. Elaine Ware, "The Vanishing American: Identity Crisis in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *MELUS* 13, no. 3/4 (1986): 6
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/467185>.

272. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 75.

273. Rick Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 16.

274. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 17.

275. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 17.

276. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 17.

William, William Trimble toes, he's a good fisherman, catch his hands put 'em in the pans, some lay eggs, some not, wire, briar, limber lock, three geese in the flock, one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest [...]²⁷⁷

Even though Ken Kesey was always considered to be “an icon of some sort of anti-American counterculture,”²⁷⁸ in fact he perceived himself as a believer of the American Dream, thus adopting his family's values and following the Kesey's attitude that “treasured family and community, fostered ambition and determination, and admired personal courage and integrity.”²⁷⁹ It can be argued that he was also partially influenced by William Faulkner after having attended his lecture at the University of Oregon, where he appealed to the students for preserving their own individuality. More precisely, Faulkner said: “I protest against reducing man to a mass. Man has got to be himself.”²⁸⁰ Similarly, Ken Kesey conveyed his friend's message that “a man should be as big as he feels it's in him to be.”²⁸¹

In his life Ken Kesey obviously acted in accordance with his values. During the period of his studies he was popular not only among his classmates but also among his professors who admired him for his charisma and magnetism.²⁸² He was “a fraternity man, [...] an accomplished performer, [...] a celebrated athlete, [...] a leader among his peers,”²⁸³ etc. Besides becoming “one of the best wrestlers on the University of Oregon,”²⁸⁴ he also practiced magic, took drugs and earned himself a reputation of a prankster. Dodgson writes that the mentioned activities were not just a source of entertainment. He describes “the personal philosophy”²⁸⁵ behind it:

By challenging people's perception of themselves and their reality – through the use of drugs, art, magic, pranks, or any sort of unconventional behavior – Kesey hoped that one by one, the scales would fall from people's eyes, their foolish hang-ups would be revealed, and the world might be a better place.²⁸⁶

In this manner, Ken Kesey explained the meaning of psychedelic drugs:

277. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 19.

278. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 23.

279. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 23.

280. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 23.

281. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 23.

282. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 37.

283. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 37.

284. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 36.

285. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 140.

286. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 140.

“The real meaning of psychedelics is to know all of the conditioned responses of men and then to prank them. This is the surest way to get them to ask questions, and until they ask questions they are going to remain conditioned robots.”²⁸⁷

After his unsuccessful attempt to build a career in Hollywood, Ken Kesey volunteered to become a subject of drug experiments that were performed at the Menlo Park Veterans Administration hospital in Palo Alto in 1960. He describes the environment of the ward, where he would just six months later spend days and nights writing the novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*:

“It was a ward. All the other people in there were nuts. I went out and looked through the window, a little, tiny window, and the door there with a heavy, heavy screen between two panes of glass. There was no way to break out. You could barely see out through it. I'd look out there and see these people moving around, and I could understand them a whole lot better than I could understand the doctors and the nurses, or the interns – and they knew this.”²⁸⁸

Ken Kesey explained it was thanks to his “drug-changed consciousness”²⁸⁹ that he developed such empathy even towards those patients who would be labeled in his novel as “the Chronics” or “the Vegetables.” He described them, besides other things, as “infants growing backwards, away from civilization and rationalization, back to complete dependence, to darkness, the womb, the seed.”²⁹⁰ More precisely, although he viewed them as “creatures that need spooned puree and paplum,”²⁹¹ Ken Kesey said “they could see a truth that the doctors couldn't see and I could see it too.”²⁹² Despite he recognized that the mentioned empathy or understanding could possibly be the mere effects of the drug, he was also aware of the fact that the drug truly provided him with “more observation and more insight.”²⁹³ Furthermore, Dodgson states that thanks to psychedelic drugs Ken Kesey revealed his “true inner self,”²⁹⁴ abandoned “the habit patterns of thought”²⁹⁵ and realized the artificiality of all the barriers

287. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 140.

288. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 116.

289. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 135.

290. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 135.

291. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 135.

292. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 136.

293. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 117.

294. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 145.

295. Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 145.

between human beings.²⁹⁶ The effects of LSD on his mind are described by John Perry Barlow:

“[M]y sense of the universe was forever changed. [...] I sensed the complete connectedness of everything. It was obvious to me that all of the separateness I ordinarily perceived was, in fact, an artifact of cultural conditioning, and was indeed less “real” than what I was supposedly hallucinating.”²⁹⁷

Thus, it can be stated (from the viewpoint of Laing and his study) that his true self connected with the inmates’ true selves and the understanding that consequently took place between Ken Kesey and the patients can be ascribed to this process of inner connection.

In consideration of the aforesaid, Ken Kesey obviously based his novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* on the above described experience of his; the inmates are depicted not only as much more sane than they appear to be but also far less mad than the dehumanizing system (referred to in the novel as the Combine) that oppresses them and deprives them of their identities (that is, their “inner” selves). The novel’s narrator is the patient Chief Bromden, a socially alienated Indian who pretends to be deaf-mute. As Ware argues, he “never reveals his first name,”²⁹⁸ although in the Chinook tradition the names are hereditary, and, moreover, there has always been a connection between one’s personality and his or her name. Despite the fact that “his father, named ‘Tee Ah Milatoona – The Pine that Stands the Tallest on the Mountain’, did live up to his name both physically and physiologically,”²⁹⁹ Bromden obviously inherited only his figure. Just as his father before, he adopts the name of his dominant mother Mary Louise Bromden. She not only forces Tee Ah Milatoona to “relinquish part of his tradition”³⁰⁰ but she also “coerces Bromden’s father into selling the tribal lands”, thus making him appear small to his son.

As his father’s size decreases in the boy’s eyes, so, too, does the child’s size decrease. Identifying with his father, Bromden explains: “when I saw my Papa start getting scared of things, I got scared too.” The father as well as Bromden develops insecurities when they lose their land and Indian lifestyle.³⁰¹

296. Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic*, 145.

297. Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic*, 146.

