

**LEAVING THE FORMATION:  
MADNESS, RESISTANCE, AND REDEMPTION  
IN THE FICTION OF TIMOTHY FINDLEY**

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Graduate Programme in English  
York University  
North York, Ontario**

**June 1999**



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by Lisa Salem-Wiseman

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## ABSTRACT

Since he began writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Timothy Findley has published nine novels, three collections of short stories, three plays and one memoir, nearly all of which are marked by the motif of madness. This study examines the depiction of madness in Findley's fiction through the lens of the theories of the anti-psychiatry movement, particularly those of R.D. Laing and David Cooper.

Findley began writing at the height of the popularity of the anti-psychiatry movement, at a time when Laing's theories on madness were earning a great deal of popular attention in North America. His view of madness, as articulated through his fiction, is remarkably consistent with that presented by the proponents of the anti-psychiatry movement: both address the wide-scale destruction of human and non-human life through the misapplication of human beings' rational impulses; both view madness as a potentially revolutionary force; and both recognize rational civilization's impulse to impose the label of "mad" upon those individuals who deviate from society's norms, expunging such individuals from society in an attempt to impose a distance between reason and its opposite. According to this view, "mad" individuals – whose perceptions are controlled, not by conscious, rational processes, but by unconscious ones – are able to resist and possibly transform the repressive, destructive norms of their society. Despite their society's diagnosis, it is not the individuals who react against the norms of society who are insane, but the society itself; this is effectively illustrated in Findley's novels, in which those characters who are labelled "mad" exhibit what is recognizably the most "sane" behaviour of all.

In this world which continues to permit systemic violence and terror, it is those who "leave the formation" of modern rational civilization, rejecting the tyranny of "insane" social systems, who alone are able to gain a clear perspective on that civilization. If we would see beyond our narrow definitions of what is acceptable to embrace their imaginative vision of the world, we could perhaps redeem the sense of wonder and the spirit of benevolence that we have lost in the process of civilization.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**Dedicated to the memory of Professor Linda Lamont-Stewart  
1949-1998**

There are many people who made the completion of this project possible, and to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. First, I am extremely grateful for the support, encouragement, and practical expertise of Susan Warwick, who took over the supervising of this dissertation under difficult circumstances, and who more than rose to the occasion in spite of her own taxing schedule and previous commitments. I thank her, and my other committee members, Len Early and John Lennox, for their supportive, insightful, and extremely helpful comments throughout the writing process. I also wish to thank my external examiner, Donna Pennee, for her encouraging and helpful remarks concerning the completed work, and for helping to make the oral examination a relatively painless experience.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to be a part of an incredibly loving and supportive family; thanks must go to my parents, Shia and Jocelyne, and my brother Andrew, who have given me unconditional support and encouragement, and to Chris and Jean Wiseman, who have shared – long-distance – the emotional ups and downs that accompany the writing of a dissertation: the anxiety, the frustration, and – at long last – the relief and joy.

Finally, I cannot possibly convey the gratitude I owe my husband, Jonathan, whose enduring love, patience, editorial assistance, and seemingly inexhaustible store of pep-talks have made the writing of this dissertation possible. His unfailing belief in my ability to do this finally convinced even me. For this, and so much more, I thank him.

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**INTRODUCTION: "...SOME KIND OF ABSOLUTE CLARITY"**

**[O]ne thing about the "mad," you see, is they don't like lies. So this is why I seize so often upon these people as the heroes of my work. It's only because they have this straight, flung-out connection through the mind to some kind of absolute clarity. And this is what fiction is all about: achieving the clarity obscured by facts.**

**Timothy Findley, *Inside Memory*, 181.**

This statement should come as no surprise to readers familiar with Timothy Findley's work; the moral and epistemological privileges ascribed to madness<sup>1</sup> are recurring leitmotifs in Findley's texts, typically deployed to contest the often submerged repressive tendencies of our ostensibly rational Western culture. As I will argue, Findley's views on madness are remarkably consistent with those of the proponents of the so-called "anti-psychiatry" movement, and most notably the British psychiatrists R.D. Laing and David Cooper, whose works provide a useful lens through which to read Findley's portrayals of madness. Laing's popularity was not limited to either Britain or the psychiatric profession, but, as Zbigniew Kotowicz notes, "[h]is public presence was such that he became a household name." Kotowicz continues:

**He was read widely by professionals and lay persons alike. Books were written about him, interviews with him were conducted and published, references to his works could be found everywhere. His works were almost immediately translated into major foreign languages and he became a voice heard throughout Europe and across the Atlantic (Kotowicz 1).**

Laing has said of himself, "I suppose I'm one of the symptoms of the times" (Mezan lxxv). These times – the 1960s – were themselves characterized by a challenging of authority and a searching for alternatives to the "establishment" of contemporary capitalist society; the anti-psychiatry movement is merely one element of the general

social climate, which was marked by feelings of dissatisfaction with contemporary capitalist society and a desire to affirm the life, freedom, and dignity of individual human beings<sup>2</sup>. As Kotowicz explains, “Laing touched a raw nerve...he attempted to politicize and spiritualize, so to speak, the discourse of madness and in the process, in a truly anarchic fashion, he questioned, doubted, ridiculed some of the fundamental precepts that govern our society” (Kotowicz 1; my ellipsis). Findley’s first novel, *The Last of the Crazy People*, was written at the height of the popularity of the anti-psychiatry movement, and was published in 1967, the same year as Laing and Cooper’s *Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation* and the publication of Laing’s *The Politics of Experience*. Laing’s earlier work – particularly *The Divided Self* (1960) and *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1964) – had won him international fame. Thus, during the period in which Findley was developing the thematics that recur throughout his body of work, Laing’s ideas about madness were receiving a great deal of popular attention.

Madness in Findley’s works reflects the following definition presented by David Cooper in *The Language of Madness*:

Madness is latent in each of us as the possibility of a near total destructuring of the normal structures of existence with a view to the restructuring of a less alienated (i.e. governed by internalized forces of ‘otherness’) form of existence in a new personal space...It is only when, at some arbitrary point, a person ceases to conform sufficiently with social conventions that that person is regarded socially as mad, and at that point in bourgeois society at this moment in history the medical apparatus is brought into play (Cooper 1978: 154-155).

Findley’s work subverts standardized notions of civilization, articulating the realities and concerns of those who are deemed “mad,” “deviant” or “indigent” by a society which is organized by sets of binary structures embedded in, and constitutive of, Western



civilization. Certainly, Findley's novels are peopled with characters that could be called "insane" in the sense that they reject the vision of reality that dominates in the moral world of Findley's fiction. In this world which continues to permit systemic violence and terror, it is these characters, who reject the tyranny of "insane" social systems, who do in fact display what Findley has called "the ultimate sanity" (Gibson 122).

Findley has commented in a number of interviews<sup>3</sup> on the prevalence of "mad" characters in his work, and has said, in conversation with Graeme Gibson, that the greatest pleasure in his work as a novelist rises from "having that special twisted view which is a dependence on the insane people to do sane things" (122). Findley is openly critical of authoritarian structures which operate in our supposedly "free" society, and he often confronts – in his interviews, addresses, and non-fiction writing<sup>4</sup>, as well as in his fiction – the damage inflicted upon human beings by the prevailing social, political, military and medical establishments which structure and control our reality. Madness, in his fiction, operates as a space of resistance to the repressive and alienating norms of twentieth-century Western capitalist, technological society, and provides the only possible means by which the human race can redeem itself from the state of alienation that our civilization has produced. Nearly all of Findley's novels, and many of his short stories, feature protagonists who, if not clinically insane, nevertheless attempt to resist the conventions and restrictions of their society, which often results in their being labelled "mad." By virtue of their marginal position, Findley's characters are able to both recognize and reject tyranny, choosing instead the seemingly "irrational" action as morally preferable. Such actions – *The Wars's* Robert Ross freeing the horses, for

example – signify a call to overturn the systems which have allowed war, murder and hypocrisy – themes which are so prevalent in Findley’s fiction – to flourish. Such characters are typically classified as mad, and expunged from society, in a fictionalized enactment of what Foucault identifies, in his *Madness and Civilization*, as reason’s impulse to impose a physical separation between itself and unreason’s perceived threat. Despite their society’s diagnosis, it is not the individuals who react against the norms of society, but the society – which sanctions evil – which is itself insane; this is effectively illustrated in Findley’s novels, in which those characters who are labelled “mad” exhibit what is recognizably the most “sane” behaviour of all. However, in his juxtaposition of the “sane” behaviour of the mad individual and the “mad” behaviour of Western society in general, Findley does not indict “society” as a generalized, anonymous construct but, rather, reveals through his narratives how we are ourselves each individually implicated in the very societal violence that we claim to abhor. Characters such as Vanessa Van Horne, Ruth Damarosch, and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley live in a world in which violence is so pervasive that they are unable to recognize the extent of their own complicity within it. While they believe that they are engaged in gestures of resistance, they are heavily implicated in the very systems which oppress them and which threaten to destroy humanity.

Findley’s novels contain several characters who have been diagnosed as schizophrenic – such as Lilah Kemp and Amy Wylie – or who are hospitalized for psychiatric treatment – such as Hooker Winslow, Minna Joyce, and Lily Kilworth. These characters occupy positions from which they are able to resist the norms of society;

however, their potential is limited, due to the impulse of rational society to sequester the mad as “other,” and to “cure” them through intrusive treatments designed to “drag them willy-nilly back into our world” (*Headhunter* 189). Lilah takes her medication, not because she desires conformity, but because she cannot bear to be confined in an asylum, while Lily is sent to an asylum, where she dies in a fire which she herself sets. This notion that any violence and suffering associated with madness springs, not from the mad themselves, but from the treatment of the mad by the sane, is one of many similarities between Findley’s work and the theories of the anti-psychiatrists. David Cooper writes, in *The Language of Madness*:

Of course there is suffering in psychiatrized madness *but this suffering is entirely imposed* by the intervention of techniques, family techniques, other micro-social techniques of evasion and elimination, and then the biggest, most technical and most medically respected evasion and elimination of all – psychiatry and its adjunct professionalisms, psychologists, social workers, nurses, etc... [T]here is a world of difference between this socially imposed suffering and a despair that one chooses, even joyfully, to live through (Cooper 1978: 43; emphasis in original, my ellipsis).

Left alone to their “joyful despair,” Findley’s novels suggest, the mad could lead us to a world of wonder, in which the artificially imposed barriers between “reality” and the imagination are broken down<sup>5</sup>. Given the centrality of madness to Findley’s fiction, and the consistencies between Findley’s and Laing’s views on madness, it is surprising that madness is a motif that, to date, has been addressed by very few Findley scholars<sup>6</sup>. This dissertation, which will examine Findley’s representations of madness within the framework of the theories of R.D. Laing, represents the first full-length study of madness in Findley’s novels.

While a detailed analysis of the anti-psychiatry movement is beyond the scope of this project, I think that, as I will be returning to Laing's theories throughout this dissertation, it is worthwhile to outline some of the central ideas of what are generally thought to be R.D. Laing's three most important books: *The Divided Self* (1960); *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1964); and *The Politics of Experience* (1967). The term "anti-psychiatry" was coined by David Cooper – a South African-born psychiatrist who trained and practiced in Britain – in 1967 to refer to a strain of thinking within psychiatry that was highly critical of traditional psychiatric practices. Although some, including Laing, rejected the term "anti-psychiatry," the psychiatrists associated with this movement – Laing, Cooper, Aaron Esterson, Joseph Berke, Leon Redler, and Morton Schatzman in England; and Thomas Szasz in the United States – were united in their questioning of, not merely particular techniques of psychiatry, but the very foundations of psychiatry itself, including its conception of madness as an illness which can – and must – be "cured" by the intervention of Western medicine. In contrast, the anti-psychiatrists view institutional psychiatry as "an extensive system of violence" (Cooper 1976: 55) directed against human beings, and in which individual psychiatrists participate. According to Cooper, madness is a universal, revolutionary force, which is under attack by the institution of psychiatry, which has invented the idea of "mental illness" in order to justify the incarceration of those who do not fit within the boundaries of "normal" society. The basic tenets of the anti-psychiatry movement include: the identification of "schizophrenia" as, not a sickness, but a label which is arbitrarily attached to individuals whose behaviour does not accord with accepted standards of "normal" behaviour; and the belief that what

psychiatrists call schizophrenia is “either a reaction to a disturbed family...or a healing voyage which would be of benefit if it could be completed without interference” (Tantam 334). In addition, anti-psychiatrists consider the methods of conventional psychiatry – diagnosis, followed by goal-oriented treatment (the goal being the “cure” of the “sick” individual) – to be counter-productive. For the anti-psychiatrists, the isolation of madness as the object of medical study and treatment only perpetuates the patient’s alienation; the affixing of labels such as “schizophrenia” to the individual’s behaviour is, according to anti-psychiatry, the most benign example of the “violence” which is enacted against people by traditional psychiatry; more extreme examples include electroconvulsive therapy, the prescription of powerful chemicals, and surgery. If madness is, not a “disease” to be “cured,” but a state of being, then standard medical solutions – diagnosis, therapy, medication, and surgery – which have as their aim the return of the “madman” to “normal” behaviour and interaction, not only will not achieve their aim, but may actually exacerbate the patient’s alienated condition, creating those very behaviours which are identified as “mad.”

Laing’s first book, *The Divided Self* (1960; 1965), “attempts an existential-phenomenological account of some schizoid and schizophrenic persons” (Laing 1965: 18), while approaching “psychotic” behaviour as an expression of the patient’s existence, not – as it is understood by conventional psychiatry – as the sign of a disease. Laing accepts the term “schizophrenia,” but “phenomenologically and existentially” (18), rather than in the clinical sense; in other words, schizophrenia, for the Laing of *The Divided*

*Self*, is not an illness, but a way of experiencing the world, which he characterizes as “ontological insecurity”:

The individual in the ordinary circumstances of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporary continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body (42).

At the core of *The Divided Self* is a critique of psychiatric discourse; Laing argues for the necessity of discarding the terminology of traditional psychiatry, which, he writes, is “specifically designed to isolate and circumscribe the meaning of the patient’s life to a particular clinical entity,” (13) and thus only succeeds in further alienating the patient. If “madness” is understood as a state of profound alienation from one’s “authentic self,” then a system that has the effect of exacerbating that condition clearly does more harm than good.

After the publication of *The Divided Self*, Laing began work at the Tavistock Clinic in London, where he conducted research into patterns of interpersonal communication and interaction within families of patients diagnosed as schizophrenic. In 1964, Laing and Aaron Esterson published the findings of their ongoing research into the relationship between family interaction and psychosis. This study, which involved interviews with twenty-five female patients – diagnosed as “schizophrenic” by at least two senior psychiatrists at one of two London hospitals – and their families, was published as *Sanity, Madness, and the Family*. The book presents the cases of eleven women chosen from the original twenty-five. The aim was to show that, in each case, the behaviour that has led to

the psychiatric diagnosis is, in fact, “intelligible” in the context of the pattern of interaction of that particular family. Through examining the experience of the psychotic within what they refer to as a “behavioural field,” Laing and Esterson attempt to reveal that behaviour and speech which, out of context, seems bizarre and distorted, can in fact be understood as a reasonable negotiation of the complex and alienating patterns of communication which operate in each of these chosen families. The authors argue that “schizophrenia” is a label referring to behaviour that can be traced to a disorder, not in brain functioning, but in patterns of family interaction; they conclude that “no schizophrenic has been studied whose disturbed pattern of communication has not been shown to be a reflection of, and reaction to, the disturbed and disturbing pattern characterizing his or her family of origin” (Laing and Esterson 95).

In 1967, the British edition of Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* – a text which attempts to account for the constitution of the phenomenon of madness from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries – was published by Tavistock in a series edited by Laing. The edition differed from the American edition in its inclusion of an introduction by David Cooper, which signalled the appropriation of Foucault’s text by the British anti-psychiatry movement<sup>7</sup>. In this early work, Foucault chronicles the discursive construction of madness in modern Europe, arguing that madness only explicitly became a specifiable mental illness at the end of the eighteenth century, when reason became accepted as the definitive trait of our “enlightened” identity. In order to secure this rational identity, however, all behaviour, practices, and beliefs that did not conform to this new self-understanding were excluded or outlawed. Because reason seeks objectivity and mastery,

this exclusion took the form of the confinement and “treatment” of the insane. In other words, in order to cleanse itself of what is other, reason needed to physically separate itself from the perceived threat of unreason, but this separation simultaneously facilitated the study and medicalization of madness – now both spatially and scientifically isolated. There is thus a link, Foucault argues, between the history of reason and the discursive organization of its other – unreason, or madness. As Jürgen Habermas writes, Foucault “classifies insanity among those limit experiences in which Western logos sees itself, with extreme ambivalence, faced with something heterogeneous” (Habermas 240). This heterogeneity, seen as a threat, is to be both feared and treated; yet, Foucault, like many of his philosophical predecessors, takes up this theme of heterogeneity and transgression, and seeks, within the silence of madness, an antidote to the dominating monologue of reason. In his introduction, for example, Foucault writes:

As for a common language [of madness and sanity], there is none; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason *about* madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence (Foucault xi; emphasis in original).

He continues by identifying his project as an “archaeology of that silence” (xi), but that betrays, not only the concealed Romanticism of what is ostensibly a descriptive project, but also the theoretical paradox of any such project. As Jacques Derrida points out in “Cogito and the History of Madness,” in his attempt to provide a history “of madness itself, in its most vibrant state, before being captured by knowledge” (Derrida 34)<sup>8</sup>, he



must necessarily employ the same concepts which were themselves used in the capture and containment of madness. His “archaeology” of the silence which separates reason from madness is, as part of rational discourse, complicit in that silence. As Derrida asks: “Would not the archaeology of silence be the most efficacious and subtle restoration, the repetition, in the most irreducibly ambiguous meaning of the word, of the act perpetrated against madness...?” (Derrida 35) Such a project, if it were to resist the trap of repeating that which it is critiquing, would require “*total* disengagement from the *totality* of the historical language responsible for the exile of madness” (Derrida 35).

In his introduction, Cooper finds in Foucault support for the basic tenet of anti-psychiatry: the idea that madness is a pure, uncorrupted state of being which provides access to certain universal “truths”; and the belief that “madness” is not an illness, but, rather, is the process of healing the true illness which is our present state of alienation. In his introduction, Cooper writes that, “[m]adness has in our age become a sort of lost Truth” (Cooper 1965: vii):

Madness, as Foucault makes so impressively clear in this remarkable book, is a way of seizing in extremis the racinating groundwork of the truth that underlies our more specific realization of what we are about. The truth of madness is what madness is. What madness is is a form of vision that destroys itself by its own choice of oblivion in the face of existing forms of social tactics and strategy (viii).

It is highly likely that the appeal of Foucault for the anti-psychiatrists lies in the Rousseauian framework that underlies his project. As Habermas points out, “Foucault suspects that behind the psychiatrically engendered phenomenon of mental illness, and indeed behind the various masks of madness at that time, there is something authentic whose sealed mouth need only be opened up” (Habermas 240).

The belief in the existence of a true and authentic human essence, which can be accessed through madness, is reflected in Laing's *The Politics of Experience*, which appeared in 1967, and for which he has become notorious. The book – which ends with a poetic stream-of-consciousness piece titled “The Bird of Paradise,” whose final line reads “If I could turn you on, if I could drive you out of your wretched mind, if I could tell you I would let you know” (Laing 1967: 138) – was considered by many of Laing's critics as evidence of the author's insanity. At the very least, he was seen to have crossed the line between serious psychiatrist and counter-culture guru<sup>9</sup>. While in *The Divided Self* he explores schizophrenia as an ontological state, and in *Sanity, Madness and the Family* he examines madness within “behavioural fields,” in *The Politics of Experience*, Laing questions, not only the psychiatric establishment, but the entire value system on which our society has based our very concepts of “madness” and “normality.” The modern condition, according to Laing, is itself a condition of alienation; human beings have become estranged from their true and authentic selves, and what is commonly regarded as the “normal” human condition is, in fact, a state of profound alienation:

The “normally” alienated person, by reason of the fact that he acts more or less like everyone else, is taken to be sane. Other forms of alienation that are out of step with the prevailing state of alienation are those that are labeled by the “normal” majority as bad or mad (Laing 1967: 12).

The rebellion against establishment psychiatry – to which *The Politics of Experience* greatly contributed – is consistent with the general *zeitgeist* of the 1960s, a period marked by widespread rebellion against “the establishment” in general. In London in 1967, Laing, Cooper, Leon Redler, and Joseph Berke organized the two-week Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation, in which a group of “eminent scholars and political activists”

(Cooper 1968: 7) – including Herbert Marcuse (the German philosopher and critical theorist, who had recently published *One-Dimensional Man*, a critique of capitalist society) and Stokely Carmichael (the social activist and co-author of *Black Power*) – met to speak about “new ways in which intellectuals might act to change the world” (11). The psychiatrists who organized the congress – two (Laing and Cooper) of whom contributed papers – clearly saw themselves as part of the general interrogation of the structures of power which operate in Western society. After “The Obvious,” Laing’s address to the Congress, *The Politics of Experience*, which was published the same year, is his most overtly political work; in the latter, Laing argues that, in a world in which “[n]ormal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last fifty years” (12), clinical madness – the identification of an individual’s behaviour as aberrant by a member of the psychiatric establishment – has ceased to exist as a meaningful category.

Those human beings who appear “normal,” that is, who have adjusted to the prevailing norms of their society, have done so, according to Laing, “[o]nly by the most outrageous violation of [them]selves” (64). Laing distinguishes between the clinical and ontological criteria for madness by introducing the metaphor of a formation of airplanes:

From an ideal vantage point on the ground, a formation of planes may be observed in the air. One plane may be out of formation. But the whole formation may be off course. The plane that is “out of formation” may be abnormal, bad or “mad,” from the point of view of the formation. But the formation itself may be bad or mad from the point of view of the ideal observer. The plane that is out of formation may also be more or less off course than the formation itself is (81-2).

The identification of an individual as “out of formation” is, according to Laing, the “clinical positivist criterion” for madness, while the notion that an entire society may be

“off course” when viewed from an ideal perspective, is the “ontological criterion” (82). The ontological view of madness determines “mad” behaviour, not according to the prevailing social norms, but according to an ideal of what human behaviour has the potential to be. According to this ideal, the prevailing social norms are themselves “mad.”

While Laing cautions that one must not assume that the person who is “out of formation” is necessarily more “on course” than the formation itself, and that “there is no need to idealize someone just because he is labeled ‘out of formation’,” he nevertheless shows signs of such idealization himself. In a chapter entitled “A Ten-Day Voyage,” Laing gives an account of his friend, Jesse Watkins’s, “journey” into madness and back, and suggests that psychotic experiences can be the path to healing: “Can we not see that this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality?” (116) Laing suggests a new kind of “therapy,” which would consist, not of attempting to force a person out of the “mad” state, but of guiding people through “the stormy passages” of a voyage into madness (116). This view is what has led to Laing being accused of idealizing psychotic experience through the promotion of what Siegler, Osmond and Mann, in their article “Laing’s Models of Madness,” identify as a “psychedelic” model of madness. According to the authors, there is a great deal of danger to Laing’s “implication that schizophrenics will benefit from being seen as persons embarked on a voyage of self-discovery” (Siegler, Osmond, Mann 142). They point out many differences between psychedelic experience and psychotic experience, most notably the fact that “[p]sychedelic voyages are usually voluntary, and the person usually knows what the agent of his changed

perceptions is" (142), unlike psychotic episodes, which are involuntary and considerably more disorienting, frightening, and potentially dangerous for the "voyager." Laing's suggestion that psychosis could represent a path to enlightenment and spiritual growth fails to take into account the terrifying reality of such an experience. The view of madness that Laing expresses in *The Politics of Experience* is unabashedly Romantic in its notion that the mad are visionaries, and that madness can lead the way to a universal truth and a transcendence of the mundane realm of reality. "Madness," writes Laing, "need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death" (110). Although Zbigniew Kotowicz argues that those who accuse Laing of idealizing madness are exaggerating or mis-reading Laing, his argument fails to convince; he cites Laing's acknowledgement that the experience is as often akin to "enslavement" as "liberation," and that only *some* psychotic people may have transcendental experiences, as evidence that Laing did *not* have a romantic (in the pejorative sense) view of madness. While it is true that Laing is not so indiscriminate as to suggest that *all* psychosis leads to enlightenment, the fact remains that his concern lies with the visionary potential of the mad, rather than with the realistic concerns of those who suffer psychotic episodes.

Once we have determined – as both Laing and Findley clearly have – that contemporary civilization is, in fact, "off course," then it must be admitted that the only hope for getting back on course is to leave: "If the formation is itself off course, then the man who is really to get "on course" must leave the formation" (Laing 1967: 82). In her book, *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction*, Barbara Tapa Lupack

borrows from Laing's concept of the "formation" in her exploration of the contemporary American novel's deployment of the motif of madness to comment on the absurdity and hypocrisy of contemporary reality:

Symbolizing modern man's alienation from the goals of a mechanized society which de-emphasizes humanistic – and humane – values, madness seems, especially in fiction, to be an effective method of challenging the social order. Out of step with the absurd world around them, "mad" protagonists typically withdraw from society as they struggle to internalize issues of family, culture, and history and ultimately return (though somewhat circuitously) to effect some kind of social amelioration, a process that is a variation of the monomythic pattern of departure-initiation-return described by Joseph Campbell (Lupack 1).

If the contemporary epidemic of dehumanization is recognized as being more insane than those whom our society labels "mad," then, Lupack suggests, "only the person out of step with society has an appropriate vantage point from which to view its failings; only the person who fails to obey the institutions that mandate certain behaviors can appreciate their rigidity and the consequences of nonconformity" (Lupack 18). Lupack argues that characters in novels such as *Catch-22* (1961), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), and *Being There* (1971), inhabit an absurd and violent world, in which "madness is both a legitimate response and an effective challenge to the superficial sanity of the social order" (18). Only by leaving the formation can one challenge the formation. Like the novels which Lupack includes in her study, Timothy Findley's novels – *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967), *The Butterfly Plague* (1969; 1986), *The Wars* (1977), *Famous Last Words* (1981), *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), *The Telling of Lies* (1986), *Headhunter* (1993), and *The Piano Man's Daughter* (1995) – all portray a society which has veered profoundly "off course." From Dr. Noyes's sadistic experiments on animals, to Dr. Allan

Potter's and Dr. Rupert Kurtz's manipulations of the human mind, to the widespread atrocities of fascism, Nazism and war, Findley's work returns repeatedly to what Diana Brydon refers to as "[t]he horror of organized, technological violence, directed against other human beings, against animals, and against the rest of the natural world" (Brydon 584). In his interviews, Findley often speaks of the damage human beings have inflicted upon ourselves through technological advancement, expressing opinions which are indebted to Rousseau's notion that we have, in the very process of civilization, managed to undermine the sincerity and authenticity – indeed, any essential goodness – that we possessed in a pre-political state of nature. In an interview with Alison Summers, Findley expresses the dichotomy between nature and civilization in terms of a "garden" and a "road":

We've lost the purity of the contact with *where* we are. Beyond the garden is the jungle that we have made. I didn't realize until later, but that jungle used to be unconsciously symbolized for me by a road that ran down through a park behind the house. The road rumbled with cars all day long, always letting me know that it was there; that if you went too far away from the garden, you got locked into that noise (Summers 108-9).

The only hope for the human race, Findley seems to suggest, is to discover a means of accessing the human potential which we have destroyed in the process of moving from a state of nature to our present civilization. In an interview with Donald Cameron, appropriately entitled "Make Peace With Nature Now," Findley answers a question about "the revolution" in which – according to Cameron – many authors perceive themselves as being involved, with the words: "My part of the revolution has got to do with nature" (57). For Findley, what he refers to as "the brutalization of the human race (58) is directly related to our brutalization of the natural world. Through the attempt to distance

ourselves from the natural, we have imposed a gulf between our “civilized” selves and whatever “truth” or “good” once existed in human nature. For Findley, as for the anti-psychiatrists, madness represents a means of accessing our true human potential, which we have buried beneath the veneer of civilization. In “Alice Drops Her Cigarette on the Floor,” an interview with William Whitehead that appears in Findley’s memoir, *Inside Memory*, he refers to an early acquaintanceship with a family friend who was diagnosed as insane:

My perception of this friend was that she was brilliant – that she had incredible insights into what was really going on in the world around us: but that she was...*odd*. Instead of having conversations, she would deliver monologues – in which she would reveal things about reality and portray things in a way that the so-called “sane” people around her did not understand (Findley 1990: 179-80; ellipsis in original).

He continues by saying that, “one of the most vivid things was that she saw things very sharply. She could see the heart of things” (180). This clarity of vision, Findley says, is frightening to the rest of society, who cope with their fear by attaching the label of “madman” to such people and sequestering them in asylums, to avoid a confrontation with that which defies rational understanding. According to Findley, “it is too disturbing to be told *the truth, the truth, the truth*” (180), and therefore we isolate and incarcerate those individuals whose version of reality conflicts with the dominant – and false – version held by our society. This “war” which rational, “civilized” humanity has declared on madness is an extension of the war which we have declared on nature, and both figure prominently in Findley’s novels.

Findley’s seemingly simplistic idealization of nature – and, by extension, madness – is complicated by a late-twentieth-century, post-Holocaust pessimism, which questions



whether it is indeed possible to return to the garden, to redeem “the human experiment” which, Findley feels, has come to its conclusion (Cameron 51). In *Inside Memory*, Findley recounts an event which has had a profound influence on his life and his fiction; in his twenties, prior to beginning his career as a novelist, Findley was confronted with a book of photographs of Dachau, which he discovered at the residence of Hollywood producer Ivan Moffat:

I was looking into hell – and hell was real.

And I saw all this in Hollywood, California – high above the magic of its lights and the perfume of its heady scent and I saw it through the sound of someone singing: *I get no kick from champagne...mere alcohol doesn't thrill me at all...so tell me, why should it be true...that I get a kick out of you?*

I never recovered from what I saw that night (Findley 1991: 310-11; italics in original).

Findley recalls this moment as “a kind of epiphany” (311), a realization of the capacity for evil which all human beings possess, and a recognition that “[w]e are all a collective hiding place for monsters” (311). For Findley, the holocaust is emblematic of humanity’s destruction of itself through the misapplication of reason, and he responds to it, not by turning away, but by confronting it repeatedly through his art. Findley does not attempt to deny humanity’s propensity for evil, nor does he atavistically evoke a vision of an uncorrupted, innocent pre-holocaust world; rather, he attempts to enact a critique upon the present state of humanity through confronting the horror of human violence through the power of the imagination. In his memoirs and interviews, he refers repeatedly to the power of the imagination:

I know that human imagination can save us; save the human race and save all the rest of what is alive and save this place – the earth – that is itself alive.

Imagination is our greatest gift (314).

This belief in the transformative, redemptive power of the imagination places Findley in the Romantic tradition of English literature beginning with Blake and Wordsworth. Harold Bloom, in his study of the Romantic tradition, writes that “the whole enterprise of Romanticism, as I understand it, was to show the power of the mind over a universe of death” (335). He goes on to add that “[o]ur disease is of consciousness itself, and our doctor must be the constructive power of the mind, our ability to imagine as possible a being more healed, original, and pure than what we have become” (336). The human mind alone can allow us to move beyond “the disguises presented to us as reason by our analytical intellectual traditions” (336-7). However, the dangers of this “gift” lie in the possibilities of either envisaging a different future based on idealized versions of the past and of nature, or positing a utopia that utterly transcends our present circumstances. In order to stop this pendulum swinging back and forth between nostalgia and revolution, the imagination requires the constraints of reason and understanding. The question for Findley, then, is whether his critique of Western rationalism simply leads to an uncritical celebration of imagination and, thus, to an aestheticization of politics – one of the central features of fascism itself. One wonders, indeed, if redemption is ever so simple and singular, and if the figure of the “madman” is the appropriate leader of this change.

To date, three comprehensive book-length studies of Findley’s novels have been published; two – by Anne Geddes Bailey and Donna Palmateer Pennee<sup>10</sup> – directly address issues of concern to this project. The most recent, Anne Geddes Bailey’s *Timothy Findley and the Aesthetics of Fascism* (1998), addresses the parallels in Findley’s work

between “the aesthetics of fascism” – which she defines as the representation of violence as a means to the realization of a myth of perfection – “and those of artistic representation and readerly desire” (17). In Findley’s fiction, Bailey argues, the reading of literature is a potentially subversive, politically charged act, and one that Findley repeatedly connects to madness; Findley – like the anti-psychiatrists – approaches madness as a socially constructed text, which is “read” in opposition to normality, which is itself merely another socially constructed text. In the violent, repressive world which Findley portrays in his fiction, literature – by virtue of its appeal to the imagination – offers what Bailey calls a potential “avenue of challenge and rebellion” (7) against prevailing social and economic culture. However, as Bailey points out, literature is not exclusively a site of resistance, but simultaneously produces the very repression and violence that dominate that culture. Similarly, Findley’s “mad” characters are capable of committing violent and destructive acts, as well as nurturing, regenerative ones, a fact which Bailey cites as evidence for her argument that Findley does not idealize madness. According to Bailey, the fact that, in Findley’s fiction, those labelled “mad” by mainstream society are often the only ones who recognize the power of the imagination, “should not lead to the conclusion that Findley romanticizes madness, for its tie to the natural world” (217). Rather, she writes, “[s]ometimes the mad characters who cherish imagination and human compassion are, in fact, the same characters who kill” (217). I will address this apparent paradox in the chapters to come, in which I will argue that Hooker Winslow’s killing of his family, Robert Ross’s murder of Captain Leather and Private Cassles, and Lily Kilworth’s setting of fires are acts of what David Cooper calls revolutionary “counter-

violence,” and as such are entirely consistent with a Romantic view of nature and madness as the antithesis of modern alienated civilization. Each of these acts of “counter-violence” represents an attempt – albeit a futile one – to, as Findley says “violate the violators,” to strike back against civilization on behalf of the natural world; the acts of violence are committed, not against nature, but from a position of empathy with that which has been violated in the name of “civilization,” and thus, do not dismantle the binary opposition between nature and civilization, but rather, uphold it.

While her text as a whole is less concerned with the motif of madness than Bailey’s study, Donna Pennee’s *Moral Metafiction: Counter-discourse in the Novels of Timothy Findley* (1991) – which argues that Findley’s body of work can be read as “moral metafiction,” that is, as fiction which deploys metafictional devices to engage the reader in acknowledging the moral effects of our textual constructions – includes a final chapter on “the role of the irrational” in Findley’s work. Pennee argues that madness allows several of Findley’s characters to “question, rebel against, [and] defy the tyranny of systems which, from their marginal or extrasystemic position, in their madness, by their ‘difference,’ they are able to see” (104). Pennee argues that the irrational actions of characters such as Hooker Winslow, Mrs. Noyes, and Robert Ross function as alternatives or correctives to the dominant rational paradigms of their societies; however, as she also points out, these characters “themselves endure suffering which seems ultimately to change nothing” and their acts “seem bleak in their singularity and impotence” (103). In endowing madness with a revolutionary or redemptive potential, Findley simultaneously admits the possibility that this potential may never be realized; a

cursory survey of the conclusions of Findley's novels finds his protagonists institutionalized and catatonic, regressing into the past, dead, or waiting – perhaps in vain – for the next incarnation of humankind. Indeed, the vision of the world that is found in Findley's fiction is almost unrelentingly pessimistic; however, if there is any faint glimmer of hope for the redemption of humanity, it is located in the Hooker Winslows, Robert Rosses, Lily Kilworths, and Lilah Kemps of the world – in what Findley himself has referred to as “a dependence on insane people to do sane things” (Gibson 122).

In the chapters that follow, I will explore Timothy Findley's use of “madness” as a counter-discursive strategy that simultaneously reflects and subverts the normalized forms of violence, oppression and hypocrisy that flourish in the so-called “sane” or “rational” world. I will show, moreover, that the typically clichéd opposition of sane/insane operates in a highly systematic way in Findley's work. Many of his protagonists suffer from specific or generalized forms of madness which, within their textual worlds, allow them to disclose an alternative to the oppressive social relations which Findley repeatedly contests. Others, while not “insane” in a clinical sense, are nonetheless marginalized figures and similarly offer potentially emancipatory perspectives otherwise concealed by the dominating interests of Western civilization.

In Chapter One, I will give a brief overview of the “family interaction model”<sup>11</sup> of madness, posited by Laing and Esterson in their book *Sanity, Madness, and the Family*, which argues that the experience and behaviour of psychotic patients can be understood as “intelligible” within the context of their patterns of family interaction. I will use this as a framework within which to examine Findley's novels *The Last of the Crazy People*

(1967) and *The Piano Man's Daughter* (1995), and his stories "Bragg and Minna" and "A Gift of Mercy," from the short story collection, *Stones* (1988). In these works, Findley has created three characters – Hooker Winslow, Lily Kilworth, and Minna Joyce – who exhibit behaviour which is classified as "madness" by those around them, yet which Findley shows to be "intelligible" within the context of each character's family interrelationships; the condition of each individual character can be understood, not as a "sickness," but, rather, as a manifestation of his or her disordered social-familial environment.

In Chapter Two, I will begin by referring to the movement within Laing's work away from the examination of the family unit and toward a critique of the systems which govern twentieth century Western society, a progression which is exemplified in his most controversial work, *The Politics of Experience* (1967). I will then turn to three novels – *The Telling of Lies* (1986), *The Butterfly Plague* (1969; 1986), and *Famous Last Words* (1981) – which feature protagonists who are each, to varying degrees, aware that the society in which they live is, in Laing's terminology, "off course," but who are ultimately unable to extricate themselves from their social reality in order to present an active challenge to its values, assumptions, and standards of behaviour. Vanessa Van Horne, Ruth Damarosch, and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley attempt to fight against the repressive systems which structure their realities, but their resistance is complicated by their implication in the very systems against which they are ostensibly rebelling.

In Chapter Three, I will explore the possibilities which "mad" behaviour provides for redeeming a humanity which has become "estranged from its authentic possibilities"

(Laing 1967: xiv). I will look at *The Wars* (1977), *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), and *Headhunter* (1993) – three novels in which characters make choices which place them on the margins of conventional society, and will examine the extent to which, for Findley, escape from the alienating effects of contemporary civilization is even possible. In *The Wars* and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, the protagonists, while not clinically insane, are situated – involuntarily, in the case of Mrs. Noyes – on the periphery of the society whose rules they are resisting, and as such are able to question and actively challenge the norms and values of that society. In *Headhunter*, Findley gestures toward possible redemption from the current state of civilization – which, in the words of the narrator, has “sickened” and “become a plague” (388) – through two schizophrenic characters who, by the novel’s conclusion, seem to have negotiated a middle ground between sanity and madness, and who thus provide Findley’s most tenable solution yet to the crisis of modern civilization.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I will return to the subject of the oppositional relation of nature and civilization in order to question the viability of Findley’s posited alternatives to the present state of civilization. My entry point for this interrogation is Frank Davey’s argument concerning *The Wars* – which can be extended to cover all of Findley’s work – that that text offers “no social/textual alternative” to the madness of contemporary civilization, apart from “the innocence of animals,” an option which is located “not only outside the social order” but “nearly outside human experience” (Davey 126-7). While “leaving the formation” may be the only means of either gaining perspective on or resisting the alienated and alienating effects of our present civilization,

does the prospect of “going crazy” present any real solution to the dilemma, or does it merely amount to a idealization of madness akin to R.D. Laing’s belief that psychosis could offer a transcendental journey to illumination, and could ultimately heal and redeem the human spirit? I will argue that, while Findley’s works do tend to idealize madness as an alternative to conformity with society’s norms, that his later works – *Headhunter* and *The Piano Man’s Daughter* – do in fact attempt to move beyond the oppositional categories of madness and sanity to suggest that, perhaps, the truly emancipatory potential lies neither in the realm of reason nor that of unreason, but rather in a liminal space which is neither of madness or reason. For Findley, the alternative to the present brutalization of both the natural world and the human spirit can be found, not through becoming an animal or going mad, but through demonstrating an imaginative benevolence toward all living things, an attribute which is certainly within both the social order and the realm of human experience, but which – like clarity of vision and a sense of wonder – has, for Findley, been lost in the process of civilization.



## CHAPTER 1 INSANITY BEGINS AT HOME: MADNESS IN THE FAMILY

The schizophrenic psychosis of the patient is, in my opinion, a symptom manifestation of an active process that involves the entire family.

Murray Bowen, "A Family Concept of Schizophrenia," *The Etiology of Schizophrenia*, 346

The family's function is to repress Eros; to induce a false consciousness of security; to deny death by avoiding life; to cut off transcendence; to believe in God, not to experience the Void; to create, in short, one-dimensional man; to promote respect, conformity, obedience; to con children out of play; to induce a fear of failure; to promote a respect for work; to promote a respect for "respectability."

R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, 41.

Even the most casual reader of Timothy Findley's work cannot help but be struck not only by the proportionately high number of mentally ill characters in his novels, short stories and plays, but also by the attention which Findley accords to the family environment of each of these characters. Each of these individuals' troubled states is inextricable from the family situation within which his or her identity was formed, and within which he or she must function. The list of "troubled" families in Findley's works includes, but is not limited to, *The Last of the Crazy People's* Winslows, *The Butterfly Plague's* Damarosches, *The Wars's* Rosses, *Stones's* Joyces and Cables, *Not Wanted on the Voyage's* Noyses, *Headhunter's* Kemps and Wylies, and *The Piano Man's Daughter's* Wyatts.<sup>1</sup> Findley's portrayals of these families have undeniable resonances with the work of R.D. Laing and the anti-psychiatry movement, particularly with the "family interaction model of mental illness"<sup>2</sup>, which achieved popularity in the 1960s with the founding of the journal *Family Process* (1962) and the publication of Laing and A. Esterson's *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1964). Although Findley does not openly

acknowledge the proponents of this school of thought as influences, his linking of the emotional state and social functioning of his characters to their family environments, combined with his apparent belief in the emancipatory potential of “madness,” suggests obvious affinities with this model.

In the 1960s, a fundamental adjustment in perspective occurred in the field of psychotherapy; therapists shifted “from seeing family relationships in terms of the patient to seeing the patient in terms of the family structure” (Meissner 1). Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the introduction of any other person into the patient-therapist relationship was believed to contaminate the transference phenomenon, and was therefore regarded with trepidation. The latter half of the century, however, saw the gradual inclusion of, first individual family members, and eventually the entire family, into this relationship. This model of madness, which Miriam Siegler and Humphry Osmond have called “The Family Interaction Model,” (16) conceives of the entire family as a malfunctioning organism, while the family member who has exhibited symptoms of mental illness and consequently been brought before a therapist is merely the “index patient” (16), who manifests the symptoms of the disease which has infected the family as a whole. Siegler and Osmond provide the following definition. “The whole family is ‘sick’; the one brought for help is only the ‘index patient,’ who may be the healthiest member of the family” (16). W.W. Meissner, in an article in *Family Process*, the representative journal of the family therapy movement, outlines the theory underlying the concept of family therapy:

The fundamental insight of family therapy and the basic premise of family theory is that the family is the unit of conceptualization. The patient is thereby only externalizing through his symptoms an illness which is inherent in the family itself. He is a symptomatic organ of a diseased organism (29).

As it is the organism – and not merely the single organ – which is diseased, it is the entire organism which must be treated; for proponents of the family interaction model, the method of treatment is family therapy, which seeks an end to the patient's symptoms through treatment, not of the individual patient, but of the entire family pathology. The family is viewed and treated as a single organic entity, of which the patient is merely one part.

During this time, the growing interest in the formative role of family relationships and interaction in the development of the patient's illness became the subject of much investigation, particularly concerning the families of schizophrenic patients. Schizophrenia is defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) as “a disturbance that lasts for at least 6 months and includes at least 1 month of active-phase symptoms (i.e., two [or more] of the following: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized or catatonic behavior, negative symptoms)” (DSM-IV 273). The characteristic symptoms as outlined in the DSM involve the following:

a range of cognitive and emotional dysfunctions that include perception, inferential thinking, language and communication, behavioral monitoring, affect, fluency and productivity of thought and speech, hedonic capacity, volition and drive, and attention (274).

Theodore Lidz and Stephen Fleck, of the Yale University School of Medicine, espoused the theory that studying the specific aberrations in the families of schizophrenics could provide valuable information concerning schizophrenia in particular, and family

dynamics in general. In the late 1950s, following clinical evidence that “schizophrenic patients virtually always emerge from homes marked by serious parental strife or eccentricity” (Lidz and Fleck 323), Lidz and Fleck undertook a long-term study of the families of sixteen schizophrenic patients hospitalized at the Yale Psychiatric Institute, observing the family members’ interaction with each other and with hospital staff, over periods ranging from four months to four years (332). The results confirmed the initial observations, and Lidz and Fleck concluded that “it seems certain that these serious family disorganizations cannot be extraneous to the problem” (341), and therefore, that the study of family dynamics can indeed offer important insights into schizophrenia. This conclusion is dependent on a conception of schizophrenia not as the product of disordered brain functioning, but as a failure of ego-adaptation. “Schizophrenic reactions, whatever their cause,” write Lidz and Fleck, “are a form of disorganization of the personality – a failure to achieve or maintain ego integration” (324). Successful ego integration is seen as the basis of “normal” development; according to the family interaction model, it is the family’s failure to “provide a matrix with structural requisites that help shape the ego structure of the offspring” (337) which precipitates the development of schizophrenic symptoms in that offspring.

In 1964, R.D. Laing and A. Esterson published *Sanity, Madness, and the Family*, in which they ask the question: “are the experience and behaviour that psychiatrists take as symptoms and signs of schizophrenia more socially intelligible than has come to be supposed?” (Laing and Esterson viii) Their book presents data from an ongoing investigation, began in 1958, into the families of twenty-five<sup>3</sup> female patients diagnosed

with schizophrenia. Laing and Esterson deny the existence of schizophrenia as a disorder of brain functioning, and suggest that those behaviours which doctors label “schizophrenic” are determined by environmental and social factors; the “schizophrenic” person is merely adapting to or reacting against an insane reality created by that person’s family. “We do not accept ‘schizophrenia’ as being a biochemical, neurophysiological, psychological fact,” write Laing and Esterson in their preface to the second edition, “and we regard it as palpable error, in the present state of the evidence, to take it to be a fact” (viii). They view schizophrenia, rather, as merely a diagnosis – or “label” – imposed upon the patient by the physician who has observed behaviour which he or she regards as “abnormal” or “unintelligible” within a given context. Laing and Esterson argue, based on the eleven case studies presented in this book, that a “patient’s experience and actions, especially those deemed most schizophrenic, become intelligible as they are seen in the light of her family situation” (16)<sup>4</sup>. In fact, in all eleven case studies presented in *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, the authors conclude that the patient’s behaviour was completely intelligible within the context of her family environment. One can see both the attraction and the danger of such a theory: on one hand, what was previously understood only as a mysterious disease whose causes were unfathomable was now conceived of as environmental, rather than physiological, in origin, and therefore possible to understand and possibly “cure”; on the other hand, the disregard of physiological causes of this disease in favour of social and environmental factors places the responsibility and possibly the “blame” for the child’s illness squarely on the child’s parents and other family members.

The conclusions drawn by Laing and Esterson, and by Lidz and Fleck, are indicative of a general shift in thinking about mental illness and psychotherapy which was taking place in the 1960s. In an essay in his 1967 volume *The Predicament of the Family: A Psycho-Analytical Symposium*, Peter Lomas, of the Institute of Psycho-Analysis of Great Britain, reflects on the focus on family interaction in recent studies of schizophrenia:

What is suggested by this work is that schizophrenia develops in a child who has been confused by his parents in their defensive attempts to maintain themselves. In such a family there is a gross failure of communication between members with the consequence that the child has little chance of developing a coherent and realistic picture of himself and his parents; his perceptual framework is built on shaking ground (Lomas, 13).

According to this model, the extent to which the family is able to function as a unit is understood to play a significant role in determining the child's conception of his or herself, the child's relation to the family, and the child's relation to reality. Those symptoms identified by conventional psychiatry as indicative of psychiatric disorders were thus believed by Laing and his contemporaries to have predominantly social, rather than physiological, origins.

The proponents of the anti-psychiatry movement share the belief that schizophrenia was not a disease, but merely "a label affixed by some people to others in situations where an interpersonal disjunction of a particular kind is occurring" (Laing 1967: 43). In his 1967 work, *The Politics of Experience*, Laing takes Lidz's understanding of "schizophrenia" as "a failure of human adaptation" a step further; rather than a *failure*, Laing suggests, schizophrenia denotes "*a successful attempt not to adapt to pseudo-social realities*" (43; my emphasis), that is, an active *resistance* to the prevailing

social environment and its concomitant values, standards and roles. The individual diagnosed as schizophrenic has not failed to adjust to society's norms, but rather has identified those norms as false or corrupt, and has refused to adapt. Laing has written a great deal about the role of the family in the "socialization" of children; in *The Politics of Experience*, he identifies the family's purpose as "getting each new recruit to the human race to behave and experience in substantially the same way as those who have already got here" (43). According to Laing, the conventional family exists entirely for the purpose of indoctrinating the child into the existing social reality:

The family's function is to repress Eros; to induce a false consciousness of security; to deny death by avoiding life; to cut off transcendence; to believe in God, not to experience the Void; to create, in short, one-dimensional man; to promote respect, conformity, obedience; to con children out of play; to induce a fear of failure; to promote a respect for work; to promote a respect for "respectability" (1967: 41).

As an agent of socialization, the family, argues Laing, is a corruptive force, "mainly concerned with destroying most of [a child's] potentialities," in an attempt to create "a being like ourselves, a half-crazed creature more or less adjusted to a mad world" (1967: 36).

Those who are able to resist this socialization into the madness which "is normality in our present age" (1967: 36), and who have consequently been labelled "abnormal" or "insane" because of their refusal to conform, are often the heroes of Timothy Findley's fiction. I will now explore the ways in which this particular view of the family as a contributing factor in the development of "madness"— which was prevalent as Findley was beginning his writing career during the 1960s — can serve as a lens through which to read three of Findley's works which focus primarily upon familial

interaction: *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967); “Bragg and Minna” and “A Gift of Mercy,” considered together as “the Bragg and Minna stories” (Stones, 1988); and *The Piano Man’s Daughter* (1995). In all three works, the family is presented as a synecdoche for the larger social reality; the Winslows, the Joyces and the Wyatts are conventional families who have internalized the “madness” of a world which values surfaces over substances. Into each family, Findley introduces an “index patient,” a child who has been formed by the forces of that social reality, and whose illness functions strategically in the text to alert the reader to the pathological nature of our modern society. In *The Last of the Crazy People*, the madness of Hooker Winslow, itself a product of the prevailing social reality, enables him to resist that reality; the novel ends with an image of the destruction of the old order, and the potential for rebirth and regeneration. While, in this novel, Findley fails to provide a vision of what the future may hold, in the “Bragg and Minna” stories and *The Piano Man’s Daughter* he attempts to explore the possibility of rewriting our society’s definitions of “normal”; these texts present the reader with “alternative” families – Bragg, Col and Stella in the former, and Charlie, Alexandra and Emma in the latter – which function as correctives to the hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness which characterize their social environment, and point the way to a possible future in which the boundaries between sane and mad, and normal and abnormal are blurred, if not erased altogether.

**“Violate The Violators”: Intelligible Behaviour in *The Last of the Crazy People***

In 1967 – the same year as the publication of Lomas’s volume and Laing’s *The Politics of Experience*, and three years after the appearance of Laing and Esterson’s



*Sanity, Madness and the Family* – Findley published his first novel, *The Last of the Crazy People*, at the centre of which is a severely disturbed child and a family whose members are profoundly alienated from one another and from the society in which they live. While Findley does not identify Hooker Winslow as specifically “schizophrenic,” the various phenomena which this character experiences throughout the novel are remarkably similar to the symptomology of what conventional psychiatry would diagnose as a psychotic disorder, namely delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized speech and behaviour (DSM-IV 273). “Anti-psychiatrists,” such as Laing, do not deny the *existence* of these behaviours, or their common function as indicators of “schizophrenia,” but would argue that these behaviours are *not* rooted in a physiological “abnormality” or “disease,” but can be understood as arising from a specific social or familial context. Findley’s depiction of the Winslow family possesses certain consistencies with the work of Laing and his contemporaries; although it is the child, Hooker Winslow, who is ultimately institutionalized for the murder of his family, Findley seems to be suggesting that it is the family as a unit, not any of the individual members, that is “malfunctioning.” The following description, by Lidz and Fleck, of a hypothetical patient labelled as “schizophrenic,” is particularly relevant to an understanding of Findley’s portrayal of Hooker Winslow:

Perplexed in his efforts to establish meaningful relationships, caught between opposing contradictory desires that are often traceable to parental conflict, frightened by the violence of his aggressive and erotic impulses, and unable to find a path into the future or even to gain security through regression because of distrust or fear of those upon whom he would depend, the patient withdraws from others and their ways of thinking and communicating (Lidz and Fleck 325).

As the novel progresses, recording the events in the lives of the Winslow family over the duration of one summer, the reader is presented with Hooker's behaviour in the context of his family dynamic, and is encouraged to understand Hooker's "symptoms" – beginning with aural hallucinations, progressing through disorganized perception, thought, and behaviour, and culminating in the murders and his subsequent catatonia and institutionalization – as "intelligible" when viewed within this context. In *The Last of the Crazy People*, Findley creates a Laingian portrait of how a disordered and degenerate social reality – of which the Winslows are an extreme representation – produces subjects who have not only internalized the social pathology which has formed them, but who use the vast array of deviant forms of being to rebel against the very society that has produced or diagnosed those forms. Through the characterization of Hooker Winslow, Findley explores the transgressive potential of such a subject, who becomes the agent of destruction of the very social structures which produced him.

In their withdrawal from both one another and from the outside world, the Winslows resemble the modern "schizophrenic" or "alienated" family as depicted by psychiatrists such as Laing and Esterson, Lidz and Fleck, and Peter Lomas. According to Lomas, this type of family, in which cases of schizophrenia and related psychotic disorders<sup>5</sup> are often diagnosed,

avoids penetration from the outer world, wrapping itself in secrecy and mystification. Overtly endorsing the current mores, it presents a highly respectable and normal front and may even regard its members as so above moral reproach that contact with others will be liable to corrupt them. Closer inspection, however, reveals an unhappy and bitter atmosphere, a gross failure of communication between members, an incapacity to love and grow and a deep, if concealed, sense of shame (Lomas 18).

The Winslows certainly fit this model; as a family they form an intensely insular and insulated unit, retreating from the stares and whispers of the people in their community into “the closed-up house” (26) in which life seems both spatially and temporally arrested. The Winslow house resembles a fortress, entirely protected against intrusions from the outside world; throughout the novel, no other characters set foot inside this residence, which is maintained as a timeless monument to “that fabled lifetime which encompassed the semimythical figure of Grandfather Winslow” (17). As Iris comments to Alberta Perkins, the family remains trapped within the myth of a glorified past, refusing to acknowledge the passing of time, and unable to function in present-day society:

“These people are all asleep,” she said. “Day and night. They lock themselves up in a bunch of old rooms. They make their whole life round things that are dead.” She breathed. “In that Rosetta’s office there’s nothin’ but pictures of old dead people – an’ all Gilbert talks about is things that was the way they used to be. Always what’s old. Always tryin’ to make over the past” (92).

Apart from chapters seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen, in which the Winslows attend a dance at their country club – at which they nonetheless remain isolated from each other and from the other guests, each, like Rosetta, “deeply engrossed” in his or her own private “performance” (211) – neither Nicholas, Rosetta, nor Gilbert is depicted outside the Winslow property, or in interaction with characters outside the Winslow family unit. Rather, by providing the reader with only brief glimpses of outside characters such as Harry Jarman, Alberta Perkins, Mrs. Gaylor and Tony Blair, Findley creates a portrait of a profoundly alienated family which clings so desperately to the myth of its moral superiority that it arouses resentment and suspicion among others in the community. This,

too, is consistent with Lomas's portrait of the alienated family; in his words, such a family conceives of itself as being "so above moral reproach that contact with others will be liable to corrupt them" (Lomas 18), resulting in a withdrawal from outside contact. The Winslows' self-imposed isolation from their community is deeply felt by Hooker, whose sense of his own identity is inextricable from his sense of his family's difference from other "normal" families.

Hooker himself is a solitary child with no playmates or confidantes apart from the family's maid, Iris. Trapped within a morbidly silent family, which provides him with very few cues for forming a mature self-image and identity, Hooker looks to others for his self-conception; the fact that "Mrs. Gaylor says we're crazy" (204) and that "Harry Jarman says we're crazy, too" (205) leads Hooker to the conclusion that he and his family must indeed be abnormal: "So I think that we are crazy people...[I]like those crazies in the asylum" (205-6). He consciously separates himself from other children, telling Iris that "I'd leave town before I'd play with anyone" (173). This is due to a sense of his intrinsic difference from his peers, because of his family's peculiar behaviour. On the last day of school before the summer holiday, he anticipates being sent to boarding school in the fall, when "he would not have to see again these children who lived in the town with him and who knew about his mother" (10). He takes refuge in his sense of apartness from others, feeling relief at the thought of being among the teachers and students at his new school, because "they were to be strangers to him – and he would never tell them anything. Never" (11). Removed from his family context, he could achieve an anonymity which was impossible in his community, in which he is known only in the context of his

“crazy” family. After Gilbert’s suicide, Rosetta’s remark about “those people” who stare at them only serves to underscore their status as different from others in their community: “I can only think of them as...people I’d never dream of making friends with” (249). This statement is consistent with the Winslows’ deluded view of themselves as not only different from, but superior to, the other members of their society. Their reality – and therefore the reality within which Hooker has grown up – has been characterized by a strict demarcation between “us” and “them,” “inside” and “outside,” which has resulted in Hooker’s peculiar relationship to, and inability to function in, the outside world.

Within the refuge of their house, into which they have retreated from the outside world, the Winslows have also retreated – both physically and emotionally – from one another. As Hooker remarks to Gilbert:

Mother is upstairs and won’t come down. You live in the library. Rosetta won’t look at me. Iris has secrets. And Papa sits with his back to everything. What does it mean? (204)

As this final question indicates, while Hooker has come to accept the situation within which he lives, he remains confused as to its motivations and implications. While he has become accustomed to the odd behaviour of his family, and to the whispers and laughter which greet him whenever he ventures into the public realm, he is unsure of the meaning of his family’s withdrawal. In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Findley explains that “the Winslow family, as individuals and collectively, represented a lot of values and things that must go” (Gibson 133). He links the Winslows’ situation to the “the dead end of the Family Compact,” referring to the general air of confusion and aimlessness that characterized Canadian society after the First World War brought an abrupt end to the

rise toward “a kind of aristocracy”<sup>6</sup> which had begun before the war. The Winslows are representative of a Canadian upper class which found itself rejected by a society which no longer had any use for them. They cling desperately to the conventions of the past, collectively becoming, like the house in which they live, a meticulously preserved monument to a former time, devoid of any emotional life or engagement with the values and mores of the present day. “The whole era left a residue of these people,” suggests Findley. “[I]t left a residue of Winslows, of lost people with nowhere to go and no essential background” (Gibson 133). Interestingly, Findley’s description of this period in Canadian history has certain resonances with accounts of schizophrenic symptomology. During this era, he states, Canadians “had the propensity of feeling one thing and of being another” (Gibson 133), of conceiving of themselves as aristocrats regardless of their true position in their rapidly changing society. In the Winslow household, the gap between “feeling” and “being” is expressed as an insistence that all is “normal,” despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Nicholas is oblivious to reality, attempting to cling to the notion that the Winslows remain pillars of their community, and that Jessica and Gilbert are merely “sick,” their affliction having nothing to do with their family or social environment. However, it is clearly evident to those – including the reader – who observe them that the Winslows are, like William Faulkner’s Compsons, the corrupt relics of a degenerating upper class. In his introduction to *The Portable Faulkner*, Malcolm Cowley writes of the society which Faulkner portrayed in *The Sound and the Fury* and his other Yoknapatawpha works, and its roots in the changes to the social order in the American South:

The descendants of the old ruling class...are defeated...or run away ...or they drug themselves with eloquence and alcohol...or they retire into the illusion of being inviolable Southern ladies...or they dwell so much on the past that they are incapable of facing the present...(Cowley 15-16)

The Winslows' degeneration, like that of the Compsons, is symptomatic of the disillusionment and changing structure of the society in which they live, and their reaction to the changes in their social reality mirrors that of Faulkner's fictional family. They too withdraw, Jessica into silence and absence, Gilbert into "eloquence and alcohol," Rosetta into her role as lady of the house, and Nicholas into the illusion of normalcy and propriety. While the withdrawal of the latter two characters takes the form of a passive retreat into the past, Gilbert and Jessica retreat into forms of madness, in an attempt to resist the roles expected of them.

Jessica is the first member of the family to actively rebel against the expectations placed upon her by her family and society; she suddenly and without warning retreats from the domestic life which is expected of her into the "life of the mind," withdrawing from her family and barricading herself in her room with her books and notebooks. Eva-Marie Kröller comments on the resonances between Jessica's self-imposed isolation and that of Saint Ursula as depicted by Carpaccio, and suggests that the latter can serve as an analogue for the former:

Jessie has withdrawn into a pseudo-cell, surrounded by the autobiographies of religious mystics, her notebooks and an old crucifix. The paraphernalia of her bedroom and its exclusivity remind one of Carpaccio's painting of the dream of Saint Ursula in which the annunciation of a birth is perverted into "intensely self-destructive [images], being the enunciation not of an act but of a refusal" (1981: 368).

This refusal of the “normal” maternal domestic role – which is commonly inaugurated by the annunciation of a birth – is interpreted by both family and community as madness: “We have a crazy mother, don’t we?” Hooker asks Gilbert. Consistent with the model of the mentally ill family as outlined by Siegler and Osmond – “the family is ‘sick’ because the parents come from ‘sick’ families” (1974a: 16) – and with Laing and Esterson’s case studies, Jessica comes from a family which itself has a history of mental illness:

Her mother had gone “peculiar” – as her friends had said, trying to be kind – and she had died quite soon of boredom and confusion. Her father had remarried and disappeared. But Jessie had remained aloof from the emotions involved in all of this. Or apparently she had. In truth, it had eaten into her sense of security. Privately she had withdrawn from everyone she should normally have trusted (38).

The confusion resulting from this real or perceived abandonment by both of her parents leaves Jessica with a profound insecurity which she has previously been able to mask successfully, continuing to play the social role expected of a woman of her class:

“[She was] beautiful, sensitive, in some ways even fun, *although never beyond the point of propriety*. She had worn clothes well, and wealth. She had had the proper life for the wife of a Winslow” (38; my emphasis).

Propriety proves to be constricting for Jessica. After some years ensconced as a proper wife and mother in a wealthy household, the gap between her sense of self and the image she projected to the world suddenly widens to an unbridgeable gulf, and she suffers what Nicholas terms “[a]n hysterical reaction to reality” (40). The “reality” which Jessica cannot assimilate into her self-image is the role which society demands of her, in which she must define herself solely in relation to the men in her life as the daughter, wife and mother of Winslow men. Her first words upon withdrawing to her bedroom are angrily



directed at the men whom she feels have betrayed her: "You! God damn you. You and Gilbert and Hooker and my father – all of you. Failures. Bastards" (38-9).

Jessica's withdrawal involves a rejection of all of the traditional roles which her society thrusts upon women.<sup>7</sup> She rejects the accoutrements of femininity in favour of solitude among the books and notebooks with which she fills her room; the family's birthday gifts of stockings, "bath balls," lipstick, and "bride's nightie" prompt her to ask "What are you all trying to do? Don't you understand why I am sick?" (109) She herself does understand the nature of her sickness; Lorraine York calls Jessica's withdrawal a "pointed and political rebellion against femaleness itself, as it is constructed by the dominant powers" (1991: 12). Indeed, Jessica rejects the social and biological demands which society places upon her gender, refusing to bear or nurture children, to "serve" her husband domestically or sexually, or to behave in the way society has deemed "proper" for a woman. Through her refusal of the roles of subservient wife and nurturing mother, which are assumed in Jessica's absence by Rosetta and Iris, respectively, Jessica is reacting against what York refers to as "the enslavement of woman in a never-ending cycle of domestic oppression" (1991: 12). Jessica's rejection of the "wifely" role expected of her manifests itself primarily in her refusal to engage in sexual relations with her husband: "I won't sleep with you, Nicky," she said. "Ever again" (109). This is connected to her violent disgust at the thought of becoming pregnant again: "'No.' Her voice rose. 'No. No babies. No babies. No babies'" (109). Although it seems directed at physical actions and conditions, Jessica's visceral reaction to any suggestion of sexual contact or a resulting pregnancy is rooted both in a refusal to perpetuate the cycle of

dysfunction by introducing more offspring into a profoundly disordered family and social reality, and in a reluctance to engage emotionally with another human being. Of her initial breakdown, exacerbated by her pregnancy, Nicholas realizes that “Jessica didn’t want a baby. The truth was, she didn’t want to have to care” (39). Jessica’s rejection of the nurturing role which society demands of her is manifested physically in the “dead child” (11) to which she gives birth. The stillbirth represents both her emotional stasis (she is “dead” inside) and the strength of her refusal of emotional connection. This refusal is later articulated in a conversation with Gilbert, which is overheard by the other members of the family:

“I will not...” they heard her say, “go on. I will not go...on...giving...birth... to you...and to Hooker...and to that...god...damned...baby...day...after... bloody...day...for the rest of my LIFE! Can’t I ever be free of that?” (155)

...  
 “The mere idea that you were ever – inside of me...” Jessica’s voice had gone dead. “I can’t bear you...Don’t you – won’t somebody understand that? I hate you!” (155; emphasis and ellipses in original)

This pathological rejection of both of her sons is Findley’s most powerful image of Jessica’s resistance to the stifling conventions of “proper” womanhood, subverting the reader’s expectations of unconditional maternal love. However, Jessica’s resistance has deeply tragic consequences. Not only does she remove herself from her sons’ lives, but in so doing she effectively negates their identity; Hooker knows that nothing would convince his mother to “look at him or to speak his name. He hadn’t heard her speak it for months” (16). Without a nurturing parent to affirm and confirm his identity, Hooker’s situation is akin to that of the robin’s egg that he gives Jessica for her birthday; as Iris tells Hooker, “no robin’s egg is gonna hatch in any old box up in someone’s bedroom.

It's gotta have a —" (113). The unspoken word, of course, is "mother"; just as the robin's egg will not hatch without its mother, Hooker's development into a mature, well-adjusted human being is impeded by his lack of a nurturing parental figure, of either gender.

While Jessica's rejection of her familial role — and by extension of her family itself — is the most overt example of the Winslows' emotional withdrawal, it is mirrored to varying degrees by the other members of the family. Nicholas and Rosetta, however, do not withdraw as a form of resistance to the roles thrust upon them, but rather they withdraw *into* those roles, as a strategy for avoiding the reality of their family's loss of status. Nicholas and his sister, living together in the house which used to belong to their father, have replaced spoken language with a system of communication made up of silent rituals, and rooted firmly in the past:

Her hands took his gloves, his hat, his (once her father's) malacca cane. She stepped silently to the table beneath the mirror and laid each item in its place. Then she went back. Nicholas turned at the touch of her fingers on his shoulders. She removed the overcoat and hung it in the cupboard, on a wide wooden hanger. It smelled of the distant city office — of ink, paper, and cigarettes. It reminded her of this same hallway years ago: that other man, gray-haired and tired, that other coat collar, with that same expensive, distant smell — her father, who had died and left her (33; parentheses in original).