298. Ware, “The Vanishing American,” 3.

299. Ware, “The Vanishing American,” 3.

300. Ware, “The Vanishing American,” 4.

301. Ware, “The Vanishing American,” 4.

Therefore, Chief Bromden feels torn between two different cultures. More precisely, Milatoona's son is uprooted since he has lost connection to his Indian self (that is, his cultural past, traditions, etc.) and at the same time he has not managed, no matter how he tried, to adjust himself to the white American society. Nevertheless, his subliminal desire to assimilate is strong enough to motivate him to "base his self-concept on the white man's perception of him,"³⁰² which is rather negative; he is "a victim of bullying and racial assumptions, such as the assumption that he is illiterate."³⁰³ Thus, Bromden's pretended deaf-muteness is a reflection of such an effort. He explains:

It wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all. It hadn't been just since I came to the hospital, either; people first took to acting like I couldn't hear or talk a long time before that. In the Army anybody with more stripes acted that way toward me. That was the way they figured you were supposed to act around someone who looked like I did.³⁰⁴

In this way Bromden created an artificial identity, which is termed by Laing as "the false self," in attempt to be compliant "with the intentions or expectations of the other, or with what are imagined to be the other's intentions or expectations."³⁰⁵ Chief Bromden thus goes through an identity crisis that is further deepened after his institutionalisation. The black boys on the ward condescendingly call him Chief Broom, which symbolically mirrors the fact that in their eyes he is reduced to a cleaning machine that does not hear nor talk nor think. He also claims that "the staff usually don't even notice me; I move around in my chores, and they see right through me like I wasn't there."³⁰⁶ What Chief Bromden is submitted here, according to Laing, is the act of depersonalization – "the act whereby one negates the other person's autonomy, ignores his feelings, regards him as a thing, kills the life in him."³⁰⁷ Laing further writes.

A partial depersonalization of others is extensively practised in everyday life and is regarded as normal if not highly desirable. Most relationships are based on some partial depersonalizing tendency in so far as one treats the other not in terms of any awareness of who or what he might be in himself but as virtually an android robot

302. Ware, "The Vanishing American," 4.

303. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 77.

304. Ken Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 161,
<http://www.somersetacademy.com/ourpages/auto/2015/9/29/56608819/cuckoos%20nest.pdf>

305. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 98.

306. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 116-117.

307. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 46.

playing a role or part in a large machine in which one too may be acting yet another part.³⁰⁸

Furthermore, it can be argued that Bromden's withdrawal from reality is equally caused by a traumatic experience.³⁰⁹ He recalls a memory from World War II:

At Anzio, I saw a buddy of mine tied to a tree fifty yards from me screaming for water, his face blistered in the sun. They wanted me to try to go out and help him. They'd of cut me in half from that farmhouse over there.³¹⁰

Therefore, it can be stated that all the incidents mentioned above obviously led him to his passivity and scepticism about his own powers and capabilities – which is understandable. Nevertheless, Laing suggests that it does not mean “he is losing ‘contact with’ reality, and withdrawing into himself.”³¹¹ In contrast, external events frequently “affect him more,” although “the world of his experience comes to be one he can no longer share with other people.”³¹² Moreover, Chief's silence and seeming invisibility have also certain advantages – Crawford et al. even claim that he “paradoxically holds ultimate power through his silence.”³¹³ First, as he is considered to be “deaf and dumb,” the staff “don't bother not talking out loud” in front of him about “hate and death and other hospital secrets.”³¹⁴ Thus, he gains the greatest insight into what is really going on in the institution, which, however, he cannot share with the other inmates (or at least not until the arrival of McMurphy). Second, his pretended muteness keeps his heart protected from the dangers of its exposure as he is not forced, as the other inmates, to share his inner secrets during Nurse Ratchet's therapeutic sessions.

On one hand, it is true that he is, at least partially, assigned the role of a silent observer by society. On the other hand, he himself admits that it is also a product of his fear of Nurse Ratchet and the adjusting machines of the Combine (both are further investigated in this chapter). In other words, “he chooses silence as a survival technique.”³¹⁵ Bromden also uses

308. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 47.

309. Ware, “The Vanishing American,” 6.

310. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 107.

311. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 43.

312. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 43.

313. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 77.

314. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 4.

315. Ware, “The Vanishing American,” 4.

“the fog,” though it exists only in his imagination, to hide in it in order to avoid the electroshock therapy.

Then I discovered something: I don't have to end up at that door [Shock Shop door] if I stay still when the fog comes over me and just keep quiet. The trouble was I'd been finding that door my own self because I got scared of being lost so long and went to hollering so they could track me. In a way, I was hollering for them *to* track me; I had figured that anything was better'n being lost for good, even the Shock Shop. Now, I don't know. Being lost isn't so bad.³¹⁶

Chief Bromden imagines that the institution uses “the fog machine” to create an alienating and numbing environment. Lupack defines “the fog” as “an instrument of deception which can distort his thinking and contain him within the artificial order of the institution.”³¹⁷ In general, it can be argued that Bromden's will to lose himself silently in “the fog” reflects his growing passivity and resignation. However, one's effort to become “invisible” is, as Laing suggests, a demonstration of the basic instinct of defence and it is, therefore, completely understandable. He explains:

In a world full of danger, to be a potentially seeable object is to be constantly exposed to danger. Self-consciousness, then, may be the apprehensive awareness of oneself as potentially exposed to danger by the simple fact of being visible to others. The obvious defence against such a danger is to make oneself invisible in one way or another.³¹⁸

Laing also argues that a patient who creates or is forced by surroundings to create the false self, which in Chief's case is the artificial identity of walking broom, is constantly torn between two opposed desires. On one hand, “he may need to be seen and recognized, in order to maintain his sense of realness and identity.”³¹⁹ On the other hand, he longs to be invisible as “the other represents a threat to his identity and reality.”³²⁰ In other words, “the self dreads as well as longs for real aliveness.”³²¹ Laing concludes that “the sense of identity requires the existence of another by whom one is known; and a conjunction of this other person's recognition of one's self with self-recognition.”³²² Therefore, not until Chief Bromden receives McMurphy's recognition is he able to overcome his fear, express his true self and retrieve his identity.

316. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 103.

317. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 69.

318. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 109.

319. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 113.

320. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 113.

321. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 112.

322. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 139.

In any case, Chief Bromden is not nearly the only one on the ward who has problems with identity. For instance, Harding considers himself, the other inmates and even the doctor to be rabbits. He explains his theory to McMurphy:

“Mr McMurphy ... my friend ... I’m not a chicken, I’m a rabbit. The doctor is a rabbit. Cheswick there is a rabbit. Billy Bibbit is a rabbit. All of us here are rabbits of varying ages and degrees, hippity-hopping through our Walt Disney world. [...] We’re all in here because we can’t adjust to our rabbithood. We need a good strong wolf like the nurse to teach us our place.”³²³

Harding as well as the other patients is obviously indoctrinated with this absurd and ridiculous idea by the institution. On one hand, being voluntarily institutionalized, Harding and the others thought themselves to be “different”³²⁴ even before their confinement. More precisely, they are victims of their own feeling of being misfits which results from the condemnation of their personalities by society. When McMurphy asks Harding what has led him to his incarceration, he responds:

“Guilt. Shame. Fear. Self-belittlement. [...] I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn’t the practices, I don’t think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me – and the great voice of millions chanting, ‘Shame. Shame. Shame.’ It’s the society’s way of dealing with someone different.”³²⁵

On the other hand, as Ware suggests, the inmates receive “no help from the hospital because the environment is conducive to mental illness not to mental health.”³²⁶ In other words, as Lupack argues, “the nurse whose role is to restore their health only aggravates their situation.”³²⁷ More precisely, she further deprives them of their identity and self-worth. For instance, Billy Bibbit has problems with his own sexuality since his only experience is painful – while he was proposing marriage to his girlfriend, he was not able to finish the proposal because of his speech impediment. He is forced to recall that traumatic moment during one of the therapy sessions:

“And even when I pr-proposed, I flubbed it. I said ‘Huh-honey, will you muh-muh-muh-muh-muh ...’ till the girl broke out laughing.”

323. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 49-50.

324. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 237.

325. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 237.

326. Ware, “The Vanishing American,” 6.

327. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 96.

Nurse's voice, I can't see where it comes from: "Your mother has spoken to me about this girl Billy. [...] What would you speculate it was about her that frightened you so, Billy?"

"I was in luh-love with her."³²⁸

As if the degradation of Billy's proposal by the girl's laughter were not enough, he is further humiliated (by Ratchet's comment about his mother) in front of the other patients. McMurphy compares these therapeutic discussions during which a participant's most intimate issues are exposed and analysed and consequently judged to a "pecking party."³²⁹ McMurphy explains his analogy to Harding:

"The flock gets sight of a spot of blood on some chicken and they all go peckin' at it, see, till they rip the chicken to shreds, blood and bones and feathers. But usually a couple of the flock gets spotted in the fracas, then it's their turn."³³⁰

Indeed, the notion of their own impotence is not suppressed but cultivated, if not instilled, in the inmates' minds. Billy Bibbit's situation and the way Nurse Ratchet treats him are demonstrative. According to Lupack, she perpetually intends to convince him that he "is unable to function satisfactorily with women and gives him the subliminal message that he should not even try."³³¹ After he finally, despite the nurse's recommendations, plucks up the courage to try and loses his virginity with Candy, she is "ashamed"³³² of him and expresses her worries about "how your poor mother is going to take this."³³³ The thought of Mrs. Bibbit's disappointment and judgment subsequently leads Billy to commit suicide. "Though over thirty," Lupack concludes, "Billy [...] remains the perpetual child, answerable to a double despot, his real mother, Mrs. Bibbit, and his surrogate mother, Big Nurse."³³⁴ Therefore, it can be concluded that the reason why the institution does not perceive madness, according to Foucault, as "the absolute form of contradiction"³³⁵ but rather as "a minority status, an aspect of itself that does not have the right to autonomy, and can live only grafted onto the world of

328. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 107.

329. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 44.

330. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 44.

331. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 178.

332. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 242.

333. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 242.

334. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 90.

335. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 252.

reason.”³³⁶ As Foucault concludes, in the eyes of “the new reason [...] madness is childhood.”³³⁷

The main antagonist of the novel, Nurse Ratchet, is portrayed as a cold, dehumanized woman with “dry-ice eyes” and artificial “doll-smile.”³³⁸ Chief Bromden, who compares her to “a watchful robot,”³³⁹ also considers her to be “a real veteran at adjusting things.”³⁴⁰ As a supreme agent of the Combine and the real manager of the institution, she has many powers. First, “she has a genius for insinuation;”³⁴¹ even though she never directly accuses anyone of anything, it seems to one that he has been “accused of a multitude of things.”³⁴² In this way she clearly matches Foucault’s prototype of “the keeper” who “intervenes without weapons, without instruments of constraint, with observation and language only.”³⁴³ For example, Billy’s feeling of guilt, instilled in him by Nurse Ratchet after he is discovered with Candy, is so strong that it makes him kill himself. Second, she can slow down or speed up time on the ward as she “is able to set the wall clock at whatever speed she wants.”³⁴⁴

The scene in the picture-screen windows goes through rapid changes of light to show morning, noon and night – throb off and on furiously with day and dark, and everybody is driven like mad to keep up with that passing of fake time.³⁴⁵

In this manner Ratchet “sets the daily schedule, approves all of the activities, and even determines the length of the inmates’ stays.”³⁴⁶

But most importantly, Big Nurse has the power to “adjust”³⁴⁷ human beings to their surroundings in case they are somehow deviating from the social standard. She has many instruments to achieve that; either she can dope them with pills or use “the Therapeutic Community” (whose goal is “a democratic ward, run completely by the patients and their

336. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 252.

337. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 252.

338. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 22.

339. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 22.

340. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 22.

341. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 49.

342. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 49.

343. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 251.

344. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 59.

345. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 59.

346. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 78.

347. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 22.

votes, working toward making worth-while citizens to turn back Outside onto the street”³⁴⁸); or, she might also induce fear in her patients through pointing to the vegetable-like condition of those who were not willing to adapt; and, if one is not cooperative enough, Big Nurse can have him lobotomized or treated by electroshock therapy, which is presented in Kesey’s novel as a form of punishment for any manifestation of disobedience. Her fear-inducing method is described by Foucault:

Here fear is addressed to the invalid directly, not by instruments but in speech; there is no question of limiting a liberty that rages beyond its bounds, but of marking out and glorifying a region of simple responsibility where any manifestation of madness will be linked to punishment.³⁴⁹

Moreover, as Big Nurse keeps reminding the inmates, all the procedures mentioned are performed for their “*own good*.”³⁵⁰ Therefore, not only are the patients convinced about the “therapeutic value”³⁵¹ of the treatments and punishments but they are even made refer to Big Nurse as “our dear Miss Ratchet” or “sweet, smiling, tender angel of mercy, Mother Ratchet.”³⁵² Crawford et al. observe:

Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT) and (now rarely used) psychosurgery are depicted as perceived punishments rather than treatments in a number of post-war novels. They are both used punitively at times in fiction. Both ECT and psychosurgery can be viewed as doubly displacing treatments, and indeed are presented as such in several novels: not only is the body incarcerated in the asylum, causing restriction of free movement, but the brain and thus the mind become constrained – and in the case of psychosurgery such as lobotomy, irreparably altered.³⁵³

In consideration of the aforesaid, it can be stated that the hospital is depicted in Kesey’s novel as “a factory for the Combine,” whose purpose is to fix up “mistakes made in the neighbourhoods and in the schools and in the churches.”³⁵⁴ Chief Bromden thus views himself and the other inmates on the ward as “products” that are about to be repaired in order for them to fit in the society (that is, to function properly at work, within the family, etc.). The process of fixing of each “product” involves the procedures mentioned above that obviously lead to a person’s self-alienation, dehumanization and, if they do not go completely wrong, one’s

348. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 38.

349. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 251.

350. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 156.

351. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 156.

352. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 46.

353. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 80.

354. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 31.

apparent happiness. However, as Crawford et al. further suggest, “‘adjustment’ to the real world is not always a goal for characters - [...] there are difficulties in ascertaining exactly who decides what notions of sanity or adjustment actually mean.”³⁵⁵ Gelb suggests it is the patient’s willingness to follow the “social rules.” He writes:

We imply to our patients that as long as we keep within safe boundaries and play according to social rules, everything will be all right. We then call ourselves and our patients “healthy.” We remain unaware of our own acceptance of the pervasive and subtle “rules of the game.”³⁵⁶

According to Laing, the state of adjustment can also be just pretended. He explains:

Sanity, i.e. outwardly ‘normal’ appearance, dress, behaviour, motor and verbal (everything observable),” is in this case “maintained by a false-self system while the ‘self’ had come to be more and more engaged not in a world of its own but in the world as seen by the self. I am quite sure that a good number of ‘cures’ of psychotics consist in the fact that the patient has decided, for one reason or other, once more to play at being sane.”³⁵⁷

In addition, Laing also claims that “it is not uncommon for depersonalized patients [...] to speak of having murdered their selves and also having lost or been robbed of their selves.”³⁵⁸ He further writes that “the attempt to kill the self may be undertaken intentionally”³⁵⁹ as a result of one’s indoctrinated sense of guilt. He concludes:

Thus I would wish to emphasize that our ‘normal’ ‘adjusted’ state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true potentialities, that many of us are only too successful in acquiring a false self to adapt to false realities.³⁶⁰

Nonetheless, there is certainly one character in the novel who seems to be immune to the institution’s powers and who defies Ratchet’s lunatic “world of precision efficiency and tidiness.”³⁶¹ With the arrival of Randal Patrick McMurphy Ratchet’s order on the ward begins to crumble. Chief Bromden introduces him as someone, who, unlike the other newcomers, does not “creep in the door and slide along the wall and stand scared till the black boys come sign for him and take him into the shower room.”³⁶² In contrast, his voice is loud and he

355. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 76.

356. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 198.

357. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 148.

358. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 149.

359. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 163.

360. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 14.

361. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 22.

362. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 9.

sounds as “big”³⁶³ as Bromden’s father used to sound. In short, it is clear that McMurphy, contrary to expectations, does not suffer from feelings of his own inferiority. Indeed, he did not appear on the ward because of a kind of distress or disability. On the contrary, he was admitted to the hospital, just as Yossarian in *Catch-22*, as a result of his effort to feign madness – which, according to Crawford et al., “can in some senses be seen as a form of supreme rationality”³⁶⁴ as it is “preferable to the battleground of war or a prison environment.”³⁶⁵ By all means, McMurphy’s mere presence immediately begins to disturb the sickly atmosphere of fear and sterility. For instance, he happens to be the first inmate who is not afraid to express himself, besides other things, by laughter. Truly, laughing aloud is something the other patients are not used to as “the institution itself prohibits it.”³⁶⁶ Chief well describes the powerful moment that takes place after McMurphy introduces himself to his silent audience:

He stands there waiting, and when nobody makes a move to say anything to him he commences to laugh. Nobody can tell exactly why he laughs; there’s nothing funny going on. But it’s not the way that Public Relation laughs, it’s free and loud and it comes out of his wide grinning mouth and spreads in rings bigger and bigger till it’s lapping against the walls all over the ward. Not like that fat Public Relation laugh. This sounds real. I realize all of a sudden it’s the first laugh I’ve heard in years.³⁶⁷

McMurphy’s laughter, together with his cheerful singing, brings humanity in its train. Being a crucial element of life and passion that was so much absent within the hospital’s walls, it pierces “the silent void and assails the asylum’s order.”³⁶⁸ As Lupack further argues, its liberating power is “a countertherapy” to Big Nurse’s dehumanizing regimen because it “radically undermines her authority.”³⁶⁹

Furthermore, he treats the other inmates not as a bunch of chicken or rabbits (or simply as madmen) but as human beings who are among equals. It is demonstrated, for example, on the way he interacts with them; for instance, after his admission he shakes hands with everybody (even with the chronics); or, he addresses them using in-group identity markers such as man, buddy, etc. Again, “the human touching contrasts,” Lupack writes,

363. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 9.

364. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 70.

365. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 70.

366. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 76.

367. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 10.

368. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 75.

369. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 75.

“with the cold and sterile treatment they receive from Big Nurse.”³⁷⁰ But above all, he keeps reminding them of their own sanity, which is being threatened, ironically, by the institution itself. Shortly after his introduction McMurphy says:

“Damn, what a sorry-looking outfit. You boys don’t look so crazy to me.’ He’s trying to get them to loosen up, the way you see an auctioneer spinning jokes to loosen up the crowd before the bidding starts. ‘Which one of you claims to be the craziest? Which one is the biggest loony? Who runs these card games?’³⁷¹

Similarly, he reacts to Harding’s comparison between the patients and rabbits:

“Man, you’re talkin’ like a fool. You mean to tell me that you’re gonna sit back and let some old blue-haired woman talk you into being a rabbit?”

“Not talk me into it, no. I was born a rabbit. Just look at me. I simply need the nurse to make me happy with my role.”

“You’re no damned rabbit!”

“See the ears? the wiggly nose ? the cute little button nail?”

“You’re talking like a crazy ma –“

“Like a crazy man? How astute.”

“Damn it, Harding, I didn’t mean it like that. You ain’t crazy that way. I mean – hell, I been surprised how sane you guys all are. As near as I can tell you’re not any crazier than the average asshole on the street – “³⁷²

However, McMurphy soon realizes that it is not enough to simply explain them that they are not insane and inferior; they are far too institutionalized, and so they need his further guidance, and, as Thomas H. Fick define it, “‘Bull sessions’ led by the bull goose loony”³⁷³ to revive their sense of identity and potency and to balance out the destructive effect of “the Therapeutic Community.”³⁷⁴ According to Fick, one of McMurphy’s counter-therapies is a process of “replacing an imposed identity with an imagined identity of their own creation.”³⁷⁵ In particular, he applies this therapy on Billy Bibbit, referring to him as “the renowned Billy

370. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 77.

371. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 15.

372. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 49-50.

373. Thomas H. Fick, “The Hipster, the Hero, and the Psychic Frontier in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 43, no. 1/2 (1989): 5.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1347186>.

374. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 37.

375. Fick, “The Hipster, the Hero,” 4.

Club Bibbit³⁷⁶ who is very popular among women. Similarly, after Chief Bromden has lamented over himself being “too little,”³⁷⁷ McMurphy reinvents him in his fantasy:

“There you’ll be. It’s the Big Chief Bromden, cuttin’ down the boulevard – men, women, and kids rockin’ back on their heels to peer at him: ‘Well well well, what giant’s this here, takin’ ten feet at a step and duckin’ for telephone wires?’ [...]”³⁷⁸

Moreover, he teaches the inmates that their endless “passivity may not be the solution to their problem.”³⁷⁹ Even though he does not manage to lift the control panel and thus find his way to watch the baseball match in a bar, “his futile but inspiring effort”³⁸⁰ is so impressive that it influences them in a positive way as it makes them overcome their own, constant pessimism. Therefore, after having been shown the importance of an attempt, the patients follow McMurphy’s example and pluck up the courage to vote for the change of the daily schedule so they could watch the World Series. In Chief Bromden’s imagination McMurphy symbolically pulls the fearful inmates from the safe anonymity of “the fog.” He narrates:

The first hand that comes up, I can tell, is McMurphy’s, because of the bandage where that control panel cut into him when he tried to lift it. And then off down the slope I see them, other hands coming up out of the fog. It’s like ... that big red hand of McMurphy’s is reaching into the fog and dropping down and dragging the men up by their hands, dragging them blinking into the open. First one, then another, then the next. Right on down the line of Acutes, dragging them out of the fog, till there they stand, all twenty of them, raising not just for watching TV, but against the Big Nurse, against her trying to send McMurphy to Disturbed, against the way she’s talked and acted and beat them down for years.³⁸¹

Finally, the last of McMurphy’s counter-therapies, which the patients need to undergo in order for them to “function as individuals” not only within the hospital’s walls but also “outside the institution,”³⁸² is the fishing trip. Although McMurphy still keeps supervising his crew even at the dock (without his supervision they would probably not get that far), once they are on the boat he “stands aside, refusing to help them out”³⁸³ (he knows that they have to start acting on their own). Thus, despite the fact that Chief’s thumb and Candy’s breast are

376. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 80.

377. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 169.

378. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 172.

379. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 79.

380. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 79.

381. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 109.

382. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 79.

383. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 79.

bleeding and everybody is shouting, McMurphy merely laughs while watching the hospital's crew fishing scene – and at that moment his healing laughter is transmitted to the other inmates. Chief Bromden describes the situation:

I noticed Harding is collapsed beside McMurphy and is laughing too. And Scanlon from the bottom of the boat. At their own selves as well as at the rest of us. And the girl, with her eyes still smarting as she looks from her white breast to her red one, she starts laughing. And Sefelt and the doctor, and all. It started slow and pumped itself full, swelling the men bigger and bigger.³⁸⁴

Nonetheless, as Fick argues, even though “McMurphy’s revolution succeeds” (in terms of “turning rabbits into men”), it finally destroys him. More precisely, “McMurphy is destroyed not by the Combine but by the united needs of the inmates.”³⁸⁵ In other words, as Lupack points out, “when he stops protecting his own vitals and commits to protecting those of others Ratched is finally able to get to him.”³⁸⁶ For instance, when he sees that George is being humiliated and bullied by the black boys, he defends him through confronting the aides in a fight as a result of which he is sent to the electroshock therapy. But most importantly, in consequence of Billy Bibbit’s suicide and McMurphy’s subsequent assault on Big Nurse, the doctors completely deprive him of his spirit by having him lobotomized. Nonetheless, as Lupack argues, although Nurse Ratchet finally wins her struggle with McMurphy, “her victory is Pyrrhic”³⁸⁷ as McMurphy has already passed the essence of his persona to the other inmates.³⁸⁸

According to Lupack, McMurphy’s “sacrifice makes him their savior.”³⁸⁹ Therefore, he can be perceived as a redeemer figure.³⁹⁰ Truly, it is obvious that after the trip the men’s courage and sense of identity are, at least partially, restored as they are able to laugh at themselves or make fun from the orderlies. “Before being removed from the ward [...],” Lupack writes, “McMurphy shakes Harding’s hand one last time, symbolically transferring authority back to him.”³⁹¹ But above all, the one who is influenced the most by McMurphy’s presence on the ward is definitely Chief Bromden. First, thanks to him Chief Bromden

384. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 193.