From such rituals, to the velvet curtains shutting the living room off from the rest of the world, to the "period" ceiling with its cobweb-free plaster angels, and the games of croquet on the lawn, everything about the Winslow household seems calculated to project an air of old-fashioned gentility and refinement that is at odds with the outside world;<sup>8</sup> not surprisingly, when Hooker — who lives in an environment in which reality is steadfastly avoided and denied — is confronted with a social reality in which first

Kennedy and then Oswald are assassinated, unmarried teenage girls become pregnant, and men fondle children in the grocery store, he is unable to adapt.

Both Nicholas and Rosetta are equally complicitous in keeping the household suspended in the past and shrouded in silence. Each day, upon his return from the office, Nicholas asks Rosetta about her day, a question to which she never replies. This is followed by more wordless communication, such as the dangling of a key on a chain, which signifies a wish for sherry. When they do speak, it is in short, laconic utterances, with many sentences left unfinished:

“How is Jess?” he asked, picking up the paper from a place on a nearby table.  
 “In her room,” said Rosetta, as if that were the only right answer to his question.  
 “Still?”  
 “Yes.”  
 Pause.  
 “Of course,” she added. “Reading her old notebooks.”  
 “I wish someone would – ”  
 “Yes...but...” (34)

The older Winslows’ stuttering, awkward use of language denotes an uncomfortable relationship with human emotion and with reality. They are unable to express their emotions in any meaningful way, to connect with one another, or with the world outside their family circle. After Gilbert’s suicide, Nicholas, frustrated by his inability to reach others, finally stops trying to communicate through words:

He would not talk to anyone anymore. He could not make anyone listen to him. All the right words remained in his mind, where he inserted them between the phrases he said aloud. He would not speak anymore. He would not talk to anyone (268).

This acceptance of silence and isolation is the final sign that the Winslows – as a family, and as representatives of a particular class – are doomed. Nicholas’s apathy, his

abandonment of any attempt to connect with the members of his family and community, signals the final stage of the Winslows' decline toward obsolescence.

Unlike his wife, who has rebelled against class conventions and socially prescribed gender roles, Nicholas Winslow has conformed to society's expectations of both his class and his gender, adopting the mask of successful breadwinner, husband, and father, while remaining detached from any emotions that might accompany this role. In his dissociation of what Laing calls the "disembodied" or inner self from the "embodied" or physical self, Nicholas is like a schizophrenic whose "body may go on acting in a an outwardly normal way, but inwardly it is felt to be acting on its own, automatically" (Laing 1965: 78). Nicholas is "a stranger to himself" (147), silently going through the motions of living at both work and home, making "automatic gestures in deference to the facts of life. To the edict that in society you must do something to belong. To the edict of continuity, generation to generation" (147). His emotional detachment allows him to move automatically and impassively through both his work and home environments, without any emotional connection to those around him: "His work needed none of his personality, and now neither did his family" (147). Nicholas's "mask," which imposes a distance between himself and reality, is mirrored visually by the image of Rosetta's face, which is a literal mask, frozen in the past: "Years ago she had suffered a stroke which had not only left one arm less useful to her than the other, but which had caught one whole side of her face forever in a youthful mask" (28). Her facial paralysis not only locks her appearance forever in the past, but also impedes her ability to express emotion through facial expressions. Beneath this emotionless exterior lies an unacknowledged absence; as

Kröller correctly identifies, there is a “menace emanating from Rosetta” which rises from “her refusal to acknowledge the presence of an abyss beneath the elegance she cultivates so carefully; logically, it will be she Hooker has to destroy first” (1981: 369). Rosetta is the first to be destroyed because it is her character which so elegantly encapsulates the paralysis and emptiness of the Winslow family. Rosetta, like the Winslow family as a unit, is unable to reconcile the disjunction between appearance and reality; her sole concern is the maintenance of the façade which she presents to the world, and she remains wilfully ignorant of the fact that there is no substance – no emotion, no meaningful engagement with her world – beneath that impeccable surface. Rosetta, whom Alberta Perkins calls “the Deep Freeze” (90), is outwardly manifesting, not only Nicholas’s “frozenness”, but the phenomenon that has occurred in the entire Winslow family after the stillbirth of Jessica’s baby:

As people, they solidified – it was true – and they became the absolutes of all the little things that once they had only partly been. They “froze,” as Hooker said. They got dead quiet and looked at each other all the time, talking with their eyes above his head (12).

The eerie silences and emotional paralysis of the adult Winslows have a profound effect on the other members of the household, who communicate, when at all, through the recycled texts of others, including the song and story of Frankie and Johnnie, quotations from Oscar Wilde, and repeated references to historical and political events such as the Holocaust and the assassination of Kennedy. Even Gilbert, who is the family member who most often attempts to break through the family’s silence, has been infected by this poverty of language.

Like Jessica, Gilbert is distinguished from Rosetta and Nicholas in his refusal to accept their definition of “normality”; however, unlike his mother, his resistance is enacted, not against social convention and gender roles, but against the silence that Jessica herself is instrumental in sustaining. Gilbert tries to resist the silence that envelopes the Winslow house, using his own affinity for words in his attempts to force his parents into speech: “Aren’t you ever going to say no – or try to stop me? Why don’t you get off your goddamned ass?” (146) Eventually, however, even Gilbert succumbs to the “curse” of the Winslows, as his natural eloquence becomes perverted into the writing of “endless lists”:

Lists of dates and lists of places. Lists of hockey stars, movie stars, historical figures. Lists of battles, generals, victories. Lists of poets, playwrights, authors. Lists of occasions, real and imaginary – occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, public holidays. Timetables (259)<sup>9</sup>.

In Gilbert’s last conversation with his brother before he commits suicide, he reveals that his one attempt to express his emotions in his own words resulted in an accusation of plagiarism: “in one place, just once – in verse – I knew I had a talent...I’d worked and slaved and sweated on that ballad. And then, ‘long comes Brown, and boom, he said I stole it” (199). This incident prompted him to move back home, where, influenced by his family’s silences and stilted attempts at conversation, his mind has become, not a source of original thought and feeling, but rather a receptacle for the thoughts, feelings and words of others, a place “where he hoarded so much, so many words for quoting” (46). Although his bookshelves, like his mind, are well-stocked with the imaginative legacy of the Western literary tradition, he does not engage imaginatively with these works, but rather keeps them on the shelves as talismans and touchstones for ironic commentary

upon his own situation. As Hooker reads the book titles to a drunk Gilbert, repeating the ritual by which Gilbert taught Hooker to read, Gilbert responds by quoting, in a detached manner, from various books as Hooker mentions them. The Fitzgerald title, *The Disenchanted*, causes him to laugh bitterly, and quote: “so, you’re disenchanted...I’m disenchanted...we are all disenchanted!” (190) On the scraps of paper which Gilbert leaves behind, Hooker finds, not a suicide note or plea for help or understanding, but rather a collage of unfinished phrases and quotations from other writers – “Follow in peace where all is...” (260); “It is Fear, oh Little Hunter – it is Fear.” (261) – which illustrate that Gilbert has succumbed to the Winslow’s condition of inarticulateness and arrested thought. For Gilbert, Kröller comments, “literature is a narcissistic mirror in which genuine creation has become impossible” (1981: 370). In his self-centred isolation, he is unable to engage with the thoughts and words of others, except as a sort of “Greek chorus” or commentary on his own situation. Lorraine York sees Gilbert as “a Fitzgeraldian aesthete disillusioned by a decrepit post-war society,” who is the “image of intellectual stillbirth – the social equivalent of Jessica Winslow’s stillborn child” (1991: 17). Gilbert is trapped between the “fallen” world of his society and family – bereft of ideas, emotions and words – and the intellectual world which the university had represented to him – brimming with thoughts, ideas and language; ultimately, he is unable to contentedly or successfully inhabit either world. His bookshelves – where the works of Byron, Shelley, Blake, Keats, Fitzgerald, and Wilde stand next to *Lee’s Lieutenants*, *Clausewitz On War*, *Chums*, *Airplanes of the Future*, and *Jane’s* – reveal the dualistic nature of Gilbert’s intellectual legacy; as York writes, he is “heir to an inner



world torn between aesthetic pleasures and wartime disillusion” (1991: 16-17). Gilbert’s inner conflict is reminiscent of the “splitting of the psychic functions” which, according to Eugen Bleuler, the Swiss psychiatrist who coined the term “schizophrenia” in 1911, “is one of [schizophrenia’s] most important characteristics” (Bleuler 8). Unable to reconcile the two conflicting halves of his psyche, Gilbert succumbs to emotional and intellectual paralysis, and finally commits suicide.

While Nicholas argues that Gilbert’s illness is physiological, inherited from his mother, Rosetta’s view is similar to that expressed by Laing, Esterson and their contemporaries: “I think we let them get sick...Because of always being afraid. To *do* anything” (62; emphasis in original). When Nicholas protests that Gilbert is certainly medically ill, as he is unable to function in the world as “an ordinary person,” she says to him: “You’ve never given him the chance to function like *any* kind of person” (62; emphasis in original). In the case of the Winslows, as in the case studies presented by Laing and Esterson, the family dynamic is seen as a contributing factor toward the “illness” of the child. Nicholas’s and Jessica’s emotional reticence has left Gilbert with a legacy of disillusionment and frustration, which in turn seems to have given rise to depressive symptoms, such as delayed reactions or “psychomotor retardation”<sup>10</sup>: “Have you seen him drive the car? Doesn’t react. Not properly. No reactions” (64). Gilbert’s descent into depression, which is exacerbated and hastened by his excessive use of alcohol, culminates in his suicide, the description of which emphasizes the hopelessness of Gilbert’s situation: “Gilbert, on fire, lay back like Peter crucified, hooked by his feet to the cross of the motor car, his arms spread out in a hopeless gesture, his head to one side”

(230). His suicide is both his surrender to, and his final, desperate act of protest against the environment which created him. The comparison of Gilbert's death to the crucifixion of Peter, who, while alive, spoke against "false prophets" and "false teachers...who privily shall bring in damnable heresies" (2 Peter 2:1), and who, at his own request, was crucified upside-down, emphasizes the element of protest behind Gilbert's actions. The "false teachers" here include Nicholas, who fails to provide an acceptable model of adult behaviour and communication to his sons, and, of course, Mr. Brown, who teaches Gilbert to feel shame for, rather than pride in his eloquence. Gilbert himself is a prophet, albeit one to whom no one will listen, and, as such, is the first in Findley's long line of Cassandra-figures<sup>11</sup>. Unlike the other members of his family, he attempts to connect to others through language, but finds that they either won't listen (Jessica, Nicholas) or don't understand (Mr. Brown, Hooker). Frustrated by his repeated failure to communicate, Gilbert succumbs to an emotional and intellectual stasis which can be understood as the direct product of his familial and social environment.

Just as Gilbert's "intellectual stillbirth" is inextricable from the various physical and emotional "stillbirths" of Jessica, Nicholas, and Rosetta, the behaviour and "symptoms" exhibited by Hooker Winslow, while they may seem highly unusual or abnormal, can be understood to be – to borrow the terminology from Laing and Esterson – "intelligible" when viewed within the context of his social and familial environment. While the experiences and behaviour attributed to Hooker are consistent with several of the diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia and related psychotic disorders, Findley, in his characterization, follows Laing and Esterson in his attempt to show, not that Hooker is

suffering from a disease of disordered brain functioning, but that the disordered nature of his family environment has produced these behaviours. Lidz and Fleck write that their observations of schizophrenic behaviour suggest that “schizophrenia is a condition in which the patient alters his internalized representation of reality in order to escape and withdraw from his insoluble conflicts, from a world grown untenable to him, and from social interaction” (325). Hooker’s one undeniably “insane” act – the killing of his family – arises from a distorted conception of reality; unable to understand or adapt to a profoundly disordered family environment, Hooker’s mind provides him with a means of escaping from this reality. While society calls such behaviour “insane,” Findley sympathetically presents Hooker’s feelings and actions within the context of his family environment, allowing the reader to understand that the roots of his behaviour lie, not in clinical mental illness, but in an attempt to comprehend a reality which, for him, is ultimately unintelligible.

While one cannot ignore the fact that Hooker’s distortions of thought and behaviour are consistent with the symptomology of schizophrenia, Findley presents these distortions as symptoms, not of a physiological disorder, but of his *family’s* pathology. Among the “positive symptoms”<sup>12</sup> of schizophrenia listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* are “distortions or exaggerations of inferential thinking” or “delusions,” which are “erroneous beliefs that usually involve a misinterpretation of perceptions or experiences” (274-5). Even for an eleven-year old, Hooker’s understanding of his reality seems excessively literal; after the death of Jessica’s baby, who was to be named Patrick, he inferred “that people named Patrick died very oddly,

and for two weeks at school, he waited for Patrick Farley to fall dead in the yard or to clutch himself in the gym class and die on the spot” (12). This leap in logic can be explained by the fact that Hooker is forced to attempt to understand his reality through incomplete texts. Rather than having the baby’s death explained to him by his parents, he had received the information only partially, and impersonally: “someone had said” merely that “[i]t happened dead...” (12). Because the word “said” is used, rather than the words “told him”, the impression is that this news had been overheard, rather than told directly to him.

The paucity of information which Hooker receives from his largely silent family leads to a propensity to believe everything he is told. Desperate for texts to help him understand his world, he grasps at every fragment of information that might help him contextualize his experiences. As Gilbert realizes: “Hooker...would believe anything. He’d believe it if you told him that the world was going to end” (44). In fact, when Alberta Perkins tells him about the end of the world – “Arm’geddon”(97) – he does believe it, in a very literal fashion. She tells him that, “for those of us in this perdition *now*, it will surely be bless’d relief, and a glorious day of release” (99; emphasis in original) and that “the answer to per-di-tion...is merciful death, Hooker – sudden and unknown...” (100) In Hooker’s mind, Alberta’s characterization of “merciful death” as a “bless’d relief” for “all the crazy people caught in madness” (100) is combined with both his belief – based largely on what he has heard others say about his family – that his family are “crazy people”, and his own first-hand experience of mercy-killing: he has had to put animals maimed by his cats out of their misery, and thinks “If I had a gun, I could

kill them without hurting them” (97). In addition to these two examples of death as an escape from the pain of living, Hooker also receives, from Iris, the idea of killing for love:

“Nobody kills someone they love,” [Gilbert] said.

“Maybe not,” said Iris. “But they will kill *because* of love. Perhaps they kill some people because they love them so bad that they can’t stand to see them do wrong that way. Or because they can’t stand the unhappiness anymore.”

“What unhappiness?”

“The unhappiness of loving someone who does useless things – or who’s bad” (45-6).

Guided in his interpretation by Iris, Hooker “reads” the story of Frankie and Johnnie as “a love story” and it becomes, for him, a model for the solution to his family’s pain. After Gilbert’s death, he reflects on how “peaceful” the dead appear, and then “[s]uddenly he thought, ‘Now I have the gun. For Armageddon. It is mine’ (233). From the fragmentary texts which form the basis of his reality, he begins to form the idea of applying mercy-killing to his family. He hears from various outside sources that his family is crazy, that crazy people are in “per-di-tion,” that the solution to perdition is a merciful death, and that people sometimes kill those they love the most; from these fragments he infers that murder is the solution to his family’s troubles. Hooker’s repeated misinterpretation of the events which he witnesses can be understood as a consequence of living in the silent, withdrawn Winslow family – an environment which provides him with very little assistance in interpreting his experiences; as a result, he ascribes too much authority to those few texts which he is given.

Another symptom of schizophrenia listed in the DSM is “distortions of perception (hallucinations)” (274-5). We become aware of Hooker’s distorted perception as early as

the prologue; as Hooker lies in bed before going out to the barn to kill his family, “his feet seemed to be far away” while “the other parts of him apparently were asleep” (4).

After these visual distortions, Findley writes, “the noises began” (4):

At first there was just the remembered sound of his brother’s voice, which swayed around lightly in his mind like audible smoke. Indistinctly and wordlessly it seemed to surround the sound of Hooker’s name, but it was not quite prepared to say it aloud. The fragments, in slow motion, bounced back and forth, tantalizing him with their uncertainty (5).

Auditory hallucinations are the “by far the most common” of schizophrenic hallucinations, and “are usually experienced as voices, whether familiar or unfamiliar, that are perceived as distinct from the person’s own thoughts” (DSM-IV 275). Upon awakening on the morning which opens the novel, Hooker hears the voice of his dead brother, Gilbert, as well as other, more vague voices, which emanate from a “soft, invisible, dry-sweat-scented dream of dragonflies” (5) which surrounds him: “Clittering with insinuating whispers, they flew inside his ears. He reached the window. He motioned with his hands. He tried to push away the noise” (5). These “insinuating whispers” are similar to both the insinuations of the Winslows’ community and the “pejorative or threatening voices” (DSM-IV 275) which are particularly characteristic of schizophrenic hallucinations. They are followed by voices which utter a series of sounds which are empty of conventional meaning, a “wordless procession of syllables – strident, harsh and absolute – [which] clattered across the innards of his mind, like smooth round stones rolling inside a wooden box” (8). Usually, however, Hooker’s hallucinations do not take the form of voices, but rather of a sometimes mechanical-, sometimes natural-sounding buzzing:

Seemingly from a great distance he began to hear a noise.

At first he thought that it was just someone sawing wood, but since the sound grew in volume, he concluded that it must be something else, something that was moving toward him where he lay.

It took on a slightly mechanical tone.

“It’s a motorcycle,” he said out loud.

But it was not a motorcycle.

Hooker tightened his eyelids.

Now it sounded like a beehive. (167-8)

As the events of the summer progress, and the atmosphere in his Winslow family home becomes increasingly claustrophobic, Hooker’s auditory hallucinations become more frequent. The particular nature of the sound – “the sound of the buzzing wings in his ears” (206) – signifies, like the stones in the wooden box, a connection with the natural world and with all living things, which is absent in the Winslow household:

On the way home through the woods, Hooker opened his ears, and the noises everywhere were suddenly wonderful to hear. With a rush, like fast water, came the loud and perfected outcry of all living things, spilling out in motion – wings and legs and tails and eyes – flashing up to make an open way for his running... (164)

The sound and motion which Hooker begins to hear and feel all around him function as both a reaction and an antidote to the oppressive silence and paralysis which characterize the Winslow house; by “open[ing] his ears” to the sounds – both real and imagined – of life in the world, he is able to escape temporarily from the dead, silent world of his family. The hallucinations which Hooker repeatedly experiences during the summer leading up to the killing of his family are understandable when viewed in the context of the cold, silent, repressive world within which he is required to function.

The third positive symptom listed by the DSM is “grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior” (275). The former ranges “from childlike silliness to unpredictable agitation,”

and commonly involves problems “in any form of goal-oriented behavior,” including “difficulties in performing activities of daily living such as...maintaining hygiene” (276). Apart from the shooting of his family, Hooker’s behaviour does not seem particularly “disorganized,” with the one exception being his strange actions at the club, after overhearing his father and the other men laughing at him:

Hooker did not shower. He went into an adjoining toilet instead. He flushed it and took the clear water, and he put it over his head. Then he cleaned his hands in it, threw some on his shoulders and stomach, dipped his feet in the bowl, and emerged. He took a large, neatly folded towel from the shelf. He did not dry himself but went instead, wet as he was, back to the locker room. He was wrapped from head to foot in the towel (220-1).

This bizarre behaviour is only partially explained by Hooker’s reluctance to shower in public; the men whose laughter is making him uncomfortable are in the locker room, and there is no mention of any threatening presence in the shower room itself, which Hooker does in fact walk into naked, in order to select a towel, before washing himself in the toilet. Furthermore, the explanation that he wets himself with water from the toilet in order to fool his father into thinking that he has showered, is not sufficiently convincing, as his father immediately notices that something is amiss: “You look funny,” said his father. “Are you all right?” (221) Hooker’s action has no explanation; rather, it is the irrational, disorganized behaviour of a child whose understanding of and relationship to reality is beginning to break down.

The climactic scene of the novel, in which Hooker kills his family in order to put an end to what he perceives as their suffering, is written as a scene not of destruction, but of salvation. In an interview with Donald Cameron, Findley has spoken of Hooker as the saviour of his family:



I think Hooker is a saviour figure, by which I don't mean at all anything Christ-like. There are people who come to save and people who come to destroy, and it's funny how Hooker winds up killing the family...he had to save the family by ending their lives, ending their misery (Cameron 51).

When read in the context of the rest of the novel, Hooker's shooting of his family can be understood as an act of resistance in line with, albeit more extreme than, Jessica's withdrawal and Gilbert's outspokenness. In conversation with Alison Summers, Findley has referred to Hooker's act as "a particularly crazy stand – nevertheless a very real stand. Someone had to make a decision, and since no one else in the family was going to, the child had to make it. It was a disastrous decision, although it was the logical extension of what had to be done" (Summers 105). Through the act of killing his family, Hooker attempts to efface the last traces of the degenerate society – the "crazy people" – of which the Winslows are a remnant. Findley has spoken to Donald Cameron about Hooker's act as a response to the need to "violate the violators" (Cameron 62):

I think that Hooker has a lot to do with...the urgency with which we must wipe out the old order. We must destroy what is destroying us. We must kill what is killing us (62).

Hooker's act is also one of self-sacrifice; as one of the "crazy people," he too is a part of the old order which must be eradicated. In destroying his family, Hooker destroys himself: the novel ends with his descent into catatonia. No longer even attempting to engage with his reality – "[f]or the first time, ever, in the whole of his life, the questions were gone" (281) – he is taken to a mental hospital, where Iris is discouraged from visiting by the doctors, who tell her that "Hooker would not know her" and "[i]t was best that she thought of him dead" (281). Although the "noise of birds" (281), "the changing of the season," "the flights of geese," and Iris's singing (282) in the final scene of the

novel all seem to gesture toward a regeneration of the earth *after* the “crazy people” have been purged from it, Findley requires an act of faith on the part of his reader; while Hooker functions as the agent of destruction of the world which produced him, Findley does not provide an agent of regeneration, leaving the future profoundly in question. However, in two of his later works – the “Bragg and Minna” stories from *Stones*, and *The Piano Man's Daughter* – Findley explores similar territory, yet employs various narrative strategies in order to leave his reader with a more redemptive, albeit still ambiguous, vision of what the future may hold after “the last of the crazy people” have been destroyed.

**“Noises in behind the eyes of bears”: The Articulation of Madness in the “Bragg and Minna” Stories**

Of all Findley’s work, it is arguably the two linked stories which open the collection entitled *Stones* – “Bragg and Minna” and “A Gift of Mercy” – which most plainly reveal the binary opposition which Findley sets up between those who uphold social conventions and those who resist them. In these stories, Findley has created the character of Minna Joyce, an emotionally troubled writer who has deliberately abandoned the artificiality and “cool stability” (30) of her parents’ elite enclave of Rosedale, where she was raised with “a silver spoon in every orifice” (11), in favour of the downtown neighbourhood of Parkdale, the home of the Queen Street Mental Health Centre; she has left a “life of inherited privilege” for one of “deliberate squalor” (11). Madness, in these stories, functions as a corrective to the world of appearances and social

conventions, and provides access to truth and honesty. Elsewhere, Findley draws upon the long-standing belief that the mad alone are capable of knocking down “the protective walls thrown up by other people to keep the hurt of reality out” (Findley 1990: 180), in order to access and express the “truth”. The labelling of such people as “mad,” Findley seems to suggest, arises from modern Western society’s deep-rooted fear of laying bare the truth:

When such people exist – then other people must look across the room and say: “that person over there is mad.” You see? “That person over there is crazy.” Because it is too disturbing to be told *the truth, the truth, the truth* (180; emphasis in original).

According to Findley, our fear of such clarity leads us to ostracize the mad, branding them as “other”; rather than revering such people for their supposed ability to “see the heart of things” (180), we relegate them to the margins of what we deem acceptable or “normal.”

The world which Minna has rejected is founded upon the repression of all natural emotion and sensation beneath a veneer of acquired culture and civility. The denizens of Rosedale have erected a barrier between nature and culture, and their status in the world depends on the maintenance of that barrier. “Them as live in Rosedale,” Minna says to Col, “are them as keep their shit in jars” (10). Minna’s refusal to acquiesce, to imprison the darker, less savoury elements of human nature behind a veneer of civilized politeness, is interpreted by her family as madness. Their acceptance of their own thoughts, behaviour and desires as “normal” is so firmly established that they cannot fathom – except as aberrant – any behaviour which transgresses this standard. The expectations which Minna’s family has of her are determined by their class: her mother expects her to

“marry Harry Connacher and raise two dozen kids” (11), following safely in her own footsteps to become a Rosedale wife and mother. Her father’s expectations are only slightly less conventional; as he has no son, he has dreams of her “us[ing] that brain of yours to conquer the real-estate world” (11-12), a dream which, while it acknowledges Minna’s intelligence, nonetheless has as its goal material gain rather than emotional fulfillment. Minna refuses to conform to her parents’ and her society’s expectations, and seeks precisely this fulfillment in her own choice of lifestyle:

Minna’s version of a good work had been to go and live among the poor – “not only the poor in pocket, but the poor who were in pain and maddened by the same confusion that tampered with me” (12).

Minna’s altruism and compassion, and her desire – fulfilled in her writing – for emotionally honest connection with other human beings, are viewed as aberrant by her family. Minna’s contempt for the world of surfaces and appearances in which her parents live is expressed in her continuing “hatred for what she called *ladyhood*,” which she saw “as the enemy of everything she wanted women to be” (11; emphasis in original). This rejection of Rosedale’s – and her mother’s – standards of womanhood is expressed through language, specifically through her parodic use of “ladylike” diction, including her frequent playful use of trite embellishments such as “my dear.” To Minna, the ideal of “ladyhood” imposes strictures on women’s expression of their emotions and desires, demanding that such things be hidden beneath a veneer of politeness. Minna’s appropriation of the linguistic codes of “ladyhood” is her attempt to defuse them, to render them ridiculous, and to strip them of their power.

Minna is not only aware of her parents' disapproval and lack of understanding of her move from Rosedale to Parkdale, but she is inspired by it; while working at the Morrison Café, she harbours "the vaguest hope that her mother – the newly remarried Mrs. Harold Opie – might drift by one day and find her cast-off, screwed-up daughter working behind the counter" and "drop dead of shock" (30). While Findley suggests that Minna's life on Queen Street is partly motivated by feelings of spite against her parents, he makes it clear that the more important catalyst is her benevolence for those who are "unwanted" by society:

Queen Street West and, in fact, the whole of Parkdale offered a world of unwanted people – the only people Minna felt any affection for. They lived in the shadow of the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, either having been discharged from its vast and innumerable wards or waiting to enter them (51).

As in much of Findley's fiction, the "mad" – here, the former, current, and future inhabitants of the Queen Street Mental Health Centre – bear a synecdochic relationship to all outcasts, all those who are excluded from "normal" society. In saying that Queen Street "seemed to be where Minna Joyce belonged" (39), Bragg – and Findley – is affirming her position on the margins of society, among the poor, the unwanted, and the mad.

Minna's affinity for the patients of the Queen Street Mental Health Centre is strengthened by empathy; as a young woman, she herself had spent time in a similar institution. Minna's mother had her institutionalized for her refusal to conform to her society's standards and rules: "she had broken all her family's traditions of silence, propriety and submission" (55). The atmosphere in the Joyce family, is – like that of the

Winslow family – highly repressive. Submission to authority, and strict adherence to the rules of social propriety are central to the Joyces; when Minna transgresses the standards, submitting to “yelling fits” in “the worst of places: streetcars and schoolrooms – Britnell’s Book Store – Eaton’s and Simpsons – church” (55), her behaviour can only be understood by affixing the label of “mad.” The Joyces, with their reliance upon surfaces and appearances, would rather have their daughter medicated into submission – “sedated and sedate” (55) – than acting out in protest against society’s rules and restrictions. For Findley, Minna’s institutionalization represents the sacrifice of the instinctual, natural, irrational aspects of human life to the institutionalized forces of reason that dominate the modern world. The opposition between the oppressive sane and the oppressed mad is hardly new; for example, in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, Randle McMurphy is institutionalized because he, too, refuses to recognize the rules and standards of his society: “I got in a couple of hassles at the work farm...and the court ruled that I’m a psychopath” (Kesey 13). Through McMurphy, Kesey questions the sanity of a world in which those in authority have defined “a psychopath” as “a guy [who] fights too much and fucks too much” (13); McMurphy is the lone figure with the audacity to suggest that those who possess the authority to set the standards against which everyone else is judged “ain’t wholly right” (13), a sentiment that is echoed in Findley’s Minna, who refuses to accept her society’s definitions of “right” and “wrong,” “mad” and “sane.” It is precisely these categories, however, upon which Findley relies to structure the terms of the opposition in his work, since his reversal does not overturn the dichotomy, but merely gives new content to the terms in question.

Madness is one of several elements in the Bragg and Minna stories – including homosexuality and physical “difference” – which represent challenges to society’s conception of “normal.” The homosexual relationship of Bragg and Col, which exists on the margins of – not within, yet not entirely excluded from – the marriage of Bragg and Minna, is depicted as, paradoxically, more “conventional” than the tempestuous and ill-fated heterosexual union of the title characters, and ultimately outlives that partnership. It is precisely the addition of a third party to a two-party marriage, transforming a conventional union into something undefinable and incomprehensible by our society’s standards, which “saves” Bragg and Minna’s marriage. Col, who sleeps in a room “halfway down the hall” (10) between Bragg’s and Minna’s bedrooms, is not merely Bragg’s lover, but provides both Bragg and Minna with a level of comfort and companionship which is absent from their marriage; it is Col to whom Minna confesses her hatred of Rosedale and her desire to give words to the madness she witnesses on Queen Street. This unconventional arrangement is a challenge to the “normal,” limited version of reality, directly opposed to Minna’s mother’s dream of her daughter “marry[ing] Harry Connacher and rais[ing] two dozen kids” in Rosedale. Findley’s work thus attempts to subvert standardized notions of civilization, class and gender, articulating the typically unthematized realities and concerns of those who are deemed “mad,” “deviant” or “indigent” by a society which is organized by sets of binary structures embedded in, and constitutive of, Western civilization. However, in the “Bragg and Minna” stories, Findley does not so much dismantle the oppositional relationship between reason and madness – “norm” and “deviant” – as engage in a simple reversal of

the terms, privileging not the first term in each pair, but the second. The marginal position, for Findley, provides a space from which to challenge the exclusionary practices of the dominant culture, yet the characters in “Bragg and Minna” and “A Gift of Mercy” still operate in a system of opposite terms.

Those who challenge the boundaries of a “normal,” limited version of reality – who dare to break the silence which shrouds the gap between the “accepted” and the “monstrous,” the sane and the mad – are invariably the true heroes of Findley's fiction. It is precisely these figures, excluded from the rational, patriarchal structures of society, that Findley – who has written of himself, “I am a hiding place for monsters” (1990: 306) – chooses as his protagonists, thus ostensibly overturning the systematic exclusion of the irrational, monstrous and mad from rational discourse. Stella, the six-fingered child of Bragg and Minna, is the central example of the “monstrous” in these stories. Stella is the outcome of a long struggle between Bragg and Minna, in which he attempts to “save her from giving birth to monsters” (15) by refusing to father her child:

He even had a theory that “maybe I’m a genetic homosexual.” This theory was that, since there had been genetic defects in other generations of his family – clubbed feet – cleft palates – mongoloid children – mental illness – maybe his genes were calling a halt. Maybe his genes were saying: *no more babies* (14; emphasis in original)<sup>13</sup>.

Bragg’s theory of “genetic homosexuality” indicates his acceptance of a notion of the possibility of human “perfection” which Minna – and Findley – equates with “Adolf Fucking Hitler” (14). As in many of his works, most notably *The Butterfly Plague*, Findley here explores what he has called “that terrible flirting” (Gibson 142) with the human desire for perfection, and the extent of our willingness to accept the evil that,



history tells us, almost inevitably accompanies the search for perfection. In an interview with Graeme Gibson, he spoke of “our need for perfection which tells us that [the Nazis] had some of the right ideas,” which, in most people, is quickly countered by “our abhorrence of Fascism [and] Nazism” (142). In the Bragg and Minna stories, Findley uses Bragg’s theory of “genetic homosexuality” – that he was born a homosexual in order to stop the recurrence of genetic “defects” in future generations of his family – to critique the idea that there is a standard of perfection toward which human beings must strive, and the accompanying idea that those who fall short of the mark are “defective,” “deformed” or “insane.” Minna, who has been labelled “insane” by her parents’ society, because she didn’t meet *its* standard of “perfection,” is the vehicle for Bragg’s acceptance of both his own homosexuality and – eventually – of Stella’s difference.

“Monsters”, to Findley, are far more interesting than those who conform to society’s standards. Minna’s response to Bragg’s statement of refusal – “MAYBE WHAT I WANT IS MONSTERS!” (15; emphasis in original) – signals a seeking out of that which is different or “imperfect.” Stella, who is born, not only with “six fingers on each hand” and “six toes on each foot” (17), but with “brain damage, too” (18), falls outside the realm of what conventional society deems acceptable; the notion that one can be born “damaged” implies a standard of normality, which Findley is interrogating here. Although Bragg responds to Stella’s birth by retreating into silence – “[h]e’d hardly said a word since Stella was born” (19) – Minna recognizes the arbitrariness of society’s standards of good and bad, normal and abnormal:

[S]ix fingers bad – five fingers good. That ring a bell? Get out your *Animal Farm* and read. We've been bamboozled far too long into accepting there can be no acceptance for those of us with four legs (20).