385. Fick, “The Hipster, the Hero,” 10.

386. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 85.

387. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 88.

388. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 88.

389. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 86.

390. Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*, 133.

391. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 83.

retrieves the ability of speech, after having been silent for a long time, as he says “thank you” when McMurphy offers him a gum. Second, as a result of McMurphy’s imagined reconstruction of Chief’s lost identity (the one of “the Big Chief Bromden”) he is able to liberate himself from the artificial identity of “Chief Broom,” mockingly imposed on him by the aides – the following day he simply refuses to sweep the floor. Finally, after his saviour’s death he finds his way to freedom by following McMurphy’s plan - lifting the control panel and breaking the window. Even though in the end McMurphy cannot literally go with him, Chief Bromden does not leave him completely; through suffocating him he relieves McMurphy’s spirit from the prison of his lobotomized mind and so they escape both – one spiritually and the other one both spiritually and physically. Referring to McMurphy’s rebellion, Lupack concludes:

His rebellion demonstrates to the inmates that antiorder is sanity, that true madness [...] is not their alleged irrationality but the deadly order, system, and rationality of the institution. When the rational is perverted, as on Ratchet’s ward, reason becomes madness, and the only solution lies in the disease. The society that tries to cure its misfits by standardizing and straitjacketing them only causes the illness it quarantines.
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The way Ken Kesey depicts the mental institution thus seems to match Foucault’s observation that “by a paradoxical circle, madness finally appears as the only reason for a confinement whose profound unreason it symbolizes.”³⁹³ It also demonstrates that the asylum’s character in the post-war era, as portrayed in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, remains the same as at the turn of the 18th and 19th century; at that time, Foucault writes, madness was not treated in the asylum, “whose chief concern was to sever or to ‘correct.’”³⁹⁴ Indeed, the hospital is depicted by Ken Kesey a repressive “institution of social control”³⁹⁵ or “a means for reinforcing social conformity;”³⁹⁶ the patient in there, Goffman observes, is subdued to “a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanities of self”³⁹⁷ until it is completely destroyed and substituted with an artificial identity (that is, one’s “false self” as defined by Laing) which is compliant with the social standard. Therefore, the madness of the

392. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 84.

393. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 227.

394. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 159.

395. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 62.

396. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 62.

397. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Penguin, 1961), 24.

mental institution as portrayed in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* has a destructive impact on life and humanity and mental health of the inmates; the hospital does not comply at all with the essential criterion for one's sanity – which is, as Gelb defines it, “freedom to move or struggle [...] toward optimal human potential.”³⁹⁸ Therefore, the patients need McMurphy's supervision and counter-therapies and his strong character in order for them to realize this potential and attain their freedom – the fundamental condition for one's mental health.

398. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 193.

5 CONCLUSION

Each of the novels analysed in this thesis portrays “a microcosm”³⁹⁹ of society that is governed by a complex structure of power and that in certain ways suppresses individuality and humanity, thus leading its members to a state of mechanized conformity; for example, in *Catch-22* it is the military driven by absurd bureaucracy which takes control over the pilots’ lives for the sake of its leaders’ hollow profit; or, equally, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* it is the military institution that sends young and innocent “babies”⁴⁰⁰ to war and that is responsible for the Dresden massacre during which 135,000 human beings die for the benefit of nobody; and, finally, in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* it is the sterile ward in the mental hospital where the inmates are subdued to dehumanizing processes that deprive them of their own identities and convert them into the mere particles for the machine.

The thesis investigated that the vast majority of the members of every institution are indoctrinated with the principles or values of the dominant group in society. In other words, they have a tendency to unquestioningly follow certain patterns of thinking and conduct that are standardised in society, although they are depicted as absurd and destructive; for instance, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* it is patriotism and the adjustment of the human mind to the idea of war that lead to the destruction of Dresden and it is Christianity and the notion of heroism that makes Roland Weary commit an act of violence on his compatriot; or, similarly, in *Catch-22* it is the belief in patriotism that drives the pilots to fly more and more missions without any particular purpose and it is capitalism and its competitive nature that lead the higher-rank officers to order them; and, finally, in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* it is the notion of their own insanity and impotence that the inmates on the ward are inoculated with and that prevents them from acting as independent human beings.

The protagonists of the novels are considered to be insane, either by themselves or by the rest of society (or both), due to the fact that their own principles or values are not in accordance with the social standard designed by the dominant group in society. As a result of such a discrepancy, their patterns of thinking and behaviour are thought by others to be strange and abnormal; for instance, Yossarian is perceived by others as a madman because he is not willing to die for his country or because he refuses to wear uniform after Snowden bleeds over it; or, Billy Pilgrim is considered to be insane after he tries to share his extra-

399. Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption*, 24.

400. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 8.

terrestrial experience with the people around him; and, finally, McMurphy is viewed as a psychopath or “a sex maniac”⁴⁰¹ due to his lively and passionate character which disturbs the inhumane environment of the ward.