When Minna moves to Australia with Stella, it is an extension of the journey she began by moving from Rosedale to Parkdale. Findley depicts Australia as a place in which the monstrous has been accommodated into ordinary life; the “duck-billed platypus” (22) is associated in Col’s mind with the “monsters” to which Minna wants to give birth. Australia, with its “hordes of rosella birds and cockatoos and cockatiels and the wading ibis and the jabirus and the tiny, crazy peaceful doves” (21), provides Minna with a landscape in which difference is not only tolerated, but is embraced; living in Australia, the place where Britain historically sent its “unwanted” people – convicts and psychiatric patients – is for Minna, “almost as rewarding...as taking up residence in Parkdale” (20). Significantly, it is here where Bragg, Col and Nob discover the petroglyph of the shaman-child, a “crazy figure cut in the rock so utterly and absolutely unlike all the others” (26):

It was a child. A child. The child of the two stick figures rejoicing by its side beneath the moon. and the child had long, albino hair and one six-fingered hand stretched out for all the world to see forever – and it stood on one good leg and one short leg, for which her parents had made a loving box. Forever. And forever visible (26).

Findley’s decision to end “Bragg and Minna” with a vision of difference not only welcomed but made “forever visible,” and with Bragg’s newly realized desire, inspired by the petroglyph, to “return to Ku-Ring-Gai with Stella on his shoulder” (26), provides the context for viewing both Bragg’s homosexuality and Minna’s perceived “madness” as positive and liberating, rather than limiting. The rock carvings have captured a sense of the “joy and the liveliness” associated with difference; Bragg is struck by “the sense of

endless celebration that clung to all the figures in the rock” (25), which include a myriad of creatures, including turtles, birds, snakes and the monstrous “giant platypus,” as well as human figures. The joy implicit in the carving of the shaman-child, “the crazy figure cut in the rock so utterly and absolutely unlike all the others” (26), raises implications about the role of the artist in the articulation of madness and otherness.

The original interpretation of the figure as a “shaman” resonates with the arbitrary nature of our designation of “sanity” as normal and “madness” as deviant. Madness, as Laing and his contemporaries posit, is ultimately a matter of perspective. Consider the following definition of a schizophrenic from Laing and Esterson: “He is someone who has queer experiences and/or is acting in a queer way, *from the point of view usually of his relatives and of ourselves*” (Laing and Esterson 4; my emphasis). The definitions imposed by the figure in authority – the physician – are accepted as the truth. If the gaze were reversed, Laing suggests, the behaviour of the psychiatrist would seem insane to the patient. To illustrate this point, Laing considers Emil Kraepelin’s account of a clinical examination of a young girl, whom he subsequently diagnosed as schizophrenic, proposing that the reader consider the situation from a different perspective, removing the assumption of the unquestionable authority of the physician:

Here are a man and a young girl. If we see the situation purely in terms of Kraepelin’s point of view, it all immediately falls into place. He is sane, she is insane; he is rational, she is irrational. This entails looking at the patient’s actions out of the context of the situation as she experienced it. But if we take Kraepelin’s actions – he tries to stop her movements, stands in front of her with arms outspread, tries to force a piece of bread out of her hand, sticks a needle in her forehead, and so on – out of the context of the situation as experienced and defined by him, how extraordinary *they* are! (Laing 1967: 73)

While the patient's actions are deemed "irrational" and "abnormal" when considered from within the medical paradigm, the physician's actions may seem no more rational, if the patient's perspective were to be granted equivalent authority. The willingness to accept the views held by those in positions of authority, and to label those who interrogate or resist this view as "mad," arises from a fear that it is the human race that is itself mad. Findley has written:

It is better to call the saints and artists, visionaries and dreamers "mad" than it is to [recognize them] as the only ones who are sane. History is full of this...If the saints and artists are right then the rest of the race is crazy – which, of course, it is (Timothy Findley Papers 17-3).

This refusal to allow that there may be some truth to the dissenting voices, Findley suggests, amounts to "a conspiracy to silence the truth about ourselves – that we are mad and that being mad, we are doomed to an inevitable moment when we must relinquish our hold on evolution and fall back into extinction" (17-3). To even entertain the suspicion that the human race may be "off course," to borrow Laing's phrase, is to admit that the apocalypse may be imminent; unquestioning acceptance of the legitimacy of the status quo is a much easier option.

The gap between the "accepted" and the "monstrous," the "sane" and the "mad," is shrouded in silence, and it is this silence that Findley, through characters such as Minna, seeks to subvert:

Quietly, with dignity and calm, she lay beneath the surface of her tranquilizers, plotting the overthrow of all the conniving mothers in the world – and all the sentimental, ineffectual fathers – not to mention all the obedient, deadly doctors. It was also then that Minna Joyce began to plot the overthrow of silence (56).

Minna's "overthrow" of the silence which separates the mad from the sane is attempted through the written word – at her death, Minna had written eleven books – and through gestures – including her "crusades" among the inhabitants of Queen Street, her instinctual yet inherently irrational smashing of the window to "catch" the suicidal man jumping to his death, and her attempted "rescue" of Libby Doyle. In the first incident, Findley underscores the significance of both the man's action and Minna's reaction through providing as a "soundtrack" Elton John's song "Goodbye, Yellow Brick Road," which contains a verse which echoes the oppositional relationship between reason and madness already present in these two stories:

...goodbye yellow brick road,  
 Where the dogs of society howl.  
 You can't plant me in your penthouse,  
 I'm going back to my plough (41).

The binary opposition between reason and madness, culture and nature, is here preserved in the pairing of penthouse and plough, or Rosedale and Parkdale. Findley favours the second term in each pairing, positioning himself and many of his protagonists opposite the "dogs of society," on the side of the few voices of dissent. It is these voices – the individuals labeled "mad" for challenging the dominant paradigms of modernity<sup>14</sup> – which have been silenced, and which much of Findley's fiction rather naïvely attempts to make heard.

While madness in some form is present in nearly all of Findley's novels, plays, and stories, it is the Bragg and Minna stories which most clearly echo the words written by Michel Foucault, in his 1961 work, *Madness and Civilization*:

As for a common language, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason *about* madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. I have not tried to write the history of that language, but rather the archaeology of that silence (Foucault xi).

In one sense, Foucault's text – now often singled out and criticized for its naïveté and lack of sophistication – can serve as the theoretical analogue of Findley's artistic preoccupations. Jacques Derrida, in his well-known critique of Foucault's text, pointed out the impossibility of positioning oneself outside the discourse of reason in order to write such a history or archaeology of reason's silenced other:

In writing a history of madness, Foucault has attempted – and this is the greatest merit, but also the very infeasibility of his book – to write a history of madness *itself*... Foucault wanted to write a history of madness itself, that is madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason, the language of psychiatry *on* madness... (Derrida 33-4; emphasis in original).

A *fictional* "archaeology" of that silence, by extension, is subject to the same critique. No work of artistry and calculation can succeed in giving voice to the pure expression of madness, given the formal and discursive demands of any literary work. No writer can successfully meet Minna's goal as a writer, which Findley describes as "putting an end to all the silence out on Queen Street. It's putting words where no words are and giving articulation to all that noise behind those eyes I'd been watching, innocent and crafty as a bear's" (12). Minna's epiphany concerning the relationship between art and madness reveals a fundamental weakness in Findley's project:

Half the people I was consorting with on Queen Street were *artists!* Artists and actors and poets and playwrights! Novelists, like Bragg. And, oh my God, it suddenly occurred to me that – looking out from the very same pain and madness – the only difference between the schizoids and the artists was articulation. And when I realized that what I had was articulation, I started to write like someone possessed....(12)

This statement presupposes an authenticity or “truth” which is buried beneath the surface appearances of “madness.” Minna’s attempt to articulate the “noises in behind the eyes of bears” (21) resonates with Foucault’s statement that, in order to access the authentic voice of madness, one need only “to bend an attentive ear to the whispers of the world and try to perceive the many images that have never been set down in poetry and the many fantasies that have never reached the colors proper to the waking state” (qtd. in Habermas 240)<sup>15</sup>. Findley’s own attempt to let the voices of the mad speak through his writing, is similarly problematic. While the analogue which he draws between the figures of the artist and the “madman” is rooted in a common suffering before the demands of instrumental rationality, what is troubling is the differentiation of artist and “madman” on the grounds of “articulation” alone. Apart from its obvious idealization of madness, this claim enables Findley to use the artist characters as ciphers for the mad. In other words, Findley attempts to get around the Foucauldian problem of articulating madness by identifying the artist with the madman, and then simply using the artist as a vehicle to articulate that which remains inexpressible for madness alone. Of the three writer-figures in the Bragg and Minna stories, two – Minna and Nob, the “sad, mad poet from Sydney” (4) – have been institutionalized for mental illness. Findley suggests a connection between Minna’s troubled mind and her literary talent; in contrast to Bragg, who “could spend the whole day writing a single sentence and tear it up before he went to bed” (13),

Minna is an inspired, disorganized and remarkably prolific writer. Findley suggests a rather simplistic correlation between Minna's talent and productivity and her disdain for and rejection of all convention; in her work as well as her relationships with others, she stands in opposition to the repressive forces of society which attempt to contain the chaos of human life and experience within the artificially imposed boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Findley's obvious admiration for the iconoclastic and anti-rational, expressed through his idealized portrayal of Minna Joyce, is repeated nearly a decade later in the character of Lily Kilworth in *The Piano Man's Daughter*, who, like Minna, rejects the repressive values and norms with which her Rosedale family has attempted to indoctrinate her.

**“We are not alone here, Charlie”: Nature, Madness and Wonder in *The Piano Man's Daughter***

*The Piano Man's Daughter* (1995), like many of Findley's works, is thematically organized around the tensions between artifice and nature, reason and madness, the “appropriate” and the “wonderful.” Lily Kilworth, the protagonist of *The Piano Man's Daughter*, is, as one character says, “blessed” (186) – rather than afflicted – by madness<sup>16</sup>. While Findley does effectively convey the frustration, terror and pain which accompany the pathology of Lily's illness, his representation of mental illness is nevertheless in keeping with his choice of the epigraph to this novel, Oliver Sacks's statement about the mad that: “It is their fate to be isolated and thus original.” Lily is indeed isolated in her madness, which enables her to transcend the stultifying regimes of



nineteenth-century southern Ontario propriety and adopt potentially emancipatory perspectives generally unavailable in the emotionally empty, inverted world of her mother and stepfather. Lily Kilworth suffers from a madness which manifests itself, not only through seizures and the setting of fires, but, most remarkably, through an intense connection with the animal and insect worlds. All three of these manifestations of Lily's illness function strategically in the novel to subvert the artifice, hypocrisy and rigidity of the conventions by which her family and her society are governed, but it is her *benevolence*, her affinity for non-human beings, her recognition that "we are not alone" in the world, that ultimately points beyond the ossified polarities of bourgeois culture to a reconciliation of the divided worlds which produced Lily Kilworth in the first place.

The world into which Lily is born is one of narrow minds and rigid codes of behaviour, a world in which a piano is both reducible to a mere artifact, a "sign and signal of civilization" and "a gift of gentility to all the generations to come" (26), and feared for "its ability to seduce the otherwise industrious child into a world of dreamy inactivity" (26). James Kilworth's repression of the non-rational leads to his condemnation of the piano as "a pagan instrument" (26), words which foreshadow Lily's own brief encounter with Karl, a flautist whom she imagines as "the Great God Pan" (448)<sup>17</sup> and who, for Lily, combines the liberating, anti-rational principles of music and nature<sup>18</sup>. Interestingly, although James forbids the introduction of a piano into his home, he does eventually learn to embrace the non-rational in the person of Lily, whom he welcomes into his home in spite of her illness. Thus, Lily acts as the agent of reconciliation of rational and non-rational worlds, introducing chaos and wonder into the

controlled and ordered bourgeois world of the Kilworths. Neither Lily's conception nor her birth occurs in the stately family home of Munsterfield where Ede lives with her parents, but rather in the field across the road which is the site of Ede's "conspiracies": "This was Ede's word for fiction – the fictions by which she extrapolated hope from hopeless situations and surprise from certainties: *conspiracies*. Against reality" (17; emphasis in original). Lily herself, then, is the product of such a conspiracy; her very existence functions as a corrective to the "reality" of life with the Kilworths in turn-of-the-century Ontario.

From the beginning, Findley suggests, Lily's parentage marks her as potentially transgressive to her society's standards of conformity and propriety; Tom Wyatt – the "piano man" – is clearly set apart from conventional society, by virtue of his affinity for the non-rational, represented by his intense connection to music, his ability to communicate without words, and the fact that he lived near "the dreaded Lunatic Asylum" near Queen Street (137). As in the Bragg and Minna stories, living in close proximity to a mental institution rather strangely denotes an ability to see beyond the narrow definitions of normality imposed by society, to recognize and embrace all humanity, regardless of people's reactions. His daughter, too, refuses to conform to the expectations of her society. Growing up at Munsterfield, Lily is not content to accept the boundaries set for her by her family, but rather challenges them at every turn:

At the start, there was Munsterfield itself – the house to be challenged, each individual room within its walls a foreign country. The first time Lily escaped, she was gone no more than a minute before it occurred to her that, going into hiding, she had found a way to rid the world of others – and to claim it for herself (109).

Among the “others” whom Lily seeks to escape is her uncle Liam, with his “wilful, stubborn apartness,” who “treat[s] his family with increasing condescension” (156), and whose primary concern is for the appearance of propriety and conformity. After James’s stroke, the household under Liam’s rule is a repressive, totalitarian regime, which the Kilworths compare to having “joined the army” (80):

Liam managed the household as he might have run a military outpost. Or rather, Liam’s version of a military outpost – disciplined as if survival depended on sitting down to breakfast at precisely 7:00 A.M., and not one second later (80).

This carefully maintained surface order is undermined by two things: Lily’s illness and Liam’s excessive use of alcohol, which, to Lily, he calls “memory potion,” a term which indicates its power to transport one across boundaries of time. When he drinks, Liam’s calculated “coolness” and “aloofness” (155) dissolve, and he gives free reign to his emotions. Significantly, drunkenness has a profound effect on Liam’s relation to language: when sober, Liam uses language to restore order and reason and to uphold the appearance of propriety; at Ede’s wedding, he castigates his sister for “making a spectacle...furious because she was disgracing herself in a public place” (151). After drinking much whiskey, however, his practical, rational use of language is transformed into a magical fairy-tale discourse, which possesses the power to transcend the boundaries of reason, and which holds his listeners spellbound:

He told about the wandering minstrel, *I*, who met the girl with the flaxen hair – and of how they were joined by the light of the moon and of how, when he’d wandered away again, the minstrel, *I*, was drowned in a sea full of horses – who thundered over him in waves – who swept him far, far away – and under – down and down and down... (161; ellipses in original)

This lyrical, evocative language, similar to that with which Ede remembers the story of Uncle John Fagan – *Once upon a time, in Dublin town, there lived...* (113; emphasis in original) – seems to point toward a redemptive potential in Liam’s use of alcohol; in his telling of this story, his emotional defenses are lowered and he is able to communicate with his niece. However, this potential is illusory; as he is able to both uphold the status quo and, through the use of alcohol, rebel against it, his rebellion is ultimately ineffectual, and possesses no permanent restorative potential. Despite the illusion of rebellion, Liam is as rigorous as ever in his adherence to the rules of propriety and his pursuit of “success” in accordance with the rules and standards of his society. Even when drunk, Liam acts in the interests of propriety; the decorative language which he uses to tell Lily the story of “the hidden child” merely masks the content of the story, which tells of the instrumental role which Liam’s drinking played in Ede’s decision to marry Frederick Wyatt, and thus, by extension in Lily’s imprisonment in the Selby Street attic.

Ede leaves Munsterfield and Liam’s rule to marry Frederick Wyatt, for whom Lily feels an instinctual hatred, because of his eyes, which were “cold. Frigid. Chilling” (107). Frederick’s rigid control over all emotion and his unflinching adherence to society’s conventions are made clear from his first appearance in the novel:

Frederick Wyatt at first seemed more like a distant acquaintance of Tom’s than a brother. He spoke with the kind of authority you expect when grief has no blood in it – a self-controlled kind of grief – an objective grief. Reasoned, utterly without emotion and yet with deep concern (43).

The rules of “propriety” (173) by which all Frederick’s relationships are governed lead him to “hold [Lily] at a distance” (153), refusing to acknowledge her until after the wedding, because of what others would think of his marrying his brother’s “widow.”

Findley makes the difference between Tom and Frederick apparent in their respective attitudes toward sexual relations with Ede. Both couplings occur in silence, but while Tom and Ede's lovemaking is silent because the connection between them transcends spoken communication, Frederick's violent, "perfunctory" (171) performance gives rise to a desperate need for words, which remains unfulfilled: "*Stop*, she wanted to tell him. *Stop. I don't understand what you're doing.* But nothing – still nothing was said" (171; emphasis in original). The emotional gulf between Frederick and Ede, and the felt absence of communication between them, are emphasized by the frequent repetition of variations on the phrases "nothing was said" and "not a word" (171-2). While Tom functions on a natural, instinctual level at which words are not necessary, Frederick operates on the level of surface appearances, and expects his wife to do the same.

Edith Kilworth's ascension to social respectability and importance as the wife of Frederick Wyatt is marked by an increasing reliance upon artifice and a distancing from the natural world. The flowers – "hothouse roses and lilies, bulbs that had been forced by Bateson to an exquisite burst of scent" (200) – with which Ede adorns the Selby Street house on social occasions, are in stark contrast to the flowers of the field – daisies, clover, honeysuckle, dog roses and day lilies – which Ede had fashioned into a crude wreath to mark the occasion of Lily's birth. In her gradual acclimatization to the role of Mrs. Frederick Wyatt, Ede has severed her connection to the natural world and has assumed the poise befitting her position in the most refined society.

On Frederick's instruction, Ede had commenced a thorough reading of *Our Deportment* by a man called John H. Young... Mister Young had collated a mass of instruction on the MANNERS, CONDUCT AND DRESS of what he called THE MOST REFINED SOCIETY – all set out in capital letters. Ede

just laughed, but Frederick's insistence could not be brooked. He quizzed her on the book's contents day by day, until she finally consented to take it seriously. He also provided her with a copy of *Beeton's Book of Household Management* in order to acquaint her with a proper relationship with servants (173; emphasis in original, my ellipsis).

Following Frederick's lead, Ede creates a family which accords with Laing's identification of "the family" with the repressive forces of society. The family, according to Laing, exists in order to "promote respect, conformity, obedience; to con children out of play; to induce a fear of failure; to promote a respect for work; to promote a respect for 'respectability'" (Laing 1967: 41). Findley acknowledges the role of the family in the promotion of conformity to the prevailing social reality; Ede, who had repeatedly challenged Liam's insistence on convention, becomes, as the head of her own family, a paragon of convention and conformity. Later in Ede's life, Charlie reflects on her transformation of herself:

The woman who had once sworn at Liam in the halls of the Queen's Hotel, Toronto – the girl and the woman who had thrown her head back and laughed out loud at the world around her – now sat stilled and immutable. Her posture would not have changed if you had told her a cobra was lying at her feet. She counted this as a strength. I count it now, as a tragedy (411).

As she begins "to sink into the depths of her marriage" (176), Ede gives up her "conspiracies" in favour of social conformity; she knows only that she must "*learn how to swim* – swim with graceful, accomplished strokes, and smiling all the while" remaining unaware that in her quest for conformity, she is "exercising her instinct for survival at all costs. All. Including the cost of her integrity" (177; emphasis in original). As she strives to fit into her new marriage and social milieu, she soon discovers that Lily, the product of a former "conspiracy," is now "a liability" (207) in the echelons of

society to which she and Frederick aspire. Lily had been sequestered at Munsterfield until after the honeymoon – prevented, even, from attending the wedding – and upon her arrival, the carefully ordered pattern of the household is disrupted, as is the path to social success which Ede, led by Frederick, has begun to ascend: “What you have to understand, Edith, is where we are going. And what it takes to get there. *Money. Know-how. And acceptability*” (175; emphasis in original). While Frederick earns the money, and Ede cultivates the know-how, every aspect of Lily’s existence thwarts the Wyatts’ attempts to attain acceptability. Lily, in effect, is the “cobra” at Ede’s feet, functioning as a reminder of the existence of a spontaneous natural world that cannot be constrained by reason and propriety.

Lily’s first public seizure – or “whirlwind” – occurs during an important and elaborate dinner party, in front of “Masseys and Baldwins and Gooderhams,” those denizens of the “upper-upper echelons” of society (201). In contrast to the meticulously controlled artifice of the dinner party, which achieves its pinnacle in the presentation of the highly contrived *Gâteau Saint-Honoré*, Lily’s “whirlwind” is a force of nature over which she has no control. The disruption of the ceremonious display of this elaborately constructed dessert by Lily’s seizure effectively subverts the veneer of polite society, forcing the guests to confront the irrational “other”. The use of the word “whirlwind” to describe Lily’s seizures is significant; in *Coming Through the Whirlwind*, American psychoanalyst Michael Eigen discusses the symbolic association of whirlwinds with the stripping away of all pretence and artifice: “In the Bible, a whirlwind is often associated with the leveling of arrogance. Evil is swept away by the storm. After the storm, there is

fresh air, the light of God, and human goodness. The whirlwind cleanses the psychic landscape” (Eigen 178). Through her whirlwinds, Lily tears down prescribed notions of politeness and social conventions, gaining access to primal emotions, and in turn forcing others to confront the non-rational. Unable to comprehend what they are witnessing, and unable to formulate a “proper” response to such naked emotion, the guests remain “frozen in place” (207), their habitual coldness exaggerated to the point of immobility. Frederick’s response to Lily’s “whirlwind” is consistent with his usual attempt to control his situations through the use of reason; however the rational response – to command Lily to “STOP!...Stop that! Stop that! *Now!*”(207; emphasis in original, my ellipsis) is powerless to stop the natural force of Lily’s seizure. Lily’s unfettered presence in front of the proper “Masseys and Baldwins and Gooderhams” is not “appropriate” to the situation and, as Frederick anticipates, will be the cause of damage to both Ede’s social career and his own: “She has set us back months. That’s the damage I mean. The social consequences” (208).

Following her public transgression of the repressive social conventions, Frederick has Lily banished to the attic<sup>19</sup> during all subsequent social events, to prevent further damage to the Wyatts’ reputations, and to remove from his sight what cannot be understood within a rational framework. When Ede explains that Lily’s seizures are a form of “possession” and as such cannot be understood rationally or controlled through the exercise of will, Frederick determines to banish the unknowable from his sight, declaring: “I will not have it in my presence” (208). Lily’s imprisonment in the Selby Street attic is Findley’s most self-conscious deployment of the conventions of the gothic



novel, a genre which is characterized by its exploration of the realm of the irrational, the “attic” of the reasoning, civilized mind. Lily’s new identity – “madwoman in the attic” – resonates with both Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and its post-colonial re-utterance, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as well as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1890 story of mental illness and confinement “The Yellow Wallpaper.” These texts examine and interrogate Victorian society’s attempted containment of “otherness,” historically articulated as non-rational femininity. In their book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine the conventions of the nineteenth-century sub-genre which they term “female Gothic,” establishing a connection between the imagery of domestic entrapment and enclosure so prevalent in this genre, and the social realities of women in the nineteenth century:

Literally, women like Dickinson, Brontë, and Rossetti were imprisoned in their homes, their father’s houses; indeed, almost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in men’s houses. Figuratively, such women were, as we have seen, locked into male texts, texts from which they could escape only through ingenuity and indirection. It is not surprising, then that spatial imagery of enclosure and escape, elaborated with what frequently becomes obsessive intensity, characterizes much of their writing (83).

The characteristics of the “female gothic,” according to Gilbert and Gubar, reflected the restrictions imposed by the society in which – and against which – the novels were written. Findley’s use of gothic conventions and allusions to nineteenth-century women writers<sup>20</sup> foregrounds the thematic similarity between *The Piano Man’s Daughter* and the works of Brontë and her contemporaries: he, too, portrays the consequences of the attempted denial – in the name of propriety – of that which is deemed “other.” Findley deconstructs the gothic text, discarding the notion of a romance-quest plot and

concentrating instead on the often peripheral figure of the madwoman and her attempts to escape the confines of the rational order. The novel's indictment of the suppression of the irrational is thus made explicit in a manner similar to that employed in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, producing a critique of the society which not only has placed the madwoman in the attic, but has also produced the discursive space of madness in the first place.

Lily's response to her attic confinement is the renewal of her relationship with fire. Fire had begun to "speak" to Lily on an earlier occasion, while she was engaged in the act of reading *Beeton's Book of Household Management*, a book which Frederick had given to Ede "in order to acquaint her with a proper relationship with servants" (173). Within this discourse of restraint and propriety, the instructions for fire-lighting in *Beeton's* emphasize the communicative aspect of fire – "Matches. Paper. Communicating." (189) – and while reading them, Lily hears the voice of fire speaking to her in words for the first time:

Fire had never spoken to her before in such a direct way. Not with a human voice. The language had always been in flames, augmented by the wind-words high in the chimney. Sometimes there was so much roaring it was more like song than speech. Music. Singing. Song. But not words.

This was words (188).

Fire, for Lily, is a means of communication with people of the past, as well as those who exist in the present: "It contained her secret people – gave her glimpses of them far away down in the flames, where they huddled in rooms she had never seen in life" (189). One of these "secret people" is John Fagan, Lily's great-great-uncle, who had lived in Ireland<sup>21</sup>; thus, fire allows Lily to transcend all boundaries – temporal, national, corporeal

– in order to connect with the “songs in [her] blood” (9), those traits and characteristics which, in this novel, are passed from one generation to those who follow. When Lily’s condition is discovered, Ede’s mother reveals to Ede that John Fagan had “lived in another world...not ours – where there is reason” (114). Like Lily, John Fagan had been confined to his parents’ attic, “kept there by his parents – *for his safety’s sake*. And because they were ashamed...which in itself is shaming” (115; emphasis and ellipsis in original). The locking away of that which cannot be accounted for by reason is a Kilworth family tradition; like Lily, John Fagan struggles to connect with a world which is unable and unwilling to comprehend his existence. While confined, he had covered the walls with words and images, in an attempt to *communicate*, to externalize his inner torment:

“All who did not fall down [and worship the golden image],” she said, “were to be *cast into the midst of a fiery furnace*. Uncle John’s chosen colour for this was red...My father said there were drawings, too. Paintings of the fiery furnace. One whole wall was a depiction of flames. Drawn – painted – illuminated by God’s hand. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego ...*bound in their coats, their hose and their hats, cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace*” (116; emphasis and ellipsis in original).

In the Book of Daniel, these three men refused to worship the golden idol set up by King Nebuchadnezzar and were subsequently thrown into the fire, but they were rescued, thereby demonstrating the omnipotence of the God they served. Findley is not interested in the biblical story as an illustration of the power of the Hebrew God, but rather as an argument for the freedom to worship the deity of one’s choice, be it a golden idol, the Hebrew God, the “Great God Pan,” or Ramses II, “the mummified king of all the ants” (263). The appearance of this story on the walls of the attic of the Dublin house suggests

a similarity between the biblical story and the story that is being told to Ede by her mother: John Fagan, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, was an outcast by virtue of his refusal to blindly follow the masses in their worship of whatever golden image was placed in front of them. Unlike the three biblical figures, however, John Fagan, his mother, and his father were not rescued from the “fiery furnace” of their burning house; this redemptive logic would clearly be out of place in a world from which all gods have fled. Similarly, Lily Kilworth makes no attempt to save herself from the asylum fire which kills her. Both characters sacrifice themselves to the fire which will destroy the world which, in its unwillingness to recognize that which challenges the prevailing social reality, has relegated them to the attic or asylum. Like Hooker Winslow’s destruction of his family, John Fagan and Lily Kilworth each turn their pathology against the very world which has produced it, becoming the agent of resistance to – and to some extent, destruction of – that world. For Lily, fire provides a means of forging connections between those who have been cast out from society; after the asylum fire which kills her, Lily and six others are found “gathered in a circle” (453), an image which speaks of a collective embracing of the unknown. In a sentence which has undeniable resonances with “Bragg and Minna,” Findley refers to fire as representative of “a gathering” which transcends the artificially constructed and imposed standards of contemporary Western society, reaching “all the way back to the people in the caves – the caves where the first of us were born – made visible” (455). This connection to a primordial otherness points toward the redemptive potential of fire; in its destruction of the world of surface appearances, fire opens up the possibility of connecting to something beyond this world.

It is this connection that John Fagan had been seeking, “but his parents locked the door” (455). This attempt to control the irrational is mirrored in the deaths of the twenty asylum inmates who perished because they “were caught in a stairwell whose door somehow got locked behind them” (453)<sup>22</sup>; in its attempt to repress the unknown, their society had left them “no way through” (453) to what exists beneath or beyond the surfaces of this world. Like her seizures, Lily’s fires are triggered by external incidents of human hypocrisy or cruelty. Her first fire, which she lights while sequestered in the Selby Street attic during a dinner party, begins with the remembered image of a cow being slaughtered. This image of the destruction of a non-human being by human agency inspires intense terror in Lily, which leads to the beginnings of a seizure and the knowledge that “[s]omeone must be made to come” (244). Fire, therefore, provides Lily with a means of preventing a seizure, of summoning help, and of crossing the bridge between inner and outer worlds:

The *Keeper* in Lily’s life was fire. Her jail was her illness, and its key was a box of matches. These let her in and out. Without them, she had no access to either direction. I once heard her yelling: OPEN THE GATE! OPEN THE GOD-DAMN GATE! I WANT TO COME THROUGH! By the time I reached her, she was standing in a darkened closet, setting the clothes on fire (255).

Lily’s inner world – her illness – is chaotic, unpredictable and uncontrollable, while the primary concern of the outer world appears to be the ordering of chaos and the attempt to bring the uncontrollable under control. While her seizures function as an internalized response to the external world, the lighting of fires allows her to externalize that chaos, actively expressing the fear which the outer world inspires in her, and attempting to obliterate the cause of that fear.

Findley's novels, as Diana Brydon has pointed out, reveal the ways in which "[t]he fragile balance of human life in harmony with nature has been irrevocably disturbed" (Brydon 1986: 81). Lily is the ambassador of this harmonious mode of existence, preferring the world of the ants – represented by the three anthills, Amazonia, Lily-land, and Thebes – to the world of human beings<sup>23</sup>. Lily's fascination with the ants begins with her observations of "The War Between the Ants," a series of events which culminate with the Amazons' kidnapping of the Egyptians' babies: "The violence of this was quite alarming, but Lily accepted it as being the way of ants. When Frederick locked her in the attic, that was the way of men" (259). As Brydon noted in her essay on Findley's *The Wars*, "Findley seems to draw a distinction between the "natural" violence of nature, which is spontaneous, and the "unnatural" violence of civilization, which seems bent on denying man's identity as part of the natural world" (80-1). The ant-world is valorized, not because it is more benign than the world of humans, but because it is, although highly regulated and hierarchical, an element of the natural world. The ants that Lily observes abduct each others' offspring, practice slavery, and observe social structures not unlike our own – "There were warrior ants, landowner ants, ants of the aristocracy, peasant ants and slaves" (261) – but unlike human society, ant society is governed by instinct, rather than the freely chosen constraints of human artifice. The relationship between "natural" and "non-natural" violence is not, however, morally symmetrical, given that culture ideally opens up the possibility of transcending, not just mimetically reproducing, instinctual patterns of domination. In this "fallen" state,

civilization perpetuates, but also legitimates and culturally adorns the ritualized brutality of nature, thereby simultaneously distorting both our instinctual and moral capacities.

For Findley, the wonder found in the natural, non-rational world possesses restorative potential. During Lily's confinement in the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, she asks Ede to bring her "[s]ome ants," and follows this request with another, only partially serious: "You could also bring me some matches, if you were so inclined" (436). Trapped in a rational, institutional environment, Lily's only hope is the escape which can only be achieved through the re-introduction of the chaotic wonder of the natural world:

Lily did not speak again for a moment. Then she said: "some ants *would* be nice. Some butterflies. A bird or two. We could plant a tree over there," she said, "if they'd let us dig through the floor..." (436; emphasis in original).

Lily's desire is to transgress the boundaries which separate the scientific and natural worlds, to introduce disorder and wonder into the sterile, ordered environment in which she is confined. Lily is not entirely alone in her transgressive potential, however. Her view of the world is shared and influenced by her cousin Lizzie Wyatt – "the dear, wondrous boy" (218) – and the naturalist Jean Fabre, two "men so special they had been given women's names" (257). The nomenclature is significant: in a conversation with Alan Twigg in 1988, Findley remarked, "Maybe we have to get rid of the word *manhood*...I always associate the word manhood with killing" (Twigg 86; emphasis in original). Male characters such as Lizzie Wyatt, with his "woman's name" and contralto singing voice, dissociate themselves from socially constructed maleness or "manhood," occupying a space of difference or "otherness" from which they can resist the values and

conventions associated with the “normal” male world, as represented by Lily’s grandfather, father and brother.<sup>24</sup>

Jean Henri Fabre, in whom nature and science find their resolution, and whose book *The Boy Who Loved Insects*, has almost sacred significance in Lily’s life, represents another ally in Lily’s “conspiracy” against rational reality. The tensions between nature and science are implicit in the words which Fabre addresses to his fellow scientists:

You kill and rip up the insect. I study it alive. You turn it into an object of horror and pity. I cause it to be loved. You labour in a torture-chamber and dissecting-room. I make my observations under the blue sky...You pry into death. I pry into life... (371; ellipsis in original).

Charlie identifies these words as “the spirit of Lily Kilworth” (371). This indictment of the methods and aims of the scientific establishment – of our Cartesian legacy in its most radical, institutional configuration – does not fail to resonate with the horrific episode which occurs earlier in the novel, in which Lizzie is subjected to, and does not survive, brain surgery performed on the kitchen table at Munsterfield. The attempt to control nature – even for the purpose of saving life – through the objectifying strategies of experimental science results, paradoxically, in the killing of the “wonder” which, for Findley, can be found only in the natural world. Findley’s graphic depiction of the surgery, in which Doctor Warren scoops out portions of Lizzie’s brain tumour with spoons, “not unlike the spooning of thick ice cream” (292), suggests that, although the surgery was the only possibility for saving Lizzie’s life, it is nonetheless an interference by science into the realm of nature. In the example of Lizzie’s tumour, as in the habit of the ants and the more violent aspects of Lily’s illness, Findley acknowledges the inherent imperfection of the natural world, including its capacity for violence and cruelty. Yet, it



is in this imperfection that he finds wonder. His depiction – eight full pages of gruesome details – of the operation as a grossly intrusive and insensitively-executed endeavour, amounts to a harsh criticism of nineteenth-century medicine as a futile battle between man and generalized nature, a battle in which the individual patient becomes an afterthought:

For the briefest moment, Omar Warren hung above his discovery in dismay. He recognized at once the implacable enemy of an entangled growth. The tumour, encircled as it was with nerves, could not possibly be removed without harming these to such an extent that any amount of paralysis might result.

On the other hand, given the soft, non-fibrous texture of the diseased tissue, if it were to be sectioned and removed piecemeal, parts of it would be certain to elude him, and a stalk from which further growth could occur was almost guaranteed to be left behind.

Worse still—wherever an arterial branch lay hidden within the tumour, one wrong cut could start a flow of blood that might not be stoppable.

Well. Either way, the young man was going to be imperilled.

*What was his name?* (290-1; emphasis in original)

Similarly, Lyon's destruction of Lily's ant "cities" represents the methodical, calculated, yet thoughtless violence enacted by human beings against nature, although here Findley refuses any straightforward oppositional framework within which to juxtapose animal and human natures, exploiting instead the ironic anthropomorphic projection which recoils to contest the moral superiority of our "civilized" world:

With the hatchet, he cleaved the city of Thebes in half – and then again, in quarters. With the rake he scattered the citizens of Lily-land, and with the trowel, he pierced the heart of Amazonia – digging down through its crowded nurseries in which the cocoons of both the reds and the blacks were being attended to. He threw them, *spoonful by spoonful*, into the air. He then brought forth the watering can and inserted its nozzle deep into Amazonia and poured (262; my emphasis).

Lyon's use of a spoon suggests a parallel relation between his destructive actions and those of Doctor Warren. In both cases, natural matter is under attack by the tools and utensils – instruments of both disengagement *and* manipulation – of the “civilized” world. Lily's reactions to Lyon's actions equal his in their violence, but Findley seems to suggest that hers is a more “natural,” instinctual violence, and as such is more deserving of the reader's sympathy and understanding than is Lyon's calculated and premeditated cruelty. Upon discovering Lyon's destruction of the anthills, Lily “suffered three convulsions - one, so it seemed, in behalf of each of her cities” (263). This internalized reaction to Lyon's cruelty – her violence is first enacted upon her own person – is immediately followed by an externalized act of revenge and violence:

Up in the house, Lily had retired to Lyon's closet and, using the matches retrieved from the coffin of the King of Egypt, she had methodically set fire to every piece of clothing Lyon owned. The fact is, she had to be restrained from burning the clothes he wore (264).

Significantly, this is the first of Lily's fires that is not immediately extinguished; it functions as the agent of the natural world, exacting revenge for Lyon's monstrous crime and suggesting that no human act can escape some form of cosmic restitution.

The third casualty of “civilization” in this novel – after Lizzie and the ants – is Neddy, whose peaceful, loving nature is marked by his wearing of a bird's white feather, who is able to coax from his violin sounds like a man “humming a contralto tune” (374), and who upon meeting Lily for the first time, gives her a kiss which Charlie identifies as of that type reserved “for ants on greeting one another” (379). Neddy in these ways is presented as a variation upon the character of Lizzie Wyatt, and as such is marked for sacrifice; he dies in the First World War. Lorraine York, in her study of war in Findley's

fictions, observes that “[w]ar becomes a *means* of illustration in Findley as well as a phenomenon to be illustrated” (York 1991: xviii; emphasis in original). In this novel, Findley uses war to illustrate the insanity of what we call “civilization”. Findley’s repeated use of the phrase “gone for a soldier” underscores the fact that the young men who go to war are, in fact, literally “gone,” their former selves replaced by machine-like soldiers. The arena of war, for Findley, is one in which the humanity of men is systematically stripped away and replaced with the accoutrements of “manliness” and aggression. The additional cruel irony is that Neddy dies on “the eleventh day of the eleventh month at two minutes prior to the eleventh hour” and is therefore “the last Canadian to die in the war” (420). That such unnecessary, irrational deaths occur, is, Findley and Charlie tell us, “the root of barbarism” (420). Although “[i]rrational or vengeful acts...form the very substance of human warfare” (York 1991: 54), the rationality and correctness of war itself is not questioned by society at large, whereas Lily’s reaction to Neddy’s death – she throws her clothing, jewelry and parcels at passing automobiles – is regarded as insane. Interestingly, her method of rejoinder to both Neddy’s death and the death of her ants is to strike out at the accoutrements of “civilization” – clothing and automobiles. Both incidents also involve the lighting of fires; the fire which Lily lights during a screening of a romantic film in which the hero, like Neddy, was “gone for a soldier” (425) is not only her suicide attempt, but an attempt to articulate her rage and sorrow at both society’s romanticization of war and Neddy’s senseless death.

Charlie himself later fights in the Second World War, an initiation into the world of “manly” violence<sup>25</sup> which, interestingly, results in his “emasculatation,” placing him symbolically outside of that world forever. Unlike Lily’s ants, Lizzie Wyatt, and Neddy Harris, Charlie Kilworth *survives* the violence enacted upon him and takes from it a greater appreciation for what he has already learned from the process of constructing his mother’s story: the importance of saying “yes” to all aspects of life, not merely those that can be understood within a rational framework. In spite of Lily’s exhortations to “pass it on” – the joy of living, the wonder of existence – Charlie initially refuses to father a child, because of his great fear that Lily’s illness will be transmitted to the next generation: “No child of mine will ever sing Lily’s song. Once – for all its marvels – was once too often” (9). Like Bragg, Charlie is afraid that his child might not conform to the standards of “normality,” and therefore decides to forgo the experience of fatherhood, in order to spare himself and his wife “the sorrow – or the burden – of giving birth to another Lily” (240). While he realizes that such a decision is contrary to the spirit of Lily herself, the spirit of “life at *any price*” (240; emphasis in original), he remains firm in his conviction that it is better to deny life altogether than to bring into the world a child who, like Lily, would never be able to live “the life of an ordinary child” (92). After Lily’s death, and through the process of reconstructing Lily’s life from fragments of memories, journals and photographs, Charlie reaches the decision to affirm the totality of life, including the non-human and the non-rational – the ant-world and the “songs” of Lily Kilworth. As Anne Geddes Bailey notes:

By the time of his return, he is changed by two important events. First, he writes this narrative and discovers in Lily's presence his own desire to find his child; second, he has been emasculated in the war and thus is no longer capable of penetration. Although a terrible disfigurement, his wound is also a liberation. Without the literal possession of the phallus, he becomes, metaphorically, a mother (1998a: 71).

Fathers, in *The Piano Man's Daughter*, are associated with patterns of exclusion, destruction and absence – both emotional and literal. Through transforming Charlie into a “mother,” Findley points toward a possible future marked by “a new mother/child plot based upon an intersubjective narrative relationship” (65), in which meaning is “generated through a series of negotiations between two entities – between mother and child, between narrator and text, between text and intertext, between text and reality” (Bailey 1998a: 80). As is revealed by the words which end the chapter preceding the “Coda”, the process of narrating the “text” of his mother's life brings Charlie to an awareness of the need to keep “the spirit of Lily Kilworth” alive, and of his role in that endeavour:

Circles. See the circles of endless repetition. Tom and Karl. Lizzie and Neddy. Lyon. Ede and Lily. Me... (456)

As with Bragg's identification of the figure depicted in the ancient rock carving as a child like his own, the recognition of continuity and patterning in human experience awakens Charlie to the possibility of redefining “normal” or “ordinary” according to the patterns which operate within one's own life, and results in his decision to say “yes” (460) to all life, not just that which accords with society's narrow and arbitrary definitions of normality.

The potential for a reconciliation between “civilization” and “nature,” Findley

suggests, lies in the recognition of the existence of the latter – the acknowledgment that “we are not alone”:

“We are not alone here, Charlie,” Lily said to me. “It’s their world, too. But we have taken – we are taking it from them – breaking it over their heads...” We crouched beside the anthill. “Look how delicate they are, Charlie – delicate and fine. Look how their bodies shine and what perfect precision there is in everything they do” (370).

Although Emma has not inherited Lily’s madness, she has received a more benign legacy: her instinctual acknowledgment of the ant-world functions as a sign that a reconciliation between reason and nature, sanity and madness, is indeed possible, and leads to Charlie’s own recognition that “[w]e were not – and we will never be – alone” (460-461). Emma’s paternity – as the child of an “emasculated” man, her very existence is irrational and illogical – marks her existence, like Lily’s, as yet another “conspiracy” against the systematic violence which is the reality of the rational world. Emma, as Lily predicts, has the potential to “make us visible...to pull us out of the fire” (445), that is, to move beyond an impoverished logic which offers only extreme and destructive possibilities, to a way of being which acknowledges that “we are not alone here” and recognizes wonder in the world, yet which carries with it none of the devastation wrought by Lily’s illness.

The family formed by Charlie, Alex and Emma – like those formed by Lily and Charlie, and Bragg, Minna, Col and Stella – can be read as an alternative to the “thorough and rapid brainwashing” (Laing 1967: 36) which Laing identified as the primary function of the traditional family. These “alternative families,” founded upon the celebration of diversity and the desire to widen the boundaries of what is acceptable, stand in stark

contrast to the very conventional Wyatt family, headed by Frederick and Ede, which is concerned with the adaptation to what passes for “normality”, and which removes from its sight all that defies such adaptation. The redemptive potential of each of these “alternative families” rests in the characters whose madness frees them from any accountability to the rules of logic which govern the rational world. As Charlie says, in his conclusion to his mother’s story, “There are those who demand of madness a kind of logic...that, by its very nature, madness cannot provide” (456). Lily, as Eleanor Ormond Hess explains to Charlie, lives “in another version of the world” (448), and therefore cannot be understood or judged according to the criteria of the “sane,” rational world. She inhabits a world without artifice or reason which acts as antidote to the “normal” world; This world, which includes ants, fire, and the “Great God Pan”, and which the society in which Lily lives labels inappropriate – “There it was again – the universal dictum: it is not appropriate” (249) – is the locus of wonder. Any attempt to isolate and contain the “natural” or the “inappropriate” is effectively a denial of the “wonderful” as well, much like how the necessity of scientific laws is unable to accommodate the sense of possibility and openness that attends the speculative lives of so many of Findley’s protagonists.

**CHAPTER 2 "IN FORMATION," BUT "OFF COURSE": ADAPTATION TO A  
MAD SOCIAL REALITY**

From an ideal vantage point on the ground, a formation of planes may be observed in the air. One plane may be out of formation. But the whole formation may be off course. The plane that is "out of formation" may be abnormal, bad or "mad," from the point of view of the formation. But the formation itself may be bad or mad from the point of view of the ideal observer. The plane that is out of formation may also be more or less off course than the formation itself is.

R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, 82.

In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing provides the above analogy to explain the theory which he hoped would revolutionize the twentieth-century conception of mental illness and lead the psychiatric establishment away from a clinical perspective and toward a perspective which is both existential and social in its focus. If the entire "formation" of society is, in fact, dysfunctional, then it follows that any pronouncements as to the function or dysfunction of individuals based on the criterion of whether or not they accord with that formation are suspect. In the preceding chapter, I began by looking at the theories of some of the proponents of the "anti-psychiatry" movement of the 1960s, in order to contextualize Findley's depiction of madness as both a product of and a form of resistance to the "irrationality" of the family structure. In this chapter, which will examine three of Findley's novels that move outward from the portrayal of the family unit to enact a critique of the institutions which structure and govern twentieth-century Western society, I will again refer to the work of those associated with this movement – in particular R.D. Laing and David Cooper – as they move away from the study of family



interaction to explore the irrationality of what Laing refers to as the “total social world system” (1968: 16).

In 1967, with the publication of *The Politics of Experience*, Laing, whose criticisms of traditional psychiatric practice had earned him a following among psychiatrists drawn to his theories by their dissatisfaction with the theoretical models of traditional psychiatric practice, began to gain a wider reputation as a social and cultural critic. In that text, in which he draws on psychoanalytic insights to formulate a critique of Western society, Laing posits the view that twentieth-century Western society is in need, not only of a rethinking of its definitions of sanity and madness, but of a radical alteration of its conception of “normality.” Laing argues that individual pathology is intelligible as a symptom of a larger pervasive insanity which holds the entire Western world in its grasp, and which is manifested through war, violence, hatred and other dehumanizing, destructive behaviours. Laing questions the definition of “normal” social conduct, arguing that “what we call ‘normal’ is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience” and, as such, “is radically estranged from the structure of being” (1967: 11). While identifying as mad the individual who does not conform to its definition of “normality,” and relegating such individuals to institutions to be “cured” of what, to Laing, is perfectly intelligible behaviour, Western society “highly values its normal man,” urging children to conform to the accepted standards of behaviour without questioning the criteria by which such “normalcy” is judged:

The “normally” alienated person, by reason of the fact that he acts more or less like everyone else, is taken to be sane. Other forms of alienation that are out of step with the prevailing state of alienation are those that are labeled by the “normal” majority as bad or mad (1967:12).

In a world seemingly without reason, in which “normal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last fifty years” (1967: 12), the traditional notion of madness as the absence of reason has become meaningless. How does one reach a diagnosis of insanity in a society which regularly exhibits signs of psychopathology? The psychiatrist Lester A. Gelb, a contemporary of Laing, writes:

Probably the greatest immediate immorality and corruption is the devaluation of human life itself by racism, violence, and war. This amounts, in our time, to an epidemic of dehumanization. Is there any psychopathology more serious than this? I doubt it (Gelb 195).

According to this view, continuing to live comfortably in such a world necessitates a wilful blindness to the large-scale violence in which humanity is participating. As Laing writes: “In order to rationalize our industrial-military complex, we have to destroy our capacity to see clearly any more what is in front of, and to imagine what is beyond, our noses. Long before thermonuclear war can come about, we have had to lay waste our own sanity” (1967: 36).

In 1967, the same year in which *The Politics of Experience* was published, four of the most outspoken critics of conventional psychiatry – Drs. R.D. Laing, David Cooper, Joseph Berke, and Leon Redler – organized the Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation, which took place in London in the last two weeks of July of that year. This conference, which included such notable speakers as Herbert Marcuse and Stokely Carmichael, was prompted by the psychiatrists’ realization that some of the conclusions they had reached

in their work on schizophrenia and the family could be related to certain aspects of the political reality in the 1960s, especially the Vietnam War. In a paper entitled "The Obvious," which he presented at the congress, Laing refers to the Vietnam War as an example of "extreme normality" (1968: 27),<sup>1</sup> that is, an only slightly exaggerated illustration of the violent, irrational behaviour that is sanctioned by our society on a regular basis, and considered to be "normal." According to Laing, our world is characterized by "institutionalized, organized violence" (1968: 19), for which we deny individual responsibility, projecting it instead upon "some vague mass being outside the subsystem" – which Laing refers to as "Them" – with which we are merely complying. In both "The Obvious" and *The Politics of Experience*, Laing urges his readers to question our denial of accountability for our actions, and our projection of responsibility onto "a *presence that is everywhere elsewhere*" (1967: 56; emphasis in original). Laing argues that the blind acceptance of the standards of behaviour set and practiced by the majority, without assertion of individual freedom or agency, results in human beings who are alienated from themselves and from one another: "When we have installed Them in our hearts, we are only a plurality of solitudes in which what each person has in common is his allocation to the other of the necessity for his own actions"(1967: 55). Laing emphasizes the dehumanizing potential of this conformity, and points out the danger inherent in our reluctance to consider the possibility that the standards which we blindly accept might be destructive of human life and freedom:

We must be very careful of our selective blindness. The Germans reared children to regard it as their duty to exterminate the Jews, adore their leader, kill and die for the Fatherland. The majority of my own generation did not or do not regard it as stark raving mad to feel it better to be dead than Red. None

of us, I take it, has lost too many hours' sleep over the threat of imminent annihilation of the human race and our own responsibility for this state of affairs (1967: 49).

According to Laing, constant deference to an external source for the interpretation and validation of our own experience results in the reduction of our reality to "a scene of mirages" which are "real" only insofar as "everyone believes everyone else believes them" (1967: 51). Human beings are thus absolved of any sense of responsibility or accountability for our own actions, and are able to delude ourselves that we are powerless to alter our situation. The notion that we are ourselves complicit in our own "engulfment into the monolithic bourgeois bureaucratic system," is addressed by David Cooper, in a paper entitled "Beyond Words," presented at the aforementioned Congress:

To move out of this position we have to realize certain elementary truths about how we unconsciously perpetuate this structure that castrates us...So we have to recognize that their power, the power of governments in the first world and, to a significant extent, in the European socialist world – their power is nothing less than our power. Our power, that we have perversely put into them, because we choose impotence (198).

Cooper's point, that we are not merely passive victims of a system that robs us of our free will, but that we ourselves are implicated in our own powerlessness, resonates with the three novels – *The Telling of Lies*, *The Butterfly Plague*, and *Famous Last Words* – which I will examine in this chapter. All three novels feature protagonists who are, to varying degrees, aware that the society in which they live is "off course," but who are ultimately unable to extricate themselves from their social reality – to "leave the formation" – in order to present an active challenge to its values, assumptions, and standards of behaviour.

**“I have joined my enemies”: Control and Complicity in *The Telling of Lies***

Human beings seem to have an almost unlimited capacity to deceive themselves, and to deceive themselves into taking their own lies for truth. By such mystification, we achieve and sustain our adjustment, adaptation, socialization.

R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, 47.

In the first chapter of *In the Sleep Room*, her account of the CIA-funded mind-control experiments which occurred at Montreal’s Allan Memorial Institute in the 1950s and early 1960s, Anne Collins describes a demonstration which took place in 1986, outside the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa. The small group of demonstrators, to whom Collins refers as “the mad movement,” consisted of former psychiatric patients and their supporters, who were marching in support of the nine plaintiffs who filed a suit against the CIA for experimental treatments which they received at the Allan. Not surprisingly, the protest made no impression on those behind the embassy walls; as Collins writes, “the embassy windows stared down at them, indifferent” (Collins 1). She reveals, however, that unbeknownst to the demonstrators themselves, the plaintiffs in the case – the very people the “mad movement” was supporting – were disassociating themselves from them, on the advice of their Washington lawyers, Joe Rauh and Jim Turner, because these two understood that “you don’t win at power games – you don’t beat the CIA – by allying yourself with the fringes. Nobody except other fringe-dwellers pays attention to the fringes” (4). In order to fight one of the most powerful institutions in the world, these lawyers chose to align themselves with people who themselves occupied positions of authority and power, such as David Orlikow, an MP and husband of one of Cameron’s victims, and Harvey Weinstein, the son of one of the victims. Weinstein, a psychiatrist

who held a teaching job at a major U.S. university was, of all the plaintiffs and their families, “the spokesman with the most credibility,” and proved invaluable in the case against the CIA (217-18)<sup>2</sup>. It is ironic that, in fighting the abuses perpetrated against the mentally ill by psychiatrists, the lawyers chose as their spokesperson a member of the very profession which was responsible for those abuses, rather than encouraging those who were victimized to speak on their own behalf. As Collins points out, “[f]ew people who haven’t been in mental hospitals themselves find ex-inmates a credible source of comment on anything – even their own experiences in mental hospitals” (4).

I begin with this story in order to introduce the idea of the possibility for adopting an effective position of resistance to the bureaucratic institutions which wield the power in our society. According to the lawyers in the CIA suit, a battle fought from the fringes is destined to fail; therefore successful resistance necessitates complicity with one’s enemies. Certainly, this view seems to be at odds with that expressed by Findley, whose work is filled with characters whose transgressive potential arises from their position on the margins of “normal” society, and whose rebellion against the norms and values of their families and communities signifies a refusal to be indoctrinated into the existing social reality. In my discussion of Findley’s work thus far, I have shown how Findley has chosen as his protagonists precisely these agents of disorder, due to their potential to disrupt and reveal the hypocrisy of conventional, “normal” society. Vanessa Van Horne, the protagonist and narrator of *The Telling of Lies*, differs from other Findley protagonists by virtue of the simple fact that no one questions her sanity. She conforms perfectly to the ideology, values and behaviour expected of a woman of her age and class and – both

socially and in her role as the novel's narrator/detective – acts to restore order, rather than to challenge it. The mystery at the centre of *The Telling of Lies* involves a fictional case which is based upon that of Dr. Ewen Cameron, who was the founder of Montreal's Allan Memorial Institute in 1944, and served as its director until 1964. Cameron, driven by a fierce desire to “cure” mental illness, but also fueled by the promise of fame within the scientific community, experimented with some highly unconventional and controversial techniques, including the use of sensory deprivation, drugs, electroshock treatments and a radical new treatment which he called “psychic driving” – the repeated playback of selected recorded phrases to a patient – in order to “depattern” or reprogram the minds of the mentally ill and bring about alterations in behaviour:

Cameron defined “depatterning” as breaking up existing patterns of behavior, both the normal and the schizophrenic, by means of particularly intensive electroshocks, usually combined with prolonged, drug-induced sleep. Here was a psychiatrist willing – indeed, eager – to wipe the human mind totally clean (Marks 133).

Cameron's procedures attracted the attention of the CIA, which was interested in research concerned with human behaviour control, intrigued by the possibility that it would one day be able to “crack the mental defenses of enemy agents” (Collins 26). The CIA's MKULTRA operation provided funding for the experiments through a cover organization called the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology (SIHE), resulting in what Collins refers to as a “plot right out of a science-fiction movie” (Collins 25), namely a partnership between the American government and members of the psychiatric profession in the search for means to gain control over human minds.

This astonishing alliance, and the conspiracy to conceal it not only from the patients involved but from the general public, provides Findley with the background for *The Telling of Lies*, a novel which examines Western society's complicity in the containment of difference and the concealment of menace beneath an appearance of surface order. Nearly a decade before Calder Maddox is found dead on a Maine beach, a Dr. Allan Potter conducts a series of CIA-funded experiments on inmates at Montreal's Makin Memorial Institute, which, like Cameron's treatments, involve drugs, electroconvulsive therapy, sensory deprivation, and "psychic driving." Although Dr. Potter dies of natural causes, the man who manufactured the drugs used in his experiments – Calder Maddox – is murdered by the wife of one of Potter's victims, in revenge for the damage his experiments inflicted upon her husband. Vanessa Van Horne, upon discovering that one friend – Meg Riches – is the murderer, and that another friend – Lily Porter – might possibly reveal this fact, states that "if the truth should rise to the surface of Lily's mind" she will "be forced to move against her" (359) to ensure that it remains concealed. Although Vanessa's admission of her willingness to kill Lily in order to protect Meg from the CIA has been interpreted by some critics as a positive sign of her politicization and her determination to resist what Lorraine York calls the "male power games" (1991:131)<sup>3</sup> which structure her world, I agree with the conclusion reached by Anne Geddes Bailey in her 1995 article on the novel, that "a gap exists between Vanessa's choices and Findley's position" (Bailey 1995: 192)<sup>4</sup>. While Vanessa does admit that she has "joined [her] enemies" and is "prepared to do what they have done: even to use their weapons" (359), she fails to recognize the full extent of her complicity



in the very systems she purports to be resisting. Findley, however, is very much aware of this complicity, and fills his novel with clues that allow the reader to recognize that, through the act of narration itself, Vanessa is herself implicated in the conspiracy of violence and deception which her narrative ostensibly aims to expose; Dr. Ewen Cameron's use of psychic driving to write new narratives onto the "blank slate" (Collins 132) of his patients' minds is analogous to Vanessa Van Horne's writing of her story onto the blank pages of the book which Lily herself has given her:

Lily gave me this book. Purely, out of the goodness of her heart. And yet – I've already begun to castigate her – deride her – suspect her, here on these pages. She handed them over to me with such innocence. "Here," she said; "I thought you might want to write things down; the way you take your photographs." And that's what I've done (113).

Vanessa's organization of events into a coherent, ordered narrative is indeed similar to "the way [she] take[s] [her] photographs"; Vanessa's function as narrator is to select and re-order information, to contain disorder within the rational, controlled structure which she imposes upon the events she has witnessed. She is well-suited to this role; her compulsion to impose order upon the chaos of reality is reflected in both her profession of landscape architect and her leisure pursuit of photography:

The only images I've ever created in all of my professional life – consciously and with a vengeance – have been the studied shapes of gardens. Nothing, by will, but images of order and peace. And in my photographs? What is. But never accidents; never the overturning of reality. Not anarchy (27).

While I agree with Lorraine York's suggestion that *The Telling of Lies* takes place against the backdrop of "the war with nature" (York 1991: 122), I disagree with her positioning of Vanessa as a warrior on the side of nature: as a landscape architect, Vanessa is skilled at taming the unruly raw materials of nature into artificial "images of order"; as a

photographer, her “usual paraphernalia for a day of picture-taking” includes not only two cameras and “the full range of lenses,” but also “file cards and pencils” (17-18) for making meticulous notations which impose her own vision of order upon all she witnesses; as a sufferer of various maladies, she relies on “the detail of failing, imperilled health, the pills, the regimen, the warnings” (8) to control the “natural” processes of her aging body. In the war against nature, then, Vanessa does not occupy a *defensive* position, becoming militant “on behalf of all living things” (York 1991: 131), but is, rather, a commanding officer in the army that has waged that war.

*The Telling of Lies* is subtitled “a mystery,” and the “things” which Vanessa writes onto the blank pages of the notebook take the shape of a mystery narrative, with Vanessa herself cast as the detective who must, as Catherine Hunter states, “restore order by naming the agent of disorder” (Hunter 1990: 99). As Bailey points out, Vanessa’s role as the narrator/detective of a mystery narrative itself precludes her functioning as an agent of disorder or transgression, as so many of Findley’s narrators do:

As much as she tries to break away from the system that erects barriers and brutalizes its citizens, she, through her detective story, is ultimately hermetically sealed into the capitalistic value system (Bailey 1998b:170-1).

As Donna Pennee, Catherine Hunter, and Bailey have all observed, Findley’s mystery, with its insular setting, wealthy and privileged characters, individual amateur detective, and trail of clues closely resembles the novels of Agatha Christie, in which “crime was detected and disorder contained” through a system of “sharp observation and orderly thought” (Knight 107). In Stephen Knight’s chapter on the novels of Agatha Christie in his *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, he writes that Christie:

perfected a structure, best called the clue-puzzle, which invited and empowered the careful reader to solve the problem along with the detective. The individualism and the sense of isolation inherent to the audience who shared the basic bourgeois values were themselves activated by the overall form of the novel (Knight 107).

The world of Christie's novels, writes Knight, "is a projection of the dreams of those anxious middle-class people who would like a life where change, disorder and work are all equally absent" (Knight 118). Similarly, the upper-class guests at the Aurora Sands Hotel – including Vanessa – return every summer to the same rooms they have always occupied, secure in the knowledge that nothing has changed since the hotel was founded in the mid-nineteenth century; their ordered, bourgeois existence is disrupted first by the irrational appearance of an iceberg which "will not go away, in spite of reason" (28), and second by the discovery of Calder Maddox's body, which similarly defies logic and expectations. Vanessa's function as the narrator of a mystery is to contain disorder through the detection of that which represents a deviation from the socially sanctioned norms. With careful attention to temporal and spatial detail, Vanessa plots the events surrounding the death of Calder Maddox, creating an ordered picture of the world which, Knight would suggest, is consistent with her ideological position – he points out that "[m]eticulously calibrated personal time and location is an important part of the bourgeois world-view" (Knight 120). The reader is encouraged to first identify with, and then interrogate, the bourgeois values held by Findley's detective; Vanessa Van Horne, like Christie's Miss Marple, is "a typical figure of the respectable classes" (Knight 109), and as such invites our sympathy and identification as she, again like Christie's detective, attempts to solve a crime, not through extraordinary capabilities, but through "familiar

powers of observation and reflection” (Knight 109). While the mystery genre “presents a very simple world where criminal deviance is equally plain, a ‘weak’ straying from the path of self-control and socially acceptable, mutually protective behaviour” (Knight 154), the world which Findley presents is far from simple; this is a world in which things are rarely black and white, and in which “no one is totally monstrous: not even monsters” (15). In such a world, the line separating the victims from the villains, so clearly demarcated in Christie’s fiction, is blurred, if it even still exists. The containment of disorder in this case requires, not the *revelation* of Meg Riches’s crime, but the *concealment* of her guilt; Vanessa’s vow to protect Meg, even if it means killing Lily Porter, is not, as York has written, a sign that Vanessa has gradually become “militant in this positive – and female – sense” (York 1991: 131), but is, rather, entirely consistent with both her narrative function and her ideological position as revealed through her version of events.

Vanessa’s function as narrator is literally to “tell lies”: to select and re-order information in order to create suspense<sup>5</sup>, to contain disorder within the rational, controlled structure of the mystery plot. She is fully conscious that she has “rearranged the order of events – according to my ability to grasp their meaning” (131), and admits to tampering with the diction of at least one character in her account: she notes, on one occasion, that Maryanne Forestead’s words were “more or less what follows, though her language was less precise than mine” (18). Vanessa’s tendencies toward the imposition of order place her in the company of the supposed “villains” of her narrative – Colonel Norimitsu and Calder Maddox. Colonel Norimitsu, who oversaw the prison camp in

which Vanessa and her family were interred, is, in spite of his ostensible position as “villain” to Vanessa’s “victim,” an important formative influence in her life; his Japanese formal gardens, which exist in the midst of the chaotic violence of war, inspire Vanessa’s eventual choice of profession. Furthermore, Vanessa’s dedication of her notebook to the man who “with one hand, killed my father and with the other made of my father’s grave a garden” (8) emphasizes the parallels between Norimitsu’s gardens and Vanessa’s narrative; through her meticulous construction of the detective story, she is effectively making a similar “garden” of Calder Maddox’s death. Throughout her narrative, Vanessa emphasizes the human qualities of Norimitsu, inviting the reader to accept the fact that, as he asserts, “even monsters are not always monsters” (203); however, as Bailey points out, “Colonel Norimitsu may on occasion secretly revolt against the system which he represents but he is also firmly entrenched within it and acts in accordance with its dictates” (Bailey 1998b: 162). Although he engages in secret acts of rebellion – he returns Vanessa’s mother’s wedding ring, and he (possibly) dispenses medicine to his own prisoners on the black market – he is still in the service of a system which perpetrates the very horrors which both necessitate his humanitarian gestures and simultaneously render them insufficient. In this, too, Vanessa is like her former captor; while she struggles to locate and liberate Lily Porter from the “enemy,” she is in fact complicit in the very economic and social structures that have made Lily a victim. Although Vanessa’s past as a prisoner of war would suggest a natural antipathy toward those, such as Colonel Norimitsu and Calder Maddox, who represent the abuses of power and the victimization of the innocent, the opposite seems to be true; while some, like

Moira<sup>6</sup> – “with her desperate apartness and her appalling loneliness” (358) – seem fated to be natural victims, Vanessa is able to survive her imprisonment, in part due to the strange alliance which she forms with her captor:

His English was stilted and incorrect when he finally spoke, but he spoke with perfect civility – and even with feeling.

“I have,” he said; “for you something that has been of your own.”

...

Though I did not open it, I knew by what I could feel of its shape that the perfectly folded packet enclosed my mother’s wedding ring.

...

I dared not thank him. I knew he did not want that. He did not really want me even to acknowledge what he had done.

He pointed across at the compound with his chin – his hands behind his back – and he said; “you will stand there sixteen hours.”

“Yes,” I said – understanding. I must appear, of course, to be punished (201-202).

Vanessa’s frequent comparisons of the prison at Bandung to the vacation community in Maine suggest to the reader that, in a situation in which she is witness to the abuses of power by those who seek totalitarian control, she will survive – as she did once before – by “join[ing] her enemies,” adapting to her situation through forging alliances with those in power, and through practicing the art of subterfuge that she learned at Bandung:

I’ve never questioned that ability to subdivide my person, so to speak, into separate units – isolating one and concentrating on another. This, at Bandung prison, was how we dealt with hunger, illness, loneliness and pain of every other kind. That I can lie to my heart and keep it pumping by telling it I’ve taken a pill I have not taken is a direct result of my training there. And by such lies, I may yet survive another attack (38).

Findley problematizes the distinction between “victim” and “victimizer,” through the revelation that Calder Maddox, the victim of a murder, has in fact been a victimizer, through the use of his experimental drugs on mental patients. Furthermore, Vanessa’s narrative reveals that she shares more common qualities with Maddox and Colonel

Norimitsu, the ostensible villains, than with Lily Porter, the kidnapped victim of her mystery narrative. In the character of Calder Maddox, the ruler of a pharmaceutical empire, Findley has created an ideal vehicle for his critique of the politicization and bureaucratization of medicine. Although Maddox has achieved wealth and power through the manufacture of pills, his success is largely due to his political alliances and connections, a fact which Lawrence Pawley reveals to Vanessa:

[Calder Maddox] and [Dr. Chilcott] used one another to gain ascendancy over a very important aspect of medical practice here in this country. One made drugs – the other pushed them. He pushed them in conjunction with his magic by-pass operations. Ordinary doctors, trying to save ordinary lives under ordinary circumstances got caught in the middle (179).