The conclusions drawn from the studies by Foucault and Laing show that even though society associates madness with the mere disease which should be treated, the open mind of a madman (that is, according to Laing, his or her “inner self”) can potentially have access to special insights into the world that one might intend to communicate to the people that belong to the dominant group. However, those insights often cannot be communicated because of the people’s inability to connect to the insane person’s “inner self” or due to their unwillingness to listen to him (or both). In other words, one is simply misunderstood or ignored by others; for example, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* Rumfoord does not even make any effort to hear Billy Pilgrim’s testimony about the Dresden massacre as he considers him to suffer from a mental disease called echolalia; or, in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* Chief Bromden is not able to share his insights with nobody else except McMurphy due to his pretended muteness; or, in *Catch-22* Clevinger does not seem to understand Yossarian’s point that “they are trying to kill me”⁴⁰² as his mindset has already adapted to the idea of war and he is thus imposing his patterns of thinking on Yossarian. Moreover, as Foucault and Laing observe, the goal of the modern psychiatry is not mutual understanding between the man of reason and the madman but rather the adjustment of the madman’s deviating patterns of thinking and conduct to the social standard, or, simply, the elimination of irregularities⁴⁰³ (Laing defines it as the creation of one’s “false self”). From the perspective of society, any unconventional beliefs should be corrected because they are perceived as a potential threat to her principles and values and thus are considered to be symptoms of a mental illness.⁴⁰⁴

Nevertheless, Gelb writes that “to ‘get along’” in a “corrupt society may not really be the most healthy and productive way of living.”⁴⁰⁵ He further argues that “mental health is related to the capacity for social living and is, therefore, dependent on the social context in which that social living takes place.”⁴⁰⁶ As the thesis observed, in the novels examined the

401. Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 64.

402. Heller, *Catch-22*, 14.

403. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 258.

404. Boyle, “‘Schizophrenia’ Re-Evaluated,” 30.

405. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 198.

406. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 196.

world is depicted as “a madhouse”⁴⁰⁷ and society is portrayed as twisted and insane; in *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* material profit and fame are put over individual lives; or, in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* mechanical precision and efficiency are valued more than humanity. According to Gelb, there is no “psychopathology more serious” than “an epidemic of dehumanization”⁴⁰⁸ caused by war. Similarly, the mental institution, whose real goal is the not the patient’s mental health but one’s conformity and depersonalization, cannot really provide the patient with a suitable environment for his or her treatment. In contrast, it is the very cause of the madness it intends to treat.⁴⁰⁹

In view of the above, it can be concluded that the authors portray both positive and negative dimensions in madness. On one hand, it is insanity of the institutions (and the blind followers of the ideologies and beliefs they are driven by) that is destructive as it leads to death and dehumanization. On the other hand, it is the protagonists’ madness that resides in their resistance against the institutions and their oppressive force; or, in other words, in their refusal of the perverted values that society tries to impose on them. In this manner, their deviating patterns of thought and conduct (that are perceived by the dominant group as symptoms of their madness) have a positive impact on humanity. First, according to Crawford et al. and Gross, they are life-preserving and liberating; *Catch-22* ends with Yossarian’s desertion as he refuses to fly more missions that would endanger not only his life but also the lives of many others; or, in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* Chief Bromden finally sets himself free after McMurphy helps him, at least partially, retrieve his identity and strength; and, finally, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* Billy Pilgrim withdraws from the cruel reality of war to Tralfamadore and to the world of science-fiction in order to reconstruct himself. Second, the protagonists’ madness also influences the other characters as it provides them with a positive example; in *Catch-22* Yossarian influences Chaplain Tapman who is already planning his own rebellion; or, in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* it is thanks to the presence of McMurphy and his counter-therapies that Harding perceives himself and the other inmates as human beings again.

In conclusion, the protagonists’ madness is truly depicted in the novels as “a social construction.”⁴¹⁰ It is not a representation of mental illness, but on the contrary, it is “a mind-

407. Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel*, 200.

408. Gelb, “Mental Health in a Corrupt Society,” 195.

409. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 225-228.

410. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 4.

expanding state”⁴¹¹ that is, as Crawford et al. conclude, “not only necessary for survival” but also the “only route to freedom.”⁴¹² Such a form of madness is constructive and it is the only response of a healthy mind to the mad world.

411. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 22.

412. Crawford, Baker, Carter, Brown, Lipsedge, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, 47.

RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá téma šílenství v americké poválečné literatuře, zejména v díle Josepha Hellera, Kurta Vonneguta a Kena Keseyho. Jak je již naznačeno v úvodní kapitole, šílenství může být vyobrazeno v literatuře mnoha způsoby. Na jednu stranu se může jednat o hrůzostrašný psychický stav, který může potenciálně vést k destruktivnímu chování. Na druhou stranu je však šílenství v mnohých dílech vykresleno jako společenský mýtus – v takovém případě má šílený hrdina románu přístup k neobyčejnému poznání, které jej činí osvícenějším než je většina lidí ve společnosti, jimž jejich racionalita tento přístup zamezila. Cílem práce je zjistit, jaký dopad má na život a okolí hrdinů každého románu jejich šílenství.

První část druhé kapitoly se zaměřuje na vývoj vztahu mezi šílenstvím a společností od středověku až do druhé poloviny dvacátého století. Zatímco v minulosti spolu rozum a šílenství stále ještě vedly dialog, v současnosti rozum se šílenstvím již nekomunikuje, neboť je staví do roviny psychické choroby, kterou je třeba léčit. Podle Michela Foucaulta zlom nastal v době osvícenství a to v důsledku asociace šílenství s tehdy obávanou leprou. V této části kapitoly je také popsán zrod instituce psychiatrické léčebny a její charakter, stejně jako metody léčby, po druhé světové válce. Druhá část této kapitoly se zabývá sociopolitickým kontextem poválečné Ameriky. Historik James T. Patterson a kritik Malcolm Bradbury vyzdvihují nejen materiální nadbytek a technologickou vyspělost tehdejší americké společnosti, ale také její konformnost, paranoiu a válečnou mentalitu.