Lawrence, who is one of these “ordinary doctors,” finds his practice emptied of patients; the fact that his survival rate is higher than Chilcott’s is ignored by prospective patients, because of the political clout carried by the name of Dr. Chilcott’s most famous surviving patient: “Owen Warner, President of the United States.” (179) Thus, through the use of the president’s name to attract patients to treatments whose efficacy is still suspect, members of the medical establishment are guilty of a profound abuse of power; they are in effect harming those same patients whom they have taken an oath to help. Furthermore, as Lawrence reveals, the very chemicals that “cured” the president’s condition and saved his life will eventually kill him, in an example of what Laing refers to as the “diametric irrationality” of a world in which “[d]octors in all ages have made fortunes by killing their patients by means of their cures” (Laing 1968: 19).

Throughout her narrative, Vanessa unwittingly reveals correlations between herself and the ostensible “villain” of her story; like Vanessa, Calder exerts control over nature

in his leisure activities, as well as in his professional life. His assertion that he “counted all the stars, last night”<sup>7</sup> proclaims his victory over both the celestial and the human realms; not only did he count all the stars, but he “counted more than all the Ptolemys and all the Galileos put together” (17). While Vanessa does not share Maddox’s hubris, she does share his compulsion to capture those things which, by their nature, defy capture; when Nigel’s appearance prevents her from obtaining a photograph of some loons, she regretfully admits that she “had wanted the loons so badly, their being the rarest of the rare to photograph” (24). Both Vanessa and Calder strive to conquer and possess those things which are rare, fleeting, or uncontainable; they seek to enclose them within the structures of rational thought, whether by containing them within the confines of a numerical system or by fixing their image forever in time and place, with all pertinent details written on an index card. Furthermore, Vanessa’s dependence upon medication for her various conditions underscores the instability of her position in relation to the various victims and victimizers in her narrative. Her life has been improved and possibly saved by drugs manufactured by Maddox and his colleagues; Bailey notes, “Vanessa financially supports the very system which also crippled Michael” (Bailey 1998b: 163). In addition to Norimitsu and Vanessa, Meg Riches is another character whose complicity with those she ostensibly opposes confounds the reader’s desire to classify her simply as victim or villain. In exacting revenge for what was done to Michael, Meg effectively repeats Calder’s own methods, “joining [her] enemies,” as Vanessa herself will do; Calder is murdered by “a deadly, paralyzing chemical [which] had been infused into his system by means of a sun-cream” (351). Furthermore, just as



Calder's experiments victimized the innocent, Meg's revenge created both a murderer and a victim of Lily Porter who, by applying the sun cream, unwittingly becomes the instrument of her lover's death and is then kidnapped and brainwashed because of her role.

Vanessa's narrative is infected with her own ideological biases; from the beginning, Vanessa makes it clear that Lily is of an inferior class than Meg, Mercedes and herself. In contrast to Vanessa's own mother, Rose Adella, who was "as formidable as her name" (6) and who occupied a position among the élite and influential matriarchs<sup>8</sup> who hold their court of "judges" (47) in the hotel lobby, "Maisie Cotton was not acceptable and not accepted at the Aurora Sands" (6). The very names "Maisie Cotton" and "Lily Cotton" suggest a natural simplicity and innocence that is at odds with the elaborate, intimidating names of "Vanessa Van Horne," "Arabella Barrie," and "Mercedes Mannheim," which suggest wealth and social power. Although she and her daughter did manage to secure a place among the more privileged classes, this place was not acquired naturally or gracefully, but "only after much persistence" (6). Maisie and Lily are clearly unwanted by the society to which they aspire to belong:

The pictures – circa 1935 – give evidence of [Maisie's] determination, showing her crowding into the background of other people's family tableaux – or hanging off towards one side, her smile as wide and her gestures as broad as some dreadful comedienne; much white powder, many wide hats and far too many bows adorn her image. Lily – petulant, unsure and unsteady on her little fat legs, is there in those pictures entirely by force. And always overdressed and over-plump (6).

Although Lily has forced her way into both the photographs and Vanessa's life, the latter's disdain for her is evident from the beginning of her narrative. She refers to Lily

mockingly as “a pastel patriot” (2), declares that Lily is incapable of logic or taste (3), and, by her syntax, clearly marks Lily as an outsider to the class-conscious community to which she herself belongs: “*Everyone* has always known that Lily has a heart of gold; but we have also known it’s a chocolate heart and the gold is only a wrapper made of foil” (3; my emphasis). Vanessa describes Lily at fifty-five as “still a child” (3) due to her unbridled exuberance in speech and gesture, her simple love of pleasing others, and her retention of a child-like honesty and incapacity for deceit. The fact that she is “too naïve to say one thing and mean another” (2) is read by Vanessa as unsophistication and unworldliness; by the end of the novel, the reader realizes that it is Lily, not the narrator, who alone is unable to participate in “the telling of lies” and who, as such, is marked – like Michael Riches – as a natural victim of a corrupt and manipulative society.

Vanessa’s scorn for Lily, and her admission that she does not count Lily among her friends (8), leads one to conclude that her distress at Lily’s disappearance is prompted more by a desire to restore order, to put things back in their proper places, than by a genuine concern and affection for Lily as an individual. Vanessa’s most valuable ally in this endeavour is Mercedes Mannheim, who is a firmly entrenched member of the social establishment, with access to the upper echelons of power<sup>9</sup>. Mercedes, like Vanessa with her pills, is dependent on the medical establishment; due to her regime of regular facelifts, “she speaks without a trace of visible movement and her eyes give the somewhat bizarre impression of having been sewn wide open” (244). Mercedes is a monument to the ability of institutions to inhibit and control natural human impulses; her entire persona – her physical appearance, her speech, her friendships and alliances – has

been meticulously and artificially constructed. Unlike Lily, who does not attempt to control the natural expression of her emotions, Mercedes, due to her many face-lifts, “has been left, effectively, with little but a Reader’s Digest of expressions: severely abridged” (244). Also unlike Lily, Mercedes is “pals” with influential people, most notably Donald Maltby, the head of the CIA, whom she proudly claims to hold in the palm of her hand (269). She approves of using one’s social connections to one’s own benefit: “Pals in high places, eh?” she comments conspiratorially to Vanessa. “A person never knows when she’s going to need a lot of help” (245). Vanessa is able to locate and free Lily due to her and Mercedes’s ability to succeed at social performance, to “play up and play the game” (44); she discovers Lily’s location by pretending to be a friend of “Tad” Chilcott (231) and gains entrance to the Greenes’ party with invitations “from a party [Mercedes] gave last season for the Greek Prime Minister” (282). From the beginning, both Vanessa and Mercedes are complicit in the systems that are responsible for the torture of Michael Riches, and the kidnapping and brainwashing of Lily Porter. Vanessa has not recently “joined” her enemies; she has always been among them.

In her decision to conceal the identity of Calder Maddox’s killer and the motivation for his murder, Vanessa is continuing the cover-up perpetrated by the CIA, positioning herself on the side, not only of Meg Riches, but of the American government. Her unwillingness to upset the established order of things is evident in the cryptic remarks with which she concludes her narrative:

Yes. It is time the icebergs came.  
 And they are here.  
 And so I pull the shade.  
 And the shade is green (359).

In this statement, Vanessa simultaneously acknowledges the need for things that cause us to interrogate our fixed systems of understanding the world, and admits her reluctance to accept such things. The iceberg, whose unexpected and unexplained appearance disturbs the predictable order of things for the residents of the Aurora Sands Hotel, provides the reader with a metafictional clue for reading the text; the iceberg is, as Hunter points out, a sign of both “difference” and “hiddenness” (Hunter 1990: 100-1). It is a “renegade” (133) whose appearance on the Maine coast in July defies reason and expectation, and in its mysterious origins it is linked to the enigmatic Honey Girl, the other “disturbing presence” (20) which disrupts the orderly lives of those who summer at the Aurora Sands Hotel. Vanessa’s repeated photographing of the iceberg signifies her characteristic desire to control or capture that which presents itself as “the violation of reality” (29), to impose order upon chaos. The iceberg, like Vanessa’s imprisonment at Bandung, is difficult to assimilate into a rational view of the world: “it is terrifying – just as the prison was, because it will not go away, in spite of reason” (28). Just as her imprisonment leads her to a lifelong fascination with the ordered, rational forms of Japanese formal gardens, the appearance of the iceberg prompts her to attempt to capture it through photography. Her instinct to “raise the camera in the face of wonder” (27), effectively destroying that wonder by rendering it knowable, is not unlike Major-General Welch’s impulse to raise a gun in order to “blow the bugger out of the water” (30); both characters’ response to the irrational or uncanny is to capture it, to render it knowable through “shooting” it with the implements of reason. Both the gun and the camera are tools in what York calls “the war to capture and transfix nature” (York 1988: 16). The iceberg, however, has a dual

function in the narrative, serving not only as a metaphor for the irrational, but also for the concealment of menace. Vanessa describes the iceberg as “a monster and misunderstood” (262), linking it not only to the “misunderstood” Honey Girl but to “monsters”<sup>10</sup> such as Colonel Norimitsu, whose capacity for evil is downplayed in Vanessa’s narrative because of his love of beauty, and Dr. Alan Potter, whose hidden flaw – “ambition of the unbridled kind” – “went undetected, because he’d had so many successes and so much praise” (346). These acts of concealment are repeated in Vanessa’s pulling of the shade to obscure the sign of difference and disorder. The “green” colour of the shade connects it to several earlier images of concealment: Calder Maddox’s skin, which turns green in death, because of the yellow sun-cream covering his blue-tinted flesh (54); Daniel and Lucy Greene, who not only conceal the president’s presence at Larson’s Neck, but whose party provides Vanessa and Mercedes with a means to conceal their mission to free Lily Porter, and finally, the iceberg itself, whose hidden menace Jane Williams renders appealing through the use of the colour green:

And she took a lime-green crayon and put the appropriate keel of ice in its place. I could only suppose her choice of colour had to do with keeping the menacing part of the berg as “pretty,” in her own words, as the “lovely” part above (83-4).

By “pull[ing] the shade,” Vanessa not only refuses to look at the representation of disorder, but also allows the menace that the iceberg conceals beneath the water to remain concealed, just as by refusing to name Meg Riches as the murderer of Calder Maddox, she continues the cover-up begun by the CIA regarding the experiments conducted by Allan Potter.

Findley's clever deployment of an unreliable narrator forces readers to recognize our own complicity in the silencing of madness and the containment of difference. In spite of her nominal allegiance to those who oppose the systems which control and contain difference, Vanessa, as a landscape architect, an amateur photographer, and a mystery narrator, is engaged in the containment of chaos through the imposition of narrative order; she writes, "I want to draw lines around events as if events were like the gardens I design: where I see every nuance before it exists" (317). Vanessa's attempt to exercise control over the representation of experience has a correlation with "psychic driving" as conceived of and practiced by Ewen Cameron. According to Collins, Cameron first became intrigued by the idea of using recorded messages with his patients because of the fact that it offered the promise of control over the patient's responses:

most of us working in psychotherapy and psychodynamics look quite anxiously for phenomena which we can be sure of regularly producing. To do so gives us some reassurance, some sense of *actually having the situation in our hands, of knowing where we are, of being able to control events* (Collins 124; my emphasis)<sup>11</sup>.

The desire for control which leads Cameron to subject his patients to various methods of mind control is not unlike Vanessa's own impulse to control events and experiences; however, until the moment in which she declares her willingness to act against Lily Porter, she is able to identify the enemy as external to herself, remaining unaware of her own complicity in the very systems of control which have led to the victimization of both Lily Porter and Michael Riches. She expresses surprise at her discovery that beneath her comrades' surface of gentility lies a more sinister truth: "The violence has been here always...we are the genteel Mafia – playing our family games of power while claiming

we are perfect citizens; good Americans; exemplary” (158). What Vanessa fails to realize is that, in a society in which those in power employ violent means of maintaining their authority, the very fact of being “perfect” or “exemplary” citizens necessitates a repetition of this violence. In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing writes that contemporary civilization is characterized by “violence,” which he defines as behaviour which “attempts to constrain the other’s freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other’s own existence or destiny” (Laing 1967: 36). He observes that “[w]e are effectively destroying ourselves by violence” which we fail to recognize as such (36). Vanessa’s violence reveals itself, not only in her willingness to commit murder, but in her participation in the conspiracy to restrict Lily’s freedom through the invalidation of her experience. According to Laing, control of how people experience the world is at the root of behaviour control: “Once people can be induced to experience a situation in a similar way, they can be expected to behave in similar ways” (Laing 1967: 64). The most effective way to prevent an individual from revealing a truth which one wishes to remain unspoken is not merely to entreat that individual to remain silent, but to act upon his or her experience of the situation. As Laing writes:

If Jack succeeds in forgetting something, this is of little use if Jill continues to remind him of it. He must induce her not to do so. The safest way would be not just to make her keep quiet about it, but to induce her to forget it also (Laing 1967: 18).

The invalidation of an individual’s experience may range from the indication of the triviality of that particular memory or experience, to the insistence that the experience existed only in the individual’s imagination, to the denial of the content of the memory,

and finally to the total invalidation of the individual's capacity to remember (Laing 1967: 18-19). When she expresses the hope that some of Lily's memories remain buried, Vanessa joins Dr. Chilcott, Dr. Potter, and the CIA in the manipulation of Lily's memories and experiences. Through using Dr. Potter's techniques, Dr. Chilcott is able to control Lily's behaviour by telling her that her experiences are false: "Your memories of the death of Calder Maddox are wrong" (321). Although Vanessa expresses concern for her friend, hoping "that Lily's short exposure might have failed to wipe out her mind and replace it with another" (357), she also admits to hoping that Dr. Chilcott's methods *did* achieve partial success; as it is only Lily "who can put the word Meg alongside Calder's death" (357), Vanessa remains fearful that "the truth should rise to the surface of Lily's mind" (359), and declares her intentions to "move against her" if this happens" (359). This willing participation in exerting control over the mind and behaviour of Lily Porter<sup>12</sup> – much as she exerts control over the events in her narrative, the elements in her gardens, the symptoms of her body's weaknesses, and the images captured by her camera – is a sign that Vanessa truly *has* joined her enemies.

Bailey has argued that this novel is marked by "a pervasive pessimism...which undercuts the revolutionary potential of Vanessa's narrative" (1998b:163), a statement with which I wholeheartedly agree. The conclusion of the novel has troubling implications, not only for Vanessa as an individual, but for Western culture in general. By providing, in *Vanessa*, a narrator who is both disarmingly "ordinary" and simultaneously willing to commit murder, Findley forces us as readers to not only acknowledge our own complicity with the systems that control us, but to face the



possibility that Vanessa's choice – pulling the shade – is the only possible one; that is, that there is no way for our culture to extricate itself from implication in the very coercive systems from which many of Findley's individual characters seek to free themselves.

**“Innocence was sanity”: Regression and Refuge in *The Butterfly Plague***

In *The Telling of Lies*, Vanessa Van Horne writes “To be a witness is to be accountable” (132), words which she herself fails to live up to, choosing instead to “draw the shade” and refuse her accountability by effectively denying the reality of those events which she has witnessed. This is not Findley's first work which concerns the temptation of denying reality; his play *Can You See Me Yet?* explores the human impulse to create asylum or sanctuary through the construction of false, comforting images of reality – through the telling of lies. Findley's first play concerns what Margaret Laurence's introduction describes as “the search for sanctuary in a world on fire” (11) and the tendency, in the search for safety, to close one's eyes to harsh and violent realities. The patients at the Asylum at Britton are encouraged to ignore the outside world by their nurse, who insists that “asylum is safety” (139), and admonishes them that what happens “[o]utside the gate is not our business” (32). Into the protected, enclosed garden in which “danger is a word we do not use” (36) comes Cassandra Wakelin who, as her name suggests, encourages the others to “WAKE UP” (139; emphasis in original) to the world of violence which lies beyond the gates. Cassandra alone recognizes that “[n]o one is safe anywhere” (140) and questions the actions which her society accepts as “normal.” Cassandra's electroshock treatments have had limited success in convincing her to accept

the illusion of safety; although she arrives at the Asylum insisting on the veracity of the idyllic images of her childhood, she eventually admits that this is a false representation. Ultimately, the play suggests that human beings have a responsibility to bear witness to the evil and violence which exist in the world, and which will not go away simply because we deny its existence.

*The Butterfly Plague*, written in 1969 and revised and republished in 1986<sup>13</sup> – the same year as *The Telling of Lies* – explores similar territory, namely the difficulty of maintaining one's resistance to the dominant version of experience in the face of overwhelming pressure to join what Laing calls "the formation" and conform to society's conventions and codes. Findley's protagonist, Ruth Damarosch Haddon, who witnesses the rise to power of the Nazis and competes in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, is seemingly alone in her sense of accountability for what she has witnessed. Like Vanessa Van Horne, Ruth Damarosch represents a conflation of victim and victimizer; she identifies with the "dreamers" – her term for the Jewish victims of the Nazis – yet she herself has been not only a witness but a participant in the propagation of Nazi ideology: as an Olympic athlete, she is held up as an example of physical perfection, which leads to her involvement in concentration camp experiments on the limits of human endurance, and gains her the admiration of Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels, all of whom send her gifts. Unlike Vanessa, however, both Ruth and her version of the events which she witnesses are profoundly unstable. As the novel progresses, Ruth herself is uncertain as to the veracity of her own experiences: Is she being followed by a blond man dressed in leather? Did she witness the burning of Alvarez Canyon? Is her pregnancy real or a

hallucination? As Donna Pennee states, “the ontological stability of her experiences is questionable (she wavers between sanity and insanity, reality and dream/nightmare)” (Pennee 30)<sup>14</sup>. The reader shares Ruth’s uncertainty; as it becomes increasingly apparent that Ruth’s experiences do not correlate with those of her family and her society, it is tempting to dismiss Ruth’s version of events as the hallucinations of a madwoman. In a 1971 interview, Findley points out that, while Ruth is “maddened and *thought* insane” (Cameron 55; my emphasis) because of the things she claims to have witnessed, the world which thinks her crazy is itself characterized by a profoundly irrational violence:

[I]t’s that sense in her that she has seen the most terrible things that can be seen, and heard the most horrible things that can be heard, and been made to do the most horrible things that can be done, and everyone thinks she’s crazy. But they accept all these people actually being shunted off to death camps – what’s wrong with that? (Cameron 55)

While Ruth is perceived as insane because she resists the dominant version of events, insists that certain things did happen, and refuses to ignore the violence around her, Findley’s correlation of the events which Ruth witnesses with actual events during the holocaust leads the reader to view Ruth’s version as correct. As Findley tells Graeme Gibson, “such historic events such as the Crystal Nacht, the burning of the Synagogues, the Reichstag Fire, the shooting of the German Consul in Paris: all of these things really did happen...and their dates parallel the dates in the book when Ruth’s ‘events’ take place” (Gibson 146; ellipsis in original). As the only person who recognizes these events and their implications, Ruth is perhaps the only truly “sane” character in the novel. However, while Ruth’s adherence to her own version of “reality” seems to provide her with a potentially effective position of resistance to the madness which pervades her

society, she, like Vanessa, is ultimately revealed to be complicit in the very systems which she is ostensibly resisting; Ruth's willing surrender to the myth of perfection which dominates both Hollywood and Germany in the 1930s suggests the difficulty of maintaining a position of resistance in the face of overwhelming pressure to join the formation.

Some critics of the novel<sup>15</sup> have read Ruth as a crusader against the madness which pervades her society, a "female protestor" (York 1991: 75) – to use Lorraine York's terminology – against the political and military systems which dominate the reality of both Germany and America in the 1930s. This reading ignores the many signs of Ruth's complicity in those very systems, most obviously Ruth's "rape" of the blond man who represents the fascist obsession with racial purity. To read Ruth's sexual encounter with "Race" as a rape perpetrated by him is to ignore the fact that *she* obsessively seeks *him* out, and that he is "obedient" to her "commands" (238); if this is rape, it is Ruth who is the perpetrator<sup>16</sup>, a fact which has disturbing implications for a critique of fascism. A reading which positions Ruth as a voice of resistance to the fascist mythos is confounded by the fact that Ruth does not merely have, as York has suggested, "*moments* of susceptibility" (1991: 78; my emphasis) to the myth of perfection; rather, her identity – she is an Olympic gold-medalist and a child of perfection-obsessed Hollywood – is entirely predicated on this myth. It is tempting to read Ruth as the one true voice of sanity in a mad world, but this would amount to a misreading of a novel which critiques the ideal of "virgin" purity as a form of totalitarianism, and which consequently problematizes any attempt to affirm an identity outside of fascism. Findley has created a

text which contains no character who is not somehow implicated in the very movement toward puritanism and totalitarianism which the text is critiquing. Anne Geddes Bailey writes that, “[c]onsidering the unresolved ambiguities within *The Butterfly Plague*, it is impossible to discern a totalizing pattern” (1998b:78); indeed, this is an allegorical novel which frustrates any attempts at a straightforward allegorical reading. The most obvious example of Findley’s overdetermined allegory is the symbol of the butterflies themselves, of which Findley has said, “they meant everything”:

They were the people who had flocked to California, they were fascists, they were the people who were being destroyed by the fascists, both the Jews and the Germans, they were everything (Cameron 54).

The central symbol of the “plague” of butterflies resists the reader’s attempt to contain it within any binary framework, just as the butterflies themselves are impossible to control; unlike *The Telling of Lies*’s iceberg, they are all-pervasive and cannot simply be blocked from one’s sight by pulling a shade. The butterflies are referred to as “a plague of dreams” (279), representing the dreams of perfection which plague not only the individual characters but society as a whole:

The butterflies excited Ruth and Dolly with visions. They founded dynasties of dreams that lasted through time. They blazed with colors, hardly stirring in their trees, sleepers and dreamers themselves, providing sleep and dreams of peace. Golden. Red. White and black. Some called them rusties. Some, monarchs. Some, dotties, and the rest, just butterflies.

They were, however, dreams.

The word occurs and recurs in their history. Dreams of color. Dreams of gentleness. Dreams of flight.

Or, the virgin’s dream.

Now there was a plague of dreams. A plague of butterflies (279).

The butterflies, beautiful when considered individually, become sinister and threatening when gathered *en masse*. In language and imagery which conjures the horror of

nightmares, Findley describes the danger which the butterflies represent to the human beings who are seduced by their beauty:

Many people who have survived these strange events speak of fields, trees, and even houses smothered in blankets of butterflies. They remember babies who suffocated, and helpless elderly persons who choked to death on butterflies. Crops were utterly destroyed – not eaten, but weighted down by monarchs. Tormented sheep and cattle leaped to their deaths into the ocean and into canyons, and in many instances, citizens awoke at night to find their bedroom walls and their blankets seething with rusty bodies. Incidents, too, are remembered of window screens and panes of glass blackened with crawling butterfly bodies... (271)

This reading is complicated by the fact that, at the same time that the butterflies represent the insidious spread of fascist ideology, they also represent its victims. Ruth, haunted by the vision of her own experience as the victim of her husband's obsessive control, makes the associative leap from the word "victims" to the word "butterflies" (297) and, throughout the novel, the butterflies are killed by characters ranging from Ruth herself to a famous baseball player who yells "Kill! Kill!! Kill! You orange faggots!" (289) as he swings a baseball bat at the offending creatures. The designation of the butterflies as "faggots," like the earlier designations of "crazy monsters" and "[f]ucking maniacs," strengthens the identification of the butterflies with those stigmatized groups, such as homosexuals and the insane, who, along with the Jews, were marked for destruction by the Nazi regime. Pennee has commented that "[t]he conflation of supremacist ideology with the victims of that ideology in the same symbol problematizes our notions of cause and effect in the operations of discourse" (Pennee 37). Indeed, the ambiguities inherent in this overdetermined symbol – and, in fact, in nearly every symbol or character within this novel – while problematic, provoke the reader to interrogate the

binary distinction between innocence and guilt, victim and victimizer, and to examine the notion of complicity in the victimization of the innocent in a world which defies rational explanation. The difficulty here is that when a symbol is so overdetermined that it means “everything,” it ultimately means *nothing*. It is inadequate to claim simply that Findley, in conflating the National Socialist dreams of national and racial purity, and the dreams of freedom held by the Jewish victims of Nazi ideology, is merely problematizing the categories of victim and victimizer; rather, he is rendering both of these categories meaningless. In her recent article on the novel, Heather Sanderson identifies a method of allegorical reading which seeks “to fix one-to-one correspondences, to control meaning” with a fascist aesthetic, and observes that, through “offering an unstable and incoherent multitude of meanings” (Sanderson 106), Findley is able to avoid, in his representation of fascism, a repetition of the very fundamentalist tendency which he is attempting to critique. However, in avoiding this dilemma, Findley falls into another; in his rejection of pure, uncontaminated identities or meanings, he does not provide an alternative to the fascist “plague of dreams” which has infected his fictional world, leaving the reader with an ultimately nihilistic vision of a nightmare world from which there can be no possibility for redemption.

*The Butterfly Plague* depicts a fallen world in which not even children are innocent, in which fantasy dominates reality, and in which humanity, desperately searching for a framework which will provide order and structure to the chaos of existence, leaves itself vulnerable to the tyranny of illusions. The novel begins with an act of violence committed by a child – the “assassination” of Mickey Balloon by, “of all

people, a child with a BB gun” (4) – and a mob who imitate every action of the shallow starlet Myra Jacobs, chewing gum because she does, and inanely echoing her most idiotic utterances (8). Findley, in his picture of “the amassed cudding faces” (7) of those who willingly surrender their autonomy to iconic figures, draws parallels between two societies built upon myths of perfection: the “dream factory” of 1930s Hollywood, and Germany in the years immediately preceding the second world war. The parallel which Findley draws between Nazi Germany and Hollywood is predicated on the tendency of both societies to eschew realism in favour of idealism and fantasy, and on the similarity between the national mythologies upon which each society is founded. As Bailey writes, in her study of fascist aesthetics in Findley’s works, “Fascism arose from various national and imperialistic myths and then sustained itself by creating the illusion that these myths, which were once simply metaphorical ideals, could be reality” (Bailey 1998b: 47). Hollywood is built on similar illusions; the American Dream, Findley suggests, is dependent on the creation and propagation of an ideal of perfection, personified in the novel by Letitia Virden, the “Little Virgin,” who, despite the reality of her advanced age, continues to represent the ideal of innocence and purity sought after by America and disseminated in the films produced by Hollywood’s “dream factory.” George Damarosch identifies this ideal as follows: “Wholesomeness. Virginitly. The Virgin Image, personified in the virgin body and the virgin face that could be fit to match the virgin mind of this great wide land” (174). Of course, this is an illusory image which has no basis in reality; the “virgin” has not only borne a child, but is well over fifty years old and preserves the deceptive appearance of youth through the deployment of cosmetics and



veils. In a telling scene, when Letitia's body is discovered after her murder, it is rejected as "too old" to be that of "the Little Virgin," and is cremated without having been identified or claimed; ironically, she falls prey to the very illusion of youth and beauty that she herself has fostered and, in death, she is rejected because of her failure to meet the standards which she herself has helped to create.

Findley emphasizes the sinister and destructive potential of illusions; his characters, seduced by the "virgin image," are blind to the consequences of their quest for perfection. While Ruth suspects the existence of a relationship between fascism and Hollywood – "It had crossed Ruth's mind...there might be some connection between the blond man and the staring woman" (12) – the other characters in the novel do not realize the extent to which they are persecuted by the very idea of perfection which they, as members of the Hollywood movie industry, are engaged in promoting: George is determined to participate in the dissemination of an ideal of youth and perfection from which he himself – as "old hat" (170) – is excluded; Myra assists in the creation and promotion of the very image of feminine beauty which destroys her career and her life when she – as "old fat" (215) – fails to live up to the ideal which she has set; Dolly makes films which glorify heterosexual sexuality and the ideal of physical beauty represented by Ajax Apollo and Myra Jacobs, while he is rejected by his father because of his hemophilia and homosexuality, and is tormented by the knowledge of his inability to attain the ideal which he himself is promoting. The exclusion of each of these characters from the "American Dream" of perfection and purity because of their innate qualities or natural processes which are beyond their control, suggests a parallel with the Jewish

victims of Nazi persecution, yet Findley refuses such reductive allegory; rather, he attempts to show, through each character's involvement in the propagation of the very supremacist ideology which excludes him or her, that no one – not even the victims – escapes implication in the Nazi final solution<sup>17</sup>.

Findley examines not only the pervasiveness of Hollywood's myth of youth, beauty and perfection, but its potential as a weapon in the pursuit of power. In an interview with Barbara Gabriel, Findley speaks of the danger of those who cultivate the illusion of charm and glamour "as a weapon to conceal true intent" (Gabriel 36)<sup>18</sup>; in the case of Letitia Virden, her intention to "seize power" (337) is concealed beneath a carefully constructed image which reflects society's desire for purity and innocence. Findley alerts his readers to the potential for violence which is hidden beneath the Virgin's glamorous exterior through the deployment of language which emphasizes, not her beauty, but her power: "in her stance and quiet stare could be felt the power and intensity of a conqueror" (22). The reader can only conclude that George Damarosch is correct in his assertion that motion pictures, while disguised as entertainment, can indeed be "weapons" (202) for societal control through the dissemination of ideological content. The ideology which underlies *America – I Love You!*, the film with which Letitia Virden and Cooper Carter intend to "seize power," is similar to that of National Socialism: the projection of all that is undesirable onto an "other" which can then be expunged from society, taking with it all that threatens the illusion of purity. The ideal of perfection is identifiable only by the absence of imperfections; therefore, once an "imperfection" is identified, its destruction is made to seem perfectly rational, even necessary. In Hitler's Germany, the Nazi "final

solution” was justified by the characterization of the Jewish people as an impurity which must be expelled from the nation; a similar identification and expurgation of an external threat to national purity is the basis for the Little Virgin’s “comeback” film, in which she portrays the obviously allegorical “Virginia Mary Washington, defiled by Mexicans and consequently unfit for marriage” (332). She represents the purity and perfection of America itself, and all that threatens her has been projected onto first “the dirty little Mexicans” and then “the Indians” (332). In the final scene, all threats have been vanquished and “[n]othing remained but the rotting Mexicans in the field. America was safe” (333).

In “The Obvious,” in which he warns that what one individual considers “obvious” is not necessarily so, Laing writes that “Hitler regarded it as perfectly obvious that the Jews were a poison to the Aryan race and hence required to be exterminated” (Laing 1968: 13); what is extraordinary in the case of Hitler is not his misguided beliefs, but the fact that he was able to convince an entire society of the validity of this misconception. As William L. Shirer suggests in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Hitler’s influence was greatly strengthened by his skill as an orator, his “magic power...to sway millions by his voice” (Shirer 35), and his ability to control the image which his party presented to the nation and to the world<sup>19</sup>; in fact, Susan Sontag suggests, in her 1974 essay “Fascinating Fascism,” the way in which “the 1934 Party convention was staged was partly determined by the decision to produce [Leni Riefenstahl’s film] *Triumph of the Will*” (Sontag 1982: 311). Riefenstahl’s work, Sontag writes, illustrates the predominant

theme of Fascist aesthetics, namely the submission of masses of people to a dominant figure:

The relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry: the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force (Sontag 1982: 316).

The scene in which the Little Virgin arrives at the premiere of her movie exemplifies this phenomenon. Individual experiences are subsumed by the “legend” created by the collective consciousness of the non-individuated masses who greet the “perfect” image of the star with a mass salute which resonates with images of the Nuremberg rally captured in *Triumph of the Will*. In Riefenstahl’s record of the Nuremberg Rally, as Bailey describes, “the people move as one body, united under the leadership of Hitler who is seen as the perfect embodiment of their dreams and desires” (Bailey 1998b: 53); here, Findley replaces the fascist dictator with the Hollywood star, and deploys language which foregrounds the similarities between these two examples of mass submission to the will of a leader<sup>20</sup>:

A shout went up.

The crowd raised its arms in salutation.

The band brazened the air with fanfare.

The choir sang “Hail to Thee, Sheba, Solomon’s Wife” by Handel-Wagner, and the Virgin, waving with one bejeweled hand, made semicircular turns in slow motion so they might all see and honor her.

Her stance was practiced. Perfect. Poised. Her expression was studied and her carriage aloof (359-360).

The fact that the “leader-figure” that inspires the crowd to salute *en masse* is not Letitia Virden but her son, is ultimately irrelevant; the distance imposed between an icon and its worshippers allows illusion to supercede reality. In the case of the Little Virgin, the

narrator states that “[f]rom a distance you could not see the short shaved stubble on the crest of her wrists” (360). As icons are never scrutinized at close proximity, this detail does not detract from the illusion. Octavius is able to usurp his mother’s position because, although he is male, he embodies the youthful and beautiful ideal which is the sum of her identity. The “Little Virgin” exists only as a myth; in a world in which illusion has usurped reality, the question of which is the “real” Letitia Virden is meaningless.