Druhá kapitola je věnována vyobrazení tématu šílenství v Hellerově románu *Hlava-22*. V díle jeho autor představuje absurdní svět hnaný válečným štváčstvím a osobními ambicemi armádních velitelů, kteří posílají své podřízené na smrt v nesmyslné a zdánlivě nekonečné válce. Hlavní hrdina Yossarian je ostatními považován za blázna, neboť odmítá nosit uniformu a účastnit se dalších misí poté, co jeho kamarád během jedné z nich umře. Jeho šílenství je tedy projevem nesouladu jeho vlastních hodnot a mentality s dominantními a zvrácenými principy společnosti ve válce, kde jsou lidské bytosti redukovány na pouhé armádní kvantity. Nemá tedy nic společného s psychickou poruchou; naopak, nekonvenční a bizarní způsoby jeho myšlení a chování mají pozitivní dopad nejen na jeho život, ale i na životy lidí v jeho okolí (román končí Yossarianovou dezercí, čímž zachrání život nejen sobě, ale potenciálně i mnohým dalším, kterým jde tímto svým činem příkladem). Jeho bláznovství je tedy, na rozdíl od institucionalizovaného šílenství armády, kreativní a konstruktivní. Je totiž projevem nespoutaného lidského ducha a touhy po svobodě.

Třetí kapitola zkoumá vykreslení tématu šílenství v románu Kurta Vonneguta Játka č. 5. Hlavní hrdina románu Billy Pilgrim je po návratu z války hospitalizovaný v psychiatrické léčebně. Ve válce zažil nespočet traumatizujících momentů, jako například bombardování Drážďan spojeneckými silami, při němž zahynulo 135,000 lidí. Billy, který bombardování přežil ukrytý v prostorách jatek, se účastnil vyhrabávání mrtvol ze sutí v lunární krajině vybombardovaného města. Byl mimo jiné i svědkem poprav svého krajana, učitele Edgara Derbyho, který byl souzen a odsouzen k smrti za plundrování poté co si chtěl domů odvézt čajovou konvici, která byla majetkem jednoho z mrtvých civilistů. Po válce Billy Pilgrim cestuje v čase a je také unesen mimozemšťany na planetu Tralfamadore. Ostatní lidé ho považují za blázna a jeho příběhy z planety Tralfamadore, kde je nahý vystaven obdivu v místní Zoologické zahradě, mu nevěří ani jeho vlastní dcera. Billyho únik do světa fantazie je však cestou do nových dimenzí poznání; na planetě Tralfamadore rozmlouvá s místními obyvateli o lidském druhu, jeho válečné mentalitě a o pravé podstatě času. Bláznovství Billyho Pilgrima je tedy projevem jeho snahy přetvořit vlastní svět; jeho pravé já, které není v souladu s krutostí okolního světa, nedokáže již být jeho součástí. Jeho šílenství je tedy, podobně jako šílenství Yossarianovo, vyobrazeno jako stav otevřené mysli a touha po alternativní realitě. Je tedy opět konstruktivní a životodárné.

Čtvrtá kapitola se zabývá tématem šílenství v Keseyho románu Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem. Román je zasazen do prostředí psychiatrické léčebny, kde jsou místní chovanci podrobena odlidšťujícím terapeutickým metodám (jako je např. tzv. terapeutická komunita, elektrošoková terapie, lobotomie atd.) za účelem přizpůsobení jejich distinktivních osobností společenské normě. Takový stav je z pohledu instituce brán jako duševní zdraví, v románu má ale charakter odcizení, ztráty osobnosti a v mnohých případech i samotné lidskosti. Vypravěčem je Náčelník Bromden, který je izolovaný od okolního světa v důsledku předstírané hluchoněmoty. Přestože je v očích velké sestry a ošetřovatelů jen pouhý objekt, který bezduše zametá podlahu na oddělení. Náčelník Bromden má neobvyklý vhled do skutečné podstaty nemocnice a jejích léčebných postupů – nemá však dostatečné sebevědomí na to, aby se represivnímu režimu postavil na odpor. Až s příchodem Randalla Patricka McMurphyho, který svojí nespoutanou a živelnou povahou výrazným způsobem naruší sterilní a odlidšťující prostředí léčebny, si Náčelník Bromden (stejně jako ostatní chovanci) znovu uvědomí svůj lidský potenciál a uchopí nejen osud svůj, ale i osud McMurphyho, pevněji do svých rukou. Přestože McMurphy, který své bláznovství zpočátku pouze předstírá, je do útulku přijat s diagnózou psychopata a sexuálního maniaka, jeho výrazný charakter a

živelná povaha má na ostatní pacienty skutečně léčebný a životodárný účinek. Je totiž jakousi proti-terapií vůči odlidšťujícím metodám nemocnice, díky které si chovanci znovu uvědomí své vlastní duševní zdraví. Psychiatrická léčebna je tedy v románu vyobrazena jako samotná příčina šílenství, které se paradoxně snaží léčit. Oproti tomu, McMurphyho nespoutaný duch a jeho touha po svobodě, které jsou z pohledu instituce a společnosti vnímány jako symptomy psychické poruchy, jsou z pohledu Keseyho projevem skutečného duševního zdraví.

Závěrečná kapitola shrnuje poznatky práce. Jsou v ní porovnány jednotlivé represivní instituce, jak jsou vyobrazeny ve vybraných románech, a prostředky, pomocí nichž se snaží vést jejich členy ke konformitě. Kapitola se dále zabývá hlavními hrdiny románů a diskrepancí mezi jejich vlastními hodnotami a mentalitou většinové společnosti, na základě které jsou hlavní hrdinové považováni ostatními za blázny. Nicméně, jejich bláznovství je vlastně žádoucí stav pravého poznání, uvědomění si vlastních hodnot a vůle za ně bojovat. Bizarní chování a smýšlení hlavních hrdinů má pozitivní dopad buď na jejich vlastní životy (v případě Billyho Pilgrima) nebo i na životy lidí v jejich okolí (v případě Yossariana a McMurphyho). Šílenství je tedy v románech vyobrazeno jako sociální konstrukt, neboť je ve skutečnosti projevem opravdového duševního zdraví a lidskosti. Je kreativní, konstruktivní a životodárné.

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