Findley’s examination of this world, in which reality has become irrelevant, is presented through the eyes of Ruth Damarosch Haddon, who, in spite of the violence which she has both witnessed and experienced in Germany, has succeeded in remaining strangely naive: “Childlike, she insisted there was darkness when all around her the adults were proclaiming light” (10). An admission that what was occurring was, in fact, reality and not a nightmare would amount to a loss of innocence, and Ruth “would not let go of innocence... Innocence was sanity. Just as silence was sanity” (10). Ruth’s equation of “innocence” and “silence” with “sanity” is misguided; far from preserving “sanity,” an “innocence” which is achieved through a denial of the existence of evil in fact amounts to a perpetuation of the very “insanity” which, according to Laing and his contemporaries, is the condition of contemporary Western society. Innocence and silence are the conditions under which evil is allowed to flourish unchecked and unchallenged. Paradoxically, when Ruth begins to awaken from her innocence and to become aware of the social reality in which she is living, she is considered to be “devastated with depression” and “mad” (294) by members of her family who are themselves fully implicated in the insanity which Ruth is only beginning to recognize. When the reader

first encounters Ruth, she is arriving in Hollywood by train<sup>21</sup>, having “escaped” from Germany, where she competed in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, and where she was subjected to experiments at the hands of her husband and trainer, “the notorious American Nazi, Dr. Bruno Haddon” (231). As York observes, “Ruth’s experience is paradigmatic of the condition of both women and prisoners in Nazi Germany” (York 1991: 77). In an analogue of the treatment of Jews in Hitler’s Germany, Ruth’s head is shaven, she is required to wear a uniform, she is put onto trains without being informed of her destination, and she is forced to submit to brutal physical conditions designed to test the endurance of the human body. In her marriage, she is portrayed as the prisoner of Bruno, who is both her husband and trainer, as he transforms himself into a German and a Nazi, and as his relationship with her becomes increasingly authoritarian and demeaning:

I wanted to go home – really home – truly home, to America. But no. I was married. I was a wife. I stayed with my husband.  
I was his guinea pig.  
I was bald. Once a week he shaved my head.  
I wore his uniform (99).

Ruth, having accepted her society’s definition of marriage as an institution in which it is the wife’s duty to submit to the demands of her husband, does not resist her husband’s power over her. In fact, she admits to the desire for total submission to a will greater than her own:

I *wanted* to be what he wanted. I *wanted* every muscle to be obedient to his will, not my own. When he did the counting my body became his machine, beyond my control. I don’t know where the stamina and the rhythm came from. They didn’t come from me. Perhaps from inside him. I was his instrument. I *wanted* to be. I *wanted* to obey. I *wanted* to be obedient. I *wanted* to function without thought, to respond to his voice like a dog (79; my emphasis).

Here, the repetition of the word “wanted” emphasizes Ruth’s belief that, although she submits to Bruno’s control, she has freely chosen to put herself in this position. She admits to having desired marriage to Bruno – “I wanted Bruno to marry me. I had wanted it since the day I first saw him at the beach” (78) – and remains fascinated by him despite the indignities to which he subjects her. Through Ruth’s marriage to Bruno, Findley illustrates the complexity of the human fascination with fascism and the seductive appeal of submission to another’s will. Ruth occupies the complex and unstable position of one who is neither wholly victim nor victimizer, but who has been seduced by evil; however, her desires – first to marry Bruno, and then to submit to his demands – do not, as she deludes herself, arise freely and uncontaminated from her own will, but are products of the pervasive myth of perfection which is the root, not only of the persecution of the Jews which Ruth has witnessed in Germany, but of the star status which she enjoys as an Olympic gold-medalist. Ruth’s attraction to the blond man whom she identifies as “Race” further illustrates the seductive nature of the myth of perfection; the words which spring to her mind as she observes him on the beach – “How beautiful you are, and awful. As though the two must go together” (41) – articulate the beginning of an understanding of the connection between beauty and evil, a connection which, Sontag writes, is one of the foundations of fascist aesthetics. According to Sontag, the S.S., which was “the ideal incarnation of fascism’s overt assertion of the righteousness of violence, the right to have total power over others and to treat them as absolutely inferior,” was “designed as an elite military community that would be not only supremely violent but also supremely beautiful” (Sontag 1982: 321). Fascism deploys the techniques

of the motion picture industry – the use of beauty and glamour appeal to the population’s aesthetic sensibilities – to attract people to an ideology which would otherwise be considered abhorrent. However, Ruth’s ability to see beyond the surface beauty to recognize the destruction wrought upon the world by the man she calls “Race,” does not preclude her eventual seduction by the idea which he represents.

In the context of this desire for union with the principle of racial purity, the parallel which Ruth draws between her own situation and that of the Jewish victims of Nazi ideology is highly problematic. Throughout the novel, Ruth gathers badges of “victimhood” which suggest her naïve identification with the victims of violence: “The star of Mr. Seuss; the bathing suit of the red-head; Myra’s stoles...they were emblems. The emblems of violence: of violence being done” (133; my ellipsis). Ruth’s written comment to Lisa/Lissl that they should “carry stars” (95) to identify themselves as victims is an oversimplification of the situation in which each woman finds herself; while each certainly suffers due to her society’s identification of women as inferior, each – through the recreation of herself in the image of what her society considers “perfection” – is also complicit in the very regime which oppresses her. Lisa changes her name to the German “Lissl,” marries a Nazi, and transforms herself into the ideal of feminine beauty – “Impeccably coiffured. Impeccably manicured. Impeccably made up, impeccably gowned, and impeccable of speech” (89) – while Ruth allows her head to be shaven and her breasts to be bound in order to attain an improved level of physical performance. Both these transformations signify complicity with fascist ideology. When being forced to participate in experiments designed to test the limits of the human body’s endurance



of extreme temperatures, Ruth identifies with the concentration camp inmates – whom she calls “dreamers” – who watch her, and thinks: “I was one of them” (103). This, however, is a false identification; while the double stigmas of hemophilia and femaleness lead Ruth to identify with the victims of fascist ideology, she most certainly is *not* “one of them.” As Ruth’s mother Naomi later reminds her, her career, her marriage, and her very presence in Germany are predicated upon innate qualities, such as physical strength and fearlessness, which are valued by those in power in Nazi Germany. The fact that her body is held as the embodiment of physical perfection, and not its opposite, precludes her identification as a victim. Yet, the words which Naomi chooses emphasize the fact that Ruth’s privileged position in her society is as beyond her control as the dreamers’ position is beyond theirs: “You had a good strong body. Long and lean. Extraordinary. And natural. And you had, too, an inclination not to worry about distance and drowning... You were born that way. It had nothing to do with choice” (150; my ellipsis). Both positions are determined by ideological assumptions about innate qualities and characteristics which are beyond the control of the individual; just as the “dreamers” have no control over those qualities which lead to their vilification by the Nazis, Ruth similarly has no control over her innate strengths which cause her to be admired by the leaders of the regime. The fact that her innate qualities are prized, rather than reviled, precludes her inclusion among the victims. Like Leni Riefenstahl, whose relationships with Hitler and Goebbels suggest complicity with Nazi ideology<sup>22</sup>, Ruth is greatly admired by the leaders of the Nazi regime:

I received gifts. A gold watch from Himmler – a box at the opera from the Führer – kid gloves and a leather bag from Julius Streicher – a compact from

Goering – and a pill box. And flowers from Dr. Goebbels (he called them messages of admiration) (100).

Despite Ruth's privileged position, she identifies with the "dreamers," an identification which incites her to rebel against Bruno's dictates. While subjecting her to experiments designed to test the limits of the human body's capacity for endurance of extreme temperatures, he commands her to "*Schwimmen!*" in a tank of freezing water, and while she does comply, she enacts a subtle rebellion against his screamed orders to "Crawl!" by swimming first "the side stroke, feminine and graceful" and then "the breast stroke. Lazy and slow. Feminine" (104). York reads Ruth's deliberate disobedience of Bruno's orders as an "act of sympathetic identification between an oppressed race and an oppressed sex," which represents "the culmination of the ideological journey which began when Ruth first touched the star which Mr. Seuss placed in her palm" (York 1991: 78). However, Ruth's attempt at rebellion is ultimately ineffectual; while she is able to attain, temporarily, "a measure of freedom" (105) for herself, her disobedience does nothing to alter the fate of the "dreamers." She labours under the naïve misconception that "[i]f I could endure more cold than anyone ever had, then they would never have to endure the cold again" (106). Of course, this is not true. Regardless of what happens to Ruth, the concentration camp victims will continue to suffer; her death would have no impact on their lives. However, in spite of her misguided conviction that she possesses the power to save the "dreamers" from further suffering, she ultimately chooses self-preservation, willingly putting herself in Bruno's hands – "Bruno saved me" (106) – and thereby demonstrating her alliance, not with the Jews, but with the Nazis. Her disobedience is made possible by her confidence in her privileged position; she is able to

enact such small rebellions because she is secure in her knowledge that she is at no real risk, that she is of sufficient value to Bruno and his colleagues that they will not allow her to die. While she professes to have become “One” with the “dreamers” (106), her actions throughout the novel suggest, rather, that she has become “One” with Bruno and the values which he represents.

In another scene, Ruth responds to her discovery of the corpse of Race’s first victim with a self-imposed repetition of Bruno’s orders to “swim”, demonstrating that she has internalized his control over her will. While Findley modified this passage for the 1986 edition of the novel, the 1969 version uses imagery which more explicitly suggests Ruth’s complicity with fascism:

Ruth locked herself in her room, took off her clothes, stood with her back hard up against the wall and began secretly, with a growing, widening silence, *to raise her right arm rhythmically, over and over, in a strangely angular salute*. Her expression slowly changed from one of exhaustion and despair to one of *willful obedience*. Standing there alone, she seemed to have *joined a throng* (1969; 48; my emphasis).<sup>23</sup>

The “throng” which she has joined is not a throng of victims, but of fascist sympathizers, a fact which is made explicit by her raising of her arm in the Nazi salute. However, while Ruth cannot be read simply as a victim of fascist ideology, neither can she be read simply as a victimizer. Ruth’s complex, contaminated identity is signalled through her nomenclature; as Pennee has pointed out, the juxtaposition of a first name taken from the old testament Book of Ruth, with a Germanic surname suggests that Ruth’s identity is a composite of Nazi and Jew. Furthermore, Ruth’s biblical namesake is herself a principle of contamination, having left her own people, the Moabites, and claimed her mother-in-law Naomi’s people as her own<sup>24</sup>. The biblical Ruth’s acceptance by her adopted people

is marked by her marriage to and impregnation by one of their kinsman. Similarly, Ruth Damarosch hopes to purify herself through what is, paradoxically, an act of contamination: the mingling of her blood line with that of "Race" a figure who represents racial purity. While it is tempting to read Ruth as the victim of – and ultimately the lone voice of dissent against – the ideology embodied by her husband, Ruth's desire for a racially pure child amounts to a repetition of Bruno's desire for a blue-eyed, German child; in both instances, the desire for perfection is shown to be contrary to the dictates of reason. On an intellectual level – "he knew about genetics" (70) – Bruno is aware of the impossibility of a brown-eyed man fathering blue-eyed children, while as a hemophilia carrier, Ruth's desire for a "blue-eyed baby, with blond hair and fine, long limbs, a straight mind and a health-infested system" (343) is equally irrational.

The central interpretive question in the novel, and one which complicates its reading is this: whose version of "reality" do we believe – the masses or the lone voice of dissent? In other words, are the figure of Race and the fire in Alvarez Canyon merely products of Ruth's unbalanced mind, or does Ruth's version of reality reveal truths to which the masses are blind? The manner in which Findley presents Ruth's version of events is sufficiently ambiguous that critics of the novel disagree on whether key events in the novel occur in Ruth's mind or in the text's "reality." Of the fire in Alvarez Canyon, in which, according to the narrator, "four thousand creatures had perished against a wall," (143) Donna Pennee writes:

What is described here only occurred in Ruth's mind: the Damarosch clan was not in Alvarez Canyon – there was a fire, but they did not directly experience it (in the same way that the Holocaust occurred, but not directly to all of us). Retrospectively, then, we confirm that Race is a figure with no

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ontological reality, haunting Ruth's psyche or resurfacing from buried memory (Pennee 32-3).

Anne Geddes Bailey disagrees, arguing that the Damarosch family's denial that they witnessed the burning "echoes revisionist versions of Nazi history which assert that there were no death camps, no gas chambers, no ovens, no victims" (Bailey 1998b: 61). I concur with Bailey in her suggestion that, in the "reality" of the novel, the Damarosches *did* in fact witness the burning of Alvarez Canyon, but refuse to acknowledge it, because after all, "to be a witness is to be accountable," and they do not want to face their accountability. Certainly, the detailed episodes which take place in Alvarez Canyon and which are focalized through characters other than Ruth suggest that, as Bailey writes, "Naomi's interpretation of reality, not Ruth's, is a denial of what is real" (Bailey 1998b: 63). Findley supports this interpretation, suggesting that Ruth alone is able to recognize the insanity of the actions of those around her and the consequences of those actions:

And [Ruth] was also right, incidentally, about Alvarez Canyon, too. The god damn Plastic World was on fire and they tried to save it...everyone wanted to save the Plastic World of Alvarez and they wanted to let all the real things die up against that fence (Gibson 146).

In an obvious analogue to revisionist accounts of history which attempt to deny the large-scale violence visited upon Jews in Europe in the years before the second world war – the fire which nobody witnesses and which has no victims is referred to as a "holocaust" (140) – the dismissal of Ruth as mad for insisting that she was there enables those who did nothing to stop the deaths of four thousand animals to retain the notion that they responded to their reality in a rational and sane manner: "But no one saw it. No one heard it. No one was there. Or, so they all claimed. Everyone heard about it of course, but

afterward. In the reports” (143). By ignoring Ruth’s version of events and insisting that that “we were not – none of us was – there” (157), Naomi is able to sustain the illusion of innocence, to deny the existence of evil in her world, and to avoid accountability for what she witnessed. In addition, while the official news reports do concede that the fire did occur, they deny that there were any victims. As Naomi’s nurse, Mrs. Bonkers, relays to Ruth, “There were no animals. Nothing died. Nothing. It was a miracle” (143). Findley’s renaming of Naomi’s nurse, “Miss Trainer” as “Miss Bonkers” in his 1986 revision of the original text of his novel, suggests that this figure, whose “face like Mussolini” (36) and penchant for military garb – “aviator’s jacket and helmet, goggles, gauntleted gloves and high black boots” (113) – identify her with fascism, represents an attitude toward life which itself is “bonkers” or crazy. Although she is a nurse, she does not “nurse” people back to health, but – assisted by morphine – helps them make the transition from life to death; she is “a professional death-watcher” (36) who chooses patients according to their proximity to death, yet who is able to convince herself of her own innocence through the denial of the existence of large-scale death and destruction.

In a world in which blind, unquestioning “innocence” is mistaken for “sanity”, Ruth’s ability to recognize the evil inherent in society’s obsession with physical perfection is deemed “madness.” Ruth’s experiences in Germany, and her consequent awareness of the potential for destruction and evil inherent in the figure of a blond man dressed in leather, are dismissed by those around her, who deny that their reality is infected by evil. The man is described as follows:

He was blond from top to toe, probably German, and he smelled of leather. He was extraordinary to look at. He could have been an advertisement for racial perfection. His eyes were blue; his hair was golden; his teeth were white and even. Every bone was perfection itself. He radiated strength, health, and stamina (10).

Ruth's identification of this man as "Race," the embodiment of the myth of perfection which is the root of much evil and suffering in the world, is not unlike the experience of the seventeen-year-old patient who told Laing that "she was terrified because the Atom Bomb was inside her" (Laing 1965: 12). From Laing's perspective, this patient was not deluded, but rather, she had merely internalized the "mad" social reality to which she was unable to adapt. Thus, not only is this schizophrenic patient more connected to "reality" than "the statesmen of the world" (Laing 1965: 12), but it seems to follow such individuals alone, by virtue of their internalization of the psychoses of the world, possess insight into these psychoses that makes resistance possible. Similarly, Ruth's ability to conjure a physical manifestation of what Findley has referred to as "the idea of fascism" (Gibson 146) suggests that, unable to adapt to the insanity of her world, she has internalized it, and thus possesses an insight into the events that are occurring in the world which others are denied:

What I was trying to express was that Ruth translated [the events which she had witnessed in Germany] into this "thing"... not even a human being, but a "thing"... almost only an idea, that went around murdering people and lighting fires and doing all these things. Now – in fact – her translation of reality was correct. An "idea" was going around killing things. The idea of Fascism (Gibson 146).

"Race" is not, as Donna Pennee writes, "a figure with no ontological reality" (32); the rapes and murders which he commits, and the fires which he sets, all register in the "real world" of the novel. However, it is Ruth alone who is able to identify this figure who



represents an “advertisement for racial perfection” (10) as the cause of the violence, to link the blond man dressed in leather with the acts of brutal and senseless violence, and to conclude that “he represents race” (154). After finding the remains of a girl whom she had observed following the blond man, Ruth connects him to the murder and goes to the police, who do not believe her. Although she carries the scrap of blue fabric as a reminder of what she has witnessed, others do not afford it the same significance as she does. Naomi dismisses Ruth’s insistence on what she has witnessed as the result of depression:

You come back here, and we all grant you’ve come back justifiably depressed over your divorce and so on, but you still come back here and within two days you’re telling us you found a body on the beach. You even telephone to the Santa Monica Police Force! Get them out here and what do they find? A piece of torn material in your pocket and nothing more (157).

Naomi’s naïve assumption that Ruth’s heightened emotional state arises from her “divorce and so on” rather than the horrifying events which she witnessed and in which she was forced to participate, signals to the reader that her version of reality is to be regarded with suspicion. She not only denies the impact of Ruth’s experiences in Germany, but dismisses her account of what she has witnessed in America. This is analogous to North Americans’ denial of the enormity of what was happening in Europe and the refusal to recognize the connection between it and what was occurring simultaneously in America, a connection which is central to *The Butterfly Plague*. Of all the characters in the novel, only Ruth and Naomi are able to recognize that the “myth of perfection” which all the characters are pursuing is “the cause of all human pain” (156). However, Naomi recognizes this too late, after having aborted several fetuses, knowing

that they would be recipients of her legacy of “imperfect” blood, while Ruth is ultimately unable to resist the lure of the myth of perfection.

The fact that Ruth alone is able to accept accountability for what happened in Alvarez Canyon, and to recognize the blond man for what he is – she explicitly tells Naomi that “he represents Race” (154) – would suggest that she would be able to use this insight to resist the madness that is occurring around her; however, in her succumbing to the seductive beauty of the fascist myth through her insistence that Race be the father of her child, Findley shows the difficulty – even impossibility – of resisting the power of this myth. Ruth’s desire for a child might be read as an affirmation of life in a world plagued by evil and violence, as a refusal to see herself as “flawed” or “imperfect”, but her insistence that Race must be the father identifies it as a misguided striving for the dream of perfection embodied in the blond, blue-eyed, leather-clad figure of Race. She tells Naomi about her desire for perfection, in spite of her recognition of it as the root of suffering and evil:

In Germany, I read books. I heard speeches... I watched people. I saw things. I listened to things. Unspeakable things... And yet, in spite of reading and listening and watching; in spite of overhearing and secretly seeing; in spite of *knowing*... I still want... Race” (155; emphasis in original, my ellipses).

Her insights into the fact that Race is responsible for the violence which has recently infected her world, into the connections between fascism and Hollywood, and into the meaning of the “holocaust” in Alvarez Canyon have now been replaced by her denial of evil and pain in the world, as she begins to participate in the large-scale denial of reality in which her society is engaged:

When I am old and he is my age, what a wonderful thing it will be to look back and to say, it never happened. The dreamers did not die; Bruno did not exist; the butterflies were beautiful, – whole treefuls of them – loved and applauded by everyone who saw them; Hitler is dead. No more wars. No more threat of wars. No torment. No apprehension. And a cure for every disease... (344)

Only through participation in this mass delusion, through “dreaming everyone’s dream” (344) – the “dream” that denies the existence of difference, imperfection, violence or evil in the world – is Ruth able to regain the illusion of innocence, if not innocence itself.<sup>25</sup> Because she has seen the consequences of fascist ideology, and is aware that the butterflies are not only “beautiful” but are also deadly, she is unable to sustain this innocence, and she is forced to admit that the perfect, blue-eyed child that she has convinced herself she is carrying is, in fact, “not there” (346); the illusion has been destroyed by a thought which has taken over her mind, “calculating where it would rearrange things, reschedule tables of habit, refashion beliefs, relieve reason” (345). Strangely, the “thought” which destroys her belief in her pregnancy – of which “she had no verification beyond her own instinctive sense” (345) – presents itself in the form of a Nazi Blackshirt:

It wore boots. It was beginning to wear a long leather coat. It put on a helmet. It crashed about on studded heels. It carried a baton, a neat little baton, and it was counting, but not out loud (345).

The destruction of Ruth’s pregnancy – which signifies an instinctive acceptance of the myth of racial purity – by her internalization of an image which itself embodies that same myth, is extremely confusing. As Bailey writes:

Perhaps it is meant to be ironic that a fascist image should crush Nazi dreams. However, the narrator confuses the reader by both suggesting that Ruth’s pregnancy is predicated on fascist ideals, and representing the end of those

ideals as something to be regretted because it has been killed by a fascist image (Bailey 1998b: 75).

The destruction of Ruth's "child" represents her awareness of the violence and threat of persecution inherent in the myth of perfection, a fact of which her experiences as Bruno's "guinea pig" have made her aware. When Ruth is forced to face the knowledge that, as Findley suggests in an interview, "you can't have perfection unless it is going to be evil" (Gibson 142), her pregnancy is exposed as a dream without substance, a fabrication that – like the American Dream and the fascist dream of perfection – does not refer back to anything other than its own illusory nature.

The acknowledgment of the illusory nature of her pregnancy does not, however, mark the end of Ruth's complicity with fascist ideology; rather, she continues to dream of perfection, a fact which is illustrated by her attempt to eradicate any signs of Dolly's homosexuality, which she reads as "imperfection." The description of the fire with which Ruth destroys the evidence of Dolly's difference or "imperfection" as a "rapidly spreading holocaust" (327) sets up a parallel between the Nazi "final solution" and Ruth's attempt to cleanse her brother's image of any "taint" of homosexuality. Ruth has not given up the desperate yearning for innocence by which she is characterized in her first appearance in the novel; her desire to reclaim her innocence – a state which is epitomized by the year 1922, prior to the revelation of Dolly's hemophilia and the Damarosch family's inherent "imperfection" – is revealed through her actions upon discovering, hidden among her brother's collection of children's books, photographs of men in sexual situations. Each of these texts – *Adventures in Wonderland*. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. *The Wizard of Oz* – concerns

the process by which an innocent is initiated into the ways of the adult world, and can be read as an allegory about the journey from innocence to knowledge and responsibility. Ruth, after having made a similar journey, has rejected knowledge in favour of clinging desperately to the illusion of innocence. Ruth's discovery of the photographs renders the fictional worlds from which the photographs fall as "devoid forever, now, of loveliness and innocence" (326); through the burning of these texts and the photographs contained within them – an act which resonates with the Nazis' burning of books – she is attempting to reclaim her innocence, in spite of her awareness that such innocence would be illusory. Her words to herself before she sets the fire that will destroy the evidence of Dolly's homosexuality – "Nothing, anywhere, was real" (327) – indicate Ruth's stubborn and relentless adherence to the illusion of innocence; while she cannot erase the knowledge that Dolly is a hemophiliac and a homosexual, that she is a carrier of hemophilia, and that her family is no longer Hollywood royalty, she will nevertheless attempt to deny these realities until the bitter end.

The novel concludes with Ruth's completion of a journey of which she has been dreaming since the beginning of the novel, the journey from experience to innocence:

She wanted to go back. Not to have married Bruno. Not to have cared about Olympic medals and championships...1922. Sixteen years ago. Theirs was then the only house on the beach. Go back. Come back. Stay (38).

In the novel's final chapter, Ruth returns to her parents' empty house and, seated on the "Star Steps" – a sign of her family's former celebrity status and continued adherence to the myth of Hollywood glamour – she insulates herself against reality by clothing herself in the remnants of a myth which she recognizes as false, but to which she continues,

irrationally, to cling. Throughout the novel, Ruth has gathered emblems which make up what Pennee calls her “composite identity” (34); these include Mr. Seuss’s star, the scrap of blue bathing suit and Race’s swastika<sup>26</sup>, symbols of her complex, heterogeneous identity. To these, Ruth now adds three symbols of the empty dreams of the Damarosch family: “She wore her mother’s black-fox coat, Dolly’s Panama [hat], and had placed George’s magenta handkerchief in her pocket” (368). The fur coat, a popular north American status symbol, was given to Naomi by George on the day of the birth of their hemophilic son, an occasion which marks the beginning of the fall of the Damarosches, and as such suggests happier, more innocent times. It is “outrageously dated” (369) in style, yet “has always suited” Naomi (369), who herself is an anachronism, a relic of an age when one could enjoy the illusion of glamour lent by a fur coat without concerning oneself about the animal whose death has made that glamour possible. Dolly’s Panama hat, an element of his “impeccable” pale blue suit, is both the affectation of a man who places a great deal of value in surface appearances and a sign of Dolly’s self-identification as imperfect – he has chosen the colour because it will show up even the smallest mark of blood, instantly reminding him of his own undesirability. Dolly has made himself into a victim; his pale blue uniform, unlike Mr. Seuss’s yellow star, is self-imposed, but, like the yellow star, it signifies the wearer’s difference from what is accepted by society as “normal.”<sup>27</sup> Finally, the colour of George’s magenta handkerchief links it both to the Nazi insignia and to the “tainted” blood of his wife, son and daughter, which causes him to destroy his family. The regal colour of the handkerchief, juxtaposed with its shabby appearance – it is “frayed at the corners, with a hole to one side” (176) –

suggests faded glamour and unfulfilled dreams. Like Naomi's coat and Dolly's hat, George's handkerchief is an affectation which appears ridiculous when seen in the context of the Damarosch family's fall from the celebrity status they once enjoyed. While Pennee interprets Ruth's retreat into the past as an "assertion of identity and presence" (Pennee 34) and not a desperate clinging to the illusion of innocence, I would argue that the construction of this scene suggests the latter and not the former interpretation; by positioning Ruth on the "Star Steps" among the faded names of former celebrities, Findley is conveying that she, like them, has "no sense of place or position" (372) in the present. Ruth's retreat into the security offered by the faded images of glamour with which the Damarosch family has costumed itself offers no potential for redemption or rehabilitation.

The image of the drowning butterfly which closes the novel is equally unsatisfying:

Ruth stared while the first deluge of relief beat out the little remaining brightness in the butterfly's wings, and at last she saw them crumple and melt. She watched as the slim, black battered boat of its tiny body slid, still clinging at first, this way and that – until the flood upon the fern became so torrential and overpowering that it swept the beaten remnants, finally, far down into the mold and mud below.

And then the rain fell in such a crowd of drops that there was nothing left in sight but the vaguest outline of the thing it could not hope to wash away (373-4).

Like the end of Ruth's pregnancy, this image suggests the death of fascist ideals, while conveying a sense of nostalgia for those ideals. In spite of the deaths which accompanied the butterfly plague, Ruth's recognition that the plague is over is accompanied by a hint of sadness:

And Ruth thought, Now there will be no more fires... And a moment later she thought,... And no more butterflies. This rain has extinguished them. Forever. Or a while.

And she spread the ashes.

And they were mud.

And there was nothing to do but turn around and go (374; ellipses in original).

However, both the narrator's and readers' knowledge of the historical events which, in the spring of 1939, were still to come, support the narrator's suggestion that fascism cannot be washed away, and that the butterflies will in fact return.<sup>28</sup> The novel ends with a profoundly pessimistic – even nihilistic – vision of a world in which “mud” is the only alternative to fires, in which the only suggestion of hope is that the butterflies may return, and in which the only action available to the individual faced with the destruction wrought by humanity's propensity for evil is to “turn around and go,” a gesture which repeats Vanessa's pulling of the shade at the end of *The Telling of Lies*.

The alternative to Ruth's attempted reclaiming of innocence through the denial of the existence of evil is the representation of evil, and here Findley catches himself on the horns of a dilemma. In his attempt to show that all humanity is implicated in the horrors of fascism, he leaves no possibility for articulating an alternative to the nightmare which has the world in its grasp. The one character who does not merely “turn around and go,” but attempts to create a record of the plague, is the sculptor Noah Trelford. Noah, who begins his project with the best of intentions – “[h]e felt that the Butterfly Plague should be interpreted and preserved” (350) – nevertheless cannot escape complicity in the very barbarism which he is attempting to represent. In attempting to represent reality, he is compelled to desecrate the very bodies of the butterflies who died in the plague:



All day, every day for weeks, he boiled his mixture at the back of the house, in various little pots, adding the wings to these glues in varying quantities and making up different textures. He developed some very interesting pastes which he applied to various bits and pieces of plastics and woods. He also made several butterfly “skeletons” out of wire and applied the mâché to these (350).

His experiments with “butterfly-mâché” (350) have, as Bailey has pointed out, disturbing resonances with Nazi concentration camps (Bailey 1998b: 76), as do his wife’s organization of the children into “work gangs” for the collection of butterfly wings, the children’s burning of the bodies in “carefully supervised fires,” and the actions of one child who “cut the wings from four thousand carcasses” (350). Through the usage of language which deliberately conjures images of the holocaust, Findley seems to be making the disturbing claim that the preservation of memory necessitates a repetition of the very acts which one is representing. In its suggestion that both the denial of evil in the name of innocence and the representation of evil in the name of knowledge are implicated in the spread of evil itself, *The Butterfly Plague* is ultimately unable to sustain a critique of fascism which posits a viable alternative to the totalizing currents and implicit violence of Western modernity.

For the epigraph to *The Butterfly Plague*, Findley has chosen a poem by the German poet Nelly Sachs which questions humanity’s receptivity to prophecies of apocalypse. The ear of mankind, the poem suggests, is too “occupied with small sounds” to register the truth in the words of prophets. The poem begins:

Ear of mankind  
overgrown with nettles  
would you hear?

If the voice of the prophets blew  
 on flutes made of murdered children's bones —  
 and exhaled airs burnt with martyrs' cries —

Ruth Damarosch, like Hooker Winslow before her and Mrs. Ross after her, is one of Findley's many Cassandra figures; like the Cassandra of Greek mythology, Ruth is unable to persuade people to believe her warnings. Ruth's version of reality is initially dismissed because of its failure to conform to society's idea of "normality"; her family is too occupied with "small sounds" to heed her warnings: Naomi ignores the reality of four thousand deaths, asking "what greater reality can there be than *my* death?" (157; my emphasis), while George and Dolly are so obsessed with creating a fantasy world on film that they ignore the world in which they are living. However, Ruth's ultimate failure as a prophet can be attributed, not to her perceived "madness," but to her inability to "leave the formation," to extricate herself from the very social structures against which she is cautioning.

**"One Mad Eye": Witnesses to Societal "Madness" in *Famous Last Words***

Ezra Pound has one mad eye: his left. And there were times I thought he saw the world through it alone, as if the other eye were blind. But now, as I write this here, I think about the world outside these windows and I see it as being the world that Ezra always saw: the world of chaos, fire and rage.

*Famous Last Words*, 77.

*Famous Last Words*, like both *The Telling of Lies* and *The Butterfly Plague*, is concerned with issues of narrative and accountability within a disordered and dehumanizing social reality. At the centre of the novel is a chronicle of fascist

involvement during the years preceding the second world war, written by the novelist and fascist collaborator Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, who records his story with a silver pencil on the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel during the final days of his life. After the war, his words are discovered by soldiers, along with his dead and mutilated body. The method of Mauberley's death – he is killed by an ice-pick which has been thrust through one eye and into his brain – forges a link between him and another fascist sympathizer who appears in the novel, the poet Ezra Pound, who Mauberley describes as having “one mad eye” which gives him access to “visions of the truth” (77). Mauberley's narrative contains a passage which argues that Pound must be exonerated for his fascist activities – which consist primarily of a series of radio broadcasts<sup>29</sup> in which he proclaimed his support for Italian fascism – on the basis of the claim that, through his “one mad eye,” he became a witness to the madness of his society, and that his writings and broadcasts merely *reflect* this madness, rather than share in its creation. *Famous Last Words*, as I will argue, does not share Mauberley's absolution of Pound and, furthermore, implicates not only Mauberley, but the reader – and even Findley himself – in the aestheticization of politics, which, Walter Benjamin suggests, is the essence of fascism<sup>30</sup>.

In *Inside Memory*, Findley writes, “*Famous Last Words* is a novel about what appeared to be – and, indeed, may well have been – the final hours of Western Civilization” (316). Far from merely recording his version of these final hours, Mauberley constructs a carefully contrived narrative which is itself complicit with the ideology which has brought about the decline of Western civilization. Every aspect of Mauberley's text, from its physical appearance – “[t]he figures were beautiful and

formal,” and embellished with “rococo loop[s]” (65) – to his deployment of the imagery of classical mythology – the account of the arrival of the king’s yacht at Dubrovnik alludes to Shakespeare’s Illyria, as well as to Pan, Cadmus, and Homer (62-3) – is designed to lure the reader into absolving Mauberley of his involvement with the members of the Penelope cabal, whose beliefs and activities are described by Lindbergh as going “beyond mere Nazism” (116). The reader of Mauberley’s tale is encouraged to find the Windsors and their friends as glamorous and fascinating as Mauberley does, and to therefore empathize with him, forgiving him for the extent of his involvement with the cabal and absolving him of responsibility for the consequences of his actions. Findley himself has interpreted Mauberley’s “famous last words” as a confession of his fascist sympathies and activities, and has stated that, in his opinion, “Mauberley is a hero,” because “in writing what he does on the walls he must condemn himself and everything he stood for” (Meyer and O’Riordan 49)<sup>31</sup>. It is possible to argue that, during the course of the events which he records, Mauberley grows from an aesthete whose “whole and only ambition is to describe the beautiful” (5) into a “compulsive witness” (21) who, accepting accountability for his actions, is driven to record the political events which he has had the privilege to observe first-hand; however, this reading ignores, not only the extent to which Mauberley – like both Ruth Damarosch and Vanessa Van Horne – remains deeply implicated in the events which he is representing, but also the absence from his narrative of such a sense of responsibility.

Mauberley’s impulse to transcribe his notebooks onto the walls of the hotel while waiting for his assassin appears to arise, less from a desire to confess to and atone for his

involvement in fascist activities, than from a simple desire to affirm his existence in the face of his impending death, in much the same way as the drawings on the walls of the caves at Altamira embody “the heart of the human race – which is its will to say *I am*” (173). Mauberley’s narrative is concerned with recording a contemporary mythology, in which in his friends – particularly Wallis Simpson, with whom, he writes “I had been in love myself in the way dogs have of loving the feet at which they lie” (64) – play the roles of deities. As Anne Geddes Bailey remarks, “[i]nstead of telling us a political confession as he promises, Mauberley actually narrates a story of political involvement which results more from love than ideology” (Bailey 112). In Mauberley’s narrative, the conspirators in the Penelope cabal are portrayed lovingly, and are afforded a mythic status which is undercut, not by Mauberley himself, but by the frame narrative in which Mauberley’s words are embedded. The reader’s awareness of the development of Mauberley’s involvement with fascism comes largely from the portions of the novel which are *not* narrated by Mauberley. It is Quinn, Freyberg, and the frame narrator – not Mauberley himself – who inform the reader of the ramifications of Mauberley’s affiliations, including the details of Mauberley’s attempt to escape the consequences of his actions through capitalizing on Pound’s association with Mussolini:

Two months before Ezra had gone to visit [Mussolini at Salo] and Mauberley had tagged along in the hope that Ezra might persuade *il Duce* to provide some means of their escaping into Switzerland. Or a piece of paper, at the very least, absolving them of conspiracy against their own kind and country. Everyone was seeking such pieces of paper. Mussolini himself was drafting rebuttals: “...I did not mean... I did not want...I did not intend...it was not my ultimate goal...” Just as later at Nuremberg so many others would say; “*I did not know...*” (9; ellipses in original).

While the reader may be tempted to forgive Mauberley for both his alliance with Mussolini and his willingness to lie about what he has seen and done – he is, after all, only attempting to save his own life – the comparison of Mauberley to the Nazi officials who denied responsibility for the deaths of Jews during the holocaust places Mauberley's self-interested actions into a familiar historical context, and forces the reader to reconsider the consequences of such allegiances.

Such a sense of the consequences – real or potential – of his activities is absent from Mauberley's own narrative, in which, Dennis Duffy points out, he does not pass judgement on himself or the people whose actions he records:

Rarely does [Mauberley] venture an opinion about the crew he is getting more and more involved with. We are never made aware of stages in his embrace of Fascism in a direct manner. Instead, old friends cut him, and other characters refer to the increasing extent of his corruption. We watch him deteriorate as a person – he maintains a polite calm in the presence of a Ribbentrop who announces coolly that he had Mauberley's best friend murdered; he passes along to the conspiracy's hit-man the news that Sir Harry Oakes, his host, needs silencing – but we are given very little about his role as a public figure (Duffy 198).

The structure of the novel invites an initial identification with Mauberley, but gradually forces the reader to interrogate that identification, through a frame narrative which presents two "readers" of Mauberley's text and life: Lieutenant Quinn and Captain Freyberg, two of the soldiers who discover Mauberley's body – and story – in the Grand Elysium Hotel. As Jamie Dopp argues, the novel positions the reader as "collaborator" in producing meaning, through making the reader a critical agent in the interrogation of his or her own reading practices. The reader is initially seduced into identifying with Quinn and thus into sharing his impulse to forgive Mauberley for his fascist involvement:

By the very act of reading *Famous Last Words*, the novel seems to imply, the reader shares in certain tendencies that lead Mauberley to his own guilty acts and evasions, his own collaboration with the enemy; like Mauberley himself, then, the reader is challenged to confront his or her own attraction to imaginative literature, his or her own preference for “fiction” over “fact,” for the comfort of “lies” (like *Famous Last Words!*) over the harsh demands of “truth” (Dopp 3).

The narrative invites identification with and sympathy for Mauberley from the very beginning, in which the reader witnesses, with the twelve-year-old Mauberley, his father’s suicide. This episode is followed by Mauberley’s flight from his enemies, which casts Mauberley in the role of fugitive hero:

All he took with him was his notebooks: some of them packed in his attaché case, others jammed and crammed into a cardboard valise whose corners and handles were riveted with brass. Time and panic had already taken their toll of his possessions and most of what he wore was scrounged: an oversized greatcoat; a pair of army boots; a peasant’s cap and a blue suit tailored in Verona. His underwear had rotted at the armpits and his socks, by journey’s end, would peel away with the skin from between his toes. His shirt was the only vaguely decent thing he wore – a nondescript and overmended plaid, his parting gift from Ezra Pound (4).

The reader’s identification of Mauberley as the “hero” of the novel is soon validated by Lieutenant Quinn, who is not only aware of Mauberley’s status as a writer but idolizes him and has “read every word he ever wrote” (46). Quinn’s admiration of Mauberley becomes a near-obsessive form of hero-worship, in which he emulates the personal habits of his hero – he begins to read by candlelight, and decides that, “[i]f Mauberley had smoked two pounds of cigarettes, then so would he” (60) – while overlooking anything that contradicts the heroic image which he has of Mauberley. Quinn’s hero-worship, like Mauberley’s own idolization of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, arises from his eagerness to locate heroes and role-models who could provide stability in the midst of

chaos, an impulse which reflects the reader's own desire to locate a hero in the text, which leads him or her to overlook or forgive many of Mauberley's actions. The initial description of Quinn – the first detailed physical description apart from that of Mauberley – mirrors this impulse, using the short-hand of Hollywood movies to portray Quinn as a hero:

He was efficient and ambitious. His hair was always combed; his breath was always peppermint fresh and the moons always showed on his fingernails. Even when he had dysentery, his underwear was always clean. And he kept a special kit apart from all his other stuff with a bottle of antiseptic inside and a bar of Castile soap. He was even good at his job. It wasn't fair. He looked like Tyrone Power (39).

In a gesture which repeats Quinn's own extension of sympathy toward Mauberley for little reason other than because "his picture was always in the papers" (46), the reader is seduced into accepting Quinn's judgement of Mauberley as "true" because he is described in superficial terms which, in an image-obsessed society, signal moral virtue and honour.

By contrasting Quinn's fastidiousness and his love of the arts with Freyberg's penchant for junk food, his admitted ignorance regarding music and literature, and his rather slovenly appearance – "[t]he most appalling example of dress that Quinn had ever seen in an officer's uniform" (48)<sup>32</sup> – the narrative encourages the reader to privilege Quinn's reading of Mauberley's "famous last words" over Freyberg's, and thus to repeat the élitist, exclusionary practices of both Quinn and Mauberley. Findley, who has said that, in the present day, "[é]litists are now leading us into the dark again" (Mellor 95), makes the reader aware of the repercussions of such practices; the consequences of the reader's own élitist reading practices are revealed through the frame narrative.



Interestingly, as it is through a visual image that the text builds sympathy for Quinn, it is also through a visual image that the text subsequently deflates the idea of Quinn as hero; after reading Mauberley's narrative, which ends with his ordering the murder of his friend, the reader is presented with a description of a photograph of Quinn: "There was a picture of Quinn himself. He was standing beside an open oven door – and inside the oven twenty bodies, or thirty, unburned" (390). The introduction of this photograph into the text functions in two ways: first, it places Mauberley's activities – which the reader may be tempted to excuse – in the context of historical atrocities with which the reader is familiar, thus forcing the reader to confront the "real" consequences of Mauberley's mythologized narrative of political intrigue. In addition, through encouraging the reader to identify with Quinn, and then implicating Quinn in the crimes which were committed by the Nazis during World War II, the text confronts the reader with the implication of all human beings in such atrocities. As Dopp writes, "the polemical assertions of certain "truths" of history – namely, the facts of fascism and the holocaust, and the implication of certain aesthetic tendencies in their rise – challenge the reader to consider his or her own culpability for these truths" (Dopp 3). In our willingness to align ourselves with Lieutenant Quinn's reading of Mauberley's narrative over that of Captain Freyberg – who cannot view Mauberley as anything other than a "traitor" (45) and a "a son of a bitch" (46) – we have effectively repeated both Quinn's willingness to overlook Mauberley's activities and Mauberley's own attraction to both the romantic and elegant Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and the "young, exuberant" Nazi Blackshirts (91)<sup>33</sup>. Mauberley's willingness to overlook the more unsavoury activities of his glamorous friends is

mirrored in the frame narrative, in Quinn's tendency to simply avoid or ignore those elements which he finds abhorrent; for example, in regarding Mauberley's dead body, he "tried not to see the face" (149). Conversely, Freyberg attempts to force Quinn – and through him, the reader – to acknowledge the implications of Mauberley's activities:

And Freyberg said; "he walked with Mussolini. He sat down with von Ribbentrop. He befriended a gang of murderers. He wrote Fascist garbage: anti-Semitic, pro-Aryan, anti-human, pro-Superman garbage. He even won prizes for it. Prizes, Quinn. Peace prizes...." (149)

Unlike "the millions" like Quinn – and, as the text forces us to recognize, like ourselves – "who cannot wait to forgive. And forget" (149), Freyberg refuses to do either, insisting upon the necessity of confronting the human propensity for evil and violence, in order to ensure that such events as the holocaust are not repeated.

While Quinn's forgiveness of Mauberley is highly suspect, Freyberg's condemnation of Mauberley is similarly tainted by the former's own single-mindedness. While the central paradox, for Quinn, is "how Mauberley, whose greatest gift had been an emphatic belief in the value of the imagination, could have been so misguided as to join with people whose whole ambition was to render the race incapable of thinking" (48), Freyberg does not concern himself with such questions, condemning Mauberley without attempting to understand him. While he derides Quinn for the latter's naïveté in accepting Mauberley's account at face value, Freyberg "fails to acknowledge how his own single-mindedness reproduces the 'us/them' mentality characteristic of fascism" (Dopp 7). He is attracted to absolutes – good and evil, right and wrong – and, while he is quick to pass judgement on artists, such as Pound and Mauberley, who became fascist collaborators, he lacks the ability – and the willingness – to delve beneath the surface in

order to attempt to understand the appeal of fascism to these individuals. In *The Appeal of Fascism*, Alastair Hamilton suggests that fascism offered a solution to the “threat of anonymity” presented by the industrialization and mechanization of the modern world by “conciliat[ing] the cult of the hero with a mass movement” (Hamilton xxi). Furthermore, fascism presented a solution to the perceived degeneration of modern society, and thus, writers “chose to commit themselves to totalitarian ideologies and to support regimes that would hasten the destruction of the civilization which they believed in a state of putrefaction” (Hamilton xxii). Finally, Hamilton writes, the fascist movement constituted “a phenomenon which artists found aesthetically satisfactory: it had turned anarchy into order” (Hamilton xx), and is thus reproduced by Mauberley’s act of containing the chaos of pre-war Europe within an orderly, dated chronicle. Dennis Duffy points out that the text of *Famous Last Words* as a whole is concerned with the appeal of fascism, the “fatal attraction that heroic decadence exerts over the man of intellect and imagination.” Mauberley, writes Duffy, is attracted to fascism by the promise of “[r]ecognition, membership in an élite association with larger than life personalities, [and] the vicarious thrills attached to the observation of neatly executed acts of violence” (Duffy 189). This attraction is evident in his narrative, which mythologizes the figures associated with the Penelope cabal, particularly the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. In Mauberley’s attraction to the glamorous Windsors and their friends, Findley illustrates a conviction which he has expressed elsewhere: “[I]t is my belief that glamour so dazzles us that we literally sweep into another corridor of history dragging the whole of the human race with us because we have been swept away.” He continues by pointing out a specific historical consequence of

allowing ourselves to be so affected: “[A] sufficient number of people being swept away by Hitler dragged the whole of civilization into an oven” (Mellor 94). *Famous Last Words* both reveals how such an occurrence was indeed possible, and forces us to confront the consequences of allowing oneself to be “swept away.”

The difference between Quinn’s and Freyberg’s reading practices extend to their interpretations of the social reality in which they live. Quinn, surveying Mauberley’s corpse, killed with an icepick through his eye, concludes that “there must have been a madman here” (45), to which Freyberg replies: “I guess the problem is...you think of insanity as being the exclusive property of madmen...*Which it ain’t*” (50; emphasis in original, my ellipses). While Stephen Scobie reads this statement as Freyberg’s acknowledgement of “the possibility of the coexistence of madness and sanity within the one person” (Scobie 224), I believe it points to a rejection of the conventionally understood definitions of sanity and insanity altogether; in the world after Dachau, a world in which “sane” people have demonstrated their ability and willingness to commit unspeakable atrocities, there is no longer any firm ground on which to stand in order to pass judgement on what is sane “[b]y way of killings” (49). In a world in which killing has become an accepted and forgivable act, the distinction between “sane” killers and “insane” killers is surely a false one. It is the large-scale epidemic of dehumanization that has overtaken the world which is “insane,” and not those who do things which seem to defy reason. Mauberley’s murder is entirely intelligible within the world of murders and betrayals within which he operates. In a later scene, Joachim von Ribbentrop, discussing with Alan Paisley the problem of how to keep Rudolf Hess silent on the subject of the

Penelope cabal, counters Paisley's observation that "we can hardly tear out his tongue" with: "But what about his mind" (304). By destroying not only Hess's memory, but his sense of himself as a human being, von Ribbentrop ensures that "the word *Penelope* would never cross his lips again" (308). Hess is admitted to an institution for the mentally ill, suffering from the delusion that he "had ceased to be a human being and was now a cat without a tail" (305). By the time of his release, "he could not remember any human detail from his past. He had become a complete amnesiac – and would remain so, on and off, to the end of his days" (309). The implication here is that it is the prevailing social reality – in which violent acts against fellow human beings are justified for political reasons – which is "insane," and that Hess, whose delusions are benign, is sane by comparison.

Mauberley justifies Pound's open embrace of fascism as the insight of a visionary who sees the world as it truly is, and who "will only be condemned because the world cannot acknowledge that the mad have visions of the truth." (77) In both this novel and the earlier play *The Trials of Ezra Pound*,<sup>34</sup> Findley rejects this characterization of Pound as a mad visionary; Pound is not, as Mauberley suggests, merely a witness who, "with his one mad eye" is able to recognize and record "the world of chaos, fire and rage" (77), but an active participant – through his political writings and the radio addresses in which he spoke in favour of fascism – in the creation and perpetuation of the "mad" social reality of which he speaks and writes. John Tytell writes, in his biography of Pound, that by the time of his arrest for treason, Pound had become "more than simply an apologist for

fascism making an occasional broadcast on Rome Radio for Mussolini" (250), and that he believed utterly in Fascist propaganda:

In Italy he began writing for newspapers like *Corriere della Sera* and the *Meridiana di Roma*, publishing a particularly offensive piece called "The Jews, Disease Incarnate." He was reading anti-Semitic tracts and pamphlets like "Britain and Jewry," which blamed international tensions on Jewish financiers and at the same time claimed that communism was part of a Jewish plot. He wrote James Laughlin that in his view "Roosevelt represents Jewry" and signed his letter "Heil Hitler." To [ee] Cummings he wrote that "Germany is 90% right in the present show" (Tytell 254).

In 1945, at the age of sixty, Pound was arrested in Italy for treason against the United States Government, and taken to Pisa, where he was confined outdoors in a six-by-eight-foot wire cage. After three weeks of interrogation by U.S. officers and daily exposure to the hot sun, he suffered a nervous breakdown, before being flown to Washington D.C. to face trial for treason. His lawyer, Julien Cornell, based his defense on a plea of insanity, arguing that his public statements against the United States Government were the result of an unsound mind<sup>35</sup>. In a preliminary hearing to determine mental competency, Pound was found unfit to stand trial, and was subsequently committed to St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, where he had been confined following his arrest for treason. Despite the result of the hearings, Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, who had access to Pound's medical records believes Pound's plea of insanity to have been a fabrication devised by Dr. Winfred Overholser, the director of St. Elizabeths, for the purpose of avoiding a trial (Torrey 1981:57). Richard W. Fenner and Walter H. Baer, the two psychiatrists who examined Pound during his confinement at Pisa, found, respectively, "[n]o paranoia, delusions nor hallucinations" and "[n]o evidence of psychosis, neurosis, or psychopathy" (Redman 6), and "[a]t a psychiatric case conference held [at St. Elizabeths] on January 28, 1946, six

staff psychiatrists denied he was delusional despite his economic theories” (Tytell 291). In spite of these accounts, as Tim Redman notes, “[s]everal critics have used Pound’s supposed insanity as a way of excusing his activities during World War II”(5). Certainly, a belief that Pound’s virulently anti-Semitic and pro-fascist statements on Italian radio were the result of mental breakdown would provide those who admire his poetry yet abhor his politics to reconcile the two. Redman himself rejects this claim, arguing that “Pound’s support for Italian fascism was not the result of psychosis but was consistent with and developed from his thought about social and economic issues” (Redman 7). The label of “insane,” in this case, provides a means of exonerating Pound for activities and associations which are no longer considered acceptable, and does not accurately reflect the reasons for his attraction to fascist ideology.

In his writing on the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel, Mauberley not only suggests – in an attempt to account for the content of his radio broadcasts – that Pound was at least partially mad, but also rejects the notion that his friend’s words had any social consequences for which Pound should be held responsible, arguing that his madness simply allowed him to recognize the barbarism of his society, and that, as a mere witness, he cannot be held accountable for the atrocities committed in the name of beliefs which he himself held:

**It will be somebody’s job to pull him down and say he was the cause of madness; thus disposing of the madness in themselves, blaming it all on him. “We should never have done these things,” they will say, “were it not that men like Pound and Mussolini, Doctor Goebbels and Hitler drove us to them. Otherwise, we should have stayed at home by our quiet hearths and dandled our children on our knees and lived out lives of usefulness and peace...”**

Missing the fact entirely that what they were responding to were the whispers of chaos, fire and anger in themselves. All of which Ezra could see from the very first with his one mad eye (77).

This is a troubling statement, as it simultaneously places Pound in the same category as Mussolini, Goebbels, and Hitler, and seems to exonerate them all. If the reader accepts Mauberley's absolution of Pound, then, the text suggests, he or she must similarly absolve these other men, viewing them as mere scapegoats for the impulses which exist in all human beings. I agree with Stephen Scobie's assessment that, in claiming that Pound should be recognized as a visionary rather than condemned as a fascist collaborator, Mauberley seeks his own exoneration, and not merely that of his friend. As Scobie argues, the claim that he should be forgiven for his actions is not entirely convincing: "It is one thing to be aware of "whispers of chaos" within oneself; it is quite another thing to act upon these impulses to the extent that Mussolini or Hitler did. Or Pound. Or Mauberley" (Scobie 225).

In addition to linking him to Pound, the ice-pick protruding from the dead Mauberley's eye serves as a metaphor for his impaired vision while alive, illustrated by his persistence in seeing the Duke and Duchess of Windsor as "icons walking on the earth," central figures in the "new mythology" which "Homer might have written" (63), and which Mauberley, in his dying days, *did* write. Mauberley has written, not a confessional or apology for his involvement with the Penelope cabal, but a mythology set in a privileged world in which "everyone was radiant; everyone was infallible" (98). It is the frame narrative, in combination with the extratextual knowledge of the reader, which reveals the consequences of the actions of these larger-than-life figures. Mauberley's



narrative itself is unflinchingly unapologetic; in the imagery with which he embellishes his account of the morning prior to his ordering of the murder of Harry Oakes, he reveals an awareness of his guilt, yet persists in viewing his actions as inevitable:

In the morning, white on white, and even my underclothes bleached as white as salt, I carried down the box of [mosquito] corpses, wondering how it could be so light, so weightless in my hands, and gave it across the table to Mavis Boodle, noting unavoidably as I did the multitude of oranges she had killed and was squeezing into a glass to keep me alive (374).

While he does not overtly admit his culpability or apologize for his actions, his emphasis on the “whiteness” of his clothing and his complicity in the “murders” of oranges and mosquitoes is indicative of his sense of guilt and his desire to absolve himself through an imaginative rendering of the scene. However, he does not provide further commentary on his involvement in *Harry Oakes's* murder, apart from writing that his responsibility for murder represented, for him, the inevitable final stage in a mythical “fall” (375). The figurative language which he deploys in his narrative reveals that his involvement in Oakes’s murder – after which he, like a dog, licks the dead man’s blood from Reinhardt’s hand – is a natural extension of the dehumanizing effect of his relationship with Wallis – whom he loves “as a dog loves its mistress” (376)<sup>36</sup>. Mauberley recounts that, when faced with the responsibility for what he has done, he fled: “This murder I had asked him for was to be mine completely, and when the authorities came it would be mine to pay for. And so – of course – I ran” (380). The words “of course,” which he embeds in this matter-of-fact account of his actions, suggest that he views his actions as logical and that he remains, even at the time of writing, unwilling to face the consequences of his actions.

The epilogue which Mauberley affixes to his narrative presents the reader with an allegory which emphasizes the truth behind *The Telling of Lies*'s statement, "to be a witness is to be accountable" (132). The epilogue tells of a mysterious "shape" which rises to the surface of the sea. Those few spectators who witness its appearance remain silent on the subject – "None of them points: none of them shouts" – and, because of this silence, the shape is forgotten, and its existence denied: "In the end the sighting is rejected, becoming something only dimly thought on: dreadful but unreal"(395). The mysterious shape represents the "whispers of chaos, fire and anger" (77) which exist in all human beings, and which, unacknowledged, will remain "a shadow lying dormant in the twilight [which] whispers from the other side of reason; I am here. I wait" (396). As long as this shadow waits, people – such as Pound and Mauberley – will be drawn toward it. Mauberley would have us believe that his narrative is his attempt to "point" and "shout," drawing our attention to the irrational impulses which are part of human nature; however, like Ezra Pound, Mauberley does not merely *represent* his society's attraction to fascist ideology, but reproduces it, through authoring a mythologized, aestheticized representation of the machinations of the Penelope cabal. While Quinn persists in viewing Mauberley's narrative as a confession, a judgement of himself and his co-conspirators – he remarks to Freyberg that "[t]he very fact that Mauberley's put them there means they will not go free" (392) – several facts support Freyberg's more cynical belief that Mauberley and his friends will be both forgiven and forgotten:

**Because, even in spite of everything you've seen and read – you yourself – I can see it in your eyes – are already turning away to look at something else: to find some other place to lay the blame for the hell we've all been living in**

this last five years. It's written all over you: Mauberley himself has already been forgiven (392).

The imminent destruction of the walls – and the words written on them – supports the claim that Mauberley's narrative will have little effect. Indeed, it appears to have had little effect on either Quinn or Freyberg; the "mementos" which each reader takes with him from the hotel illustrate that neither has significantly altered his earlier impression of Mauberley and his activities. While Freyberg leaves the hotel with his collection of evidence of Dachau, which signifies his refusal to forget the horrors of the war which are omitted from Mauberley's narrative, Quinn's choice of mementos – "the scarf he had lifted from Mauberley" and "the two dusty halves of the Alfred Cortot recording of the Schubert Sonata" (394) – points toward a continued idolization of Mauberley, in spite of the facts he has learned about his hero's involvement in fascist activities. This hero-worship is, oddly, reflected extratextually in Findley's own romantic identification with his fictional character; Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, in the introduction to their 1984 interview with Findley, comment on the green scarf which he was wearing, and which "he always wears at readings. It was initialled H.S.M. for Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (Meyer and O'Riordan 45). This suggests that Findley himself is complicit in his own character's – Quinn's – hero-worshipping of Mauberley; as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, Findley has spoken of Mauberley as a "hero," a reading which, as the text demonstrates through the example of Quinn, is itself implicated in the very ideology which the novel seeks to indict. Like Vanessa Van Horne, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley creates a record of the events which he has witnessed; however, also like Vanessa, his complicity with fascist ideology precludes him from producing a text which

takes a convincing stand against that ideology. In *Famous Last Words*, as in *The Telling of Lies* and *The Butterfly Plague*, Findley seems to be suggesting that, in order to effectively challenge the prevailing social reality, one must be able to extricate oneself from the systems of authority which exercise control over human thought and behaviour. If the institutions which govern our society are – as Laing and Findley appear to agree – fundamentally repressive and dehumanizing, then perhaps only one who is capable of moving, in Laing's phrase, "out of formation," will be able to not only *recognize* the madness which pervades our social reality, but to point toward a means of overcoming that madness.

### **CHAPTER 3 LEAVING THE FORMATION: REDEMPTION AND REGENERATION THROUGH MADNESS**

If the formation is itself off course, then the man who is really to get "on course" must leave the formation.

R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, 82.

The politicization of madness is indispensable if we would create a future.

David Cooper, *The Language of Madness*, 18.

In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing cautions that "social adaptation to a dysfunctional society may be very dangerous" (83), and suggests that the only way to challenge the prevailing social reality is to step outside of it, adopting an alternate trajectory to that which has been identified as "off course." While he stresses that it does not follow that those who leave the formation are *necessarily* any more "on course" than those who remain in formation, leaving nonetheless represents the only possible means of resistance to or liberation from a dysfunctional social reality. Such a departure from the "norms" of rational thought and behaviour is typically classified as "madness." Laing describes "schizophrenia" as a natural and necessary response to our dysfunctional social environment:

Some people labeled schizophrenic (not all, and not necessarily) manifest behavior in words, gestures, actions...that is unusual. Sometimes (not always and not necessarily) this unusual behavior...expresses, wittingly or unwittingly, unusual experiences that the person is undergoing. Sometimes (not always and not necessarily) *these unusual experiences expressed by unusual behavior appear to be part of a potentially orderly, natural sequence of experiences*" (85; my emphasis and ellipses).

This process, according to Laing, is "very seldom allowed to occur because we are so busy 'treating' the patient" (85) with aggressive, intrusive therapies designed to force the

individual to return to “normality.” In “A Ten-Day Voyage,” a short account of the “psychotic episode” of his friend, Jesse Watkins, Laing chronicles Watkins’ temporary descent into madness. He writes: “Can we not see that this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality?” (1967: 116) Laing advocates such “voyages” for the general population, and suggests that “[t]he true physician-priest would enable people to have such experiences before they are driven to extremities” (113); similarly, Jesse Watkins himself expresses the opinion “that this experience was a stage that everyone would have to go through one way or another in order to reach a higher stage of evolution” (1967: 110).

For Laing, then, the “madman” possesses a prophetic power; he is “[a]n exile from the scene of being as we know it...an alien, a stranger signaling to us from the void in which he is foundering, a void which may be peopled by presences that we do not even dream of” (1967: 93; my ellipsis). His openness to alternatives to the present norms and his freedom from the constraints of “civilization” enable him to transcend the alienated condition of modernity and to point the way for others to follow. David Cooper, in *The Language of Madness*, further examines the social and political possibilities for such a transgression of society’s norms, and suggests that the “politicization” of madness – that is, the working out of its political implications – is necessary for the future of the human race. According to Cooper, madness does not exist, except in each individual “as the possibility of a near total destructuring of the normal structures of existence with a view to the restructuring of a less alienated (i.e. governed by internalized forces of ‘otherness’)

form of existence” (154). Madness, for Cooper, is a latent internal force which possesses the potential for “universal subversion” (149); the release of this force, then, is the first step toward total social revolution:

Madness...will find its issue with the victory of all forms of subversive struggle against capitalism, fascism and imperialism and against the massive, undigested lumps of repression that exist in bureaucratic socialism, awaiting the social revolution that got left behind in the urgency of political revolution, understandably perhaps, but never excusably (Cooper 1978:149; my ellipsis).

Cooper argues that the ultimate goal is the end of madness and “its transformation into a universal creativity” (149); thus, through listening to the “language” of madness inside each of us – which we have presently invalidated through the discourse of psychiatry – we can bring about a revolution in the current state of human civilization.

Both Laing and Cooper agree that contemporary humanity has strayed from its ideal “course,” becoming “estranged from its authentic possibilities” (Laing 1967: xiv); this sentiment is reflected in Findley’s words to Donald Cameron:

What we have done to the human race is to brutalize it beyond all recognition of what the human race – I won’t say, is meant to be, because that predicates some kind of belief in God which I don’t think I have...But we found the greatest possibilities, they exist in the Michelangelos and the Beethovens and so on, and we’ve turned away from them, having exhausted that (Cameron 58-9; my ellipsis).

Findley identifies the source of this brutalization as the abuse of power which, in twentieth century Western culture, has become an epidemic. In an interview with Alison Summers, he states that power “destroys the people who are exercising it, as well as the people they gain power over. It destroys those people who acquiesce, who don’t bother to fight back” (Summers 105). As we have seen, many of Findley’s characters *do* attempt to fight back, but their resistance is complicated by their implication in the very systems

against which they are rebelling. In the previous chapter, I discussed three novels in which characters were unable to extricate themselves from the prevailing social order to make a stand against it; while *The Telling of Lies* and *The Butterfly Plague* show the difficulty of stepping outside of one's society in order to bear witness to its brutality, *Famous Last Words* suggests that merely bearing witness may not be sufficient – that human beings have a moral obligation to do more. What seems to be required is a means of extricating oneself from this “formation” and positing a set of values to replace those which have been identified as false or corruptive. When asked by Summers to identify the “enduring human values” in the world of his fiction, Findley responded by emphasizing the importance of interrogating the dominant values:

That there are people who *do* question, who say “Hey, wait a minute, what *are* you doing?... One of the enduring things is that there is always someone with integrity who will say “Stop” or “You’re not going to do that” – that there are people who say “I am here, and you can’t ignore me. I refuse to go on being ignored.” The enduring goodness of the human race is the people who refuse to remain silent, who say, “I will not let this happen” (Summers 110; emphasis in original, my ellipsis).

In this chapter, I will look at *The Wars*, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, and *Headhunter* – three novels in which characters move beyond mere “witnessing” and toward action that places them firmly outside the formation and offers redemptive alternatives to the vision of human possibility put forth by their societies. In *The Wars* and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, the protagonists, while not clinically insane, have nonetheless positioned themselves – or have been positioned – much more firmly on the margins of the social system than the protagonists of those novels discussed in Chapter Two, and as such are able to question and actively challenge its rules and restrictions. Finally, in *Headhunter*, I



will examine the extent to which madness represents, for Findley, the only possible means of stepping fully outside of this system, and thus offers the only effective position of resistance to the institutionalized violence perpetrated by humanity against itself.

**“The thing that Robert did”: Robert Ross’s “mad” action in *The Wars***

Wars don’t just happen because of politicians and statesmen. Wars happen when the people – that is, “us” – haven’t bothered to pay attention in one way or another.

Findley in conversation with Alison Summers, 107.

In an early, handwritten draft of *The Wars*, Findley included a fragment of W.H. Auden’s poem “Commentary,” as a possible epigraph to that novel. The segment Findley chose begins with “The voice of Man” entreating “O teach us to outgrow our madness”<sup>1</sup> and continues as follows:

Ruffle the perfect manners of the frozen heart,  
And once again compel it to be awkward and alive,  
To all it suffered once a weeping witness.

Clear from the head the masses of impressive rubbish;  
Rally the lost and trembling forces of the will,  
Gather them up and let them loose upon the earth,

Till they construct at last a human justice,  
The contribution of our star, within the shadow  
Of which uplifting, loving and constraining power  
All other reasons may rejoice and operate (Findley Papers vol. 17-1).

Although Findley ultimately did not choose it as an epigraph, this poem adequately reflects a central idea in *The Wars*: that there is no hope for the survival of the human race unless we “outgrow our madness,” moving beyond an impoverished logic which

offers only extreme and destructive possibilities, to a more benevolent way of being which our rationalist, militaristic culture cannot comprehend and therefore mistakenly defines as “mad.” The statement from the theorist on war, Carl von Clausewitz, which Findley did select as the second of *The Wars*’ two epigraphs<sup>2</sup> – “In such dangerous things as war the errors which proceed from a spirit of benevolence are the worst” – takes this idea one step further by problematizing the categories of human behaviour. Unlike the persona of Auden’s poem – the individual, situated on the margins of a world gone mad, who pleads for sanity – the voice with which Clausewitz speaks is representative of that very rationality which has created the madness which Auden cries out against. As Diana Brydon points out, “In *The Wars*, society sees as von Clausewitz sees” (1986a: 78) Findley’s selection of the quotation from Clausewitz provides the reader with insight into the context within which a person’s – specifically, Robert Ross’s – actions are interpreted as sane or insane. Thus, the epigraph from Clausewitz is more appropriate for a novel such as *The Wars*, which, as I will argue, is less about actual madness and sanity than about the *perception* of madness and sanity. In *The Wars*, as Brydon observes, “the narrator is obsessed as much by the paradoxes of how we know as by the horror of what we know”(1986a: 76). Indeed, Findley strategically deploys narrative strategies which draw the reader’s attention to the illusory nature of objective reality, and the fact that all knowledge necessarily requires an act of interpretation; however, as I will show, Findley’s acknowledgement of the gap between “the perceiver and the thing perceived” (191) and the impossibility of ever knowing a “true,” unmediated reality is undercut by a

Romantic conviction that those who “leave the formation” possess access to a clarity of vision which provides them alone with a means of closing this gap.

*The Wars* is primarily concerned, not with an exploration of clinical insanity, but with the very process of producing the discursive space of madness. This process is reflected in the formal qualities of the work, upon which many critics have commented<sup>3</sup>: its short, stammering sentences; its built-in interruptions and repetitions; the distance imposed between the events depicted and the time of narration – “all of this happened a long time ago”(5); its multiple beginning; its collage of fragments of image and voice; and the mediation of the narrative through an unnamed “researcher” whose task of assembling the fragments mirrors that of both the reader and the society at war. As Laurie Ricou points out, Findley’s choice of the archival researcher as narrative voice provides the reader with both a mirror for the experience of reading, and a metaphor for the war experience of those, like Mrs. Ross, who are left behind to attempt to make sense of the situation of a country at war:

Poring over his research in a quiet archives, the narrator mimics the country’s experience of war as something of overwhelming violence that happens somewhere else. Of course. Being remote from the irrational violence makes the exercise of organization possible. The form of *The Wars*, then, expresses an awareness of its own limitations, while it involves the reader in the same process which the narrator is living (Ricou 129).

Rather than attempting to directly articulate Robert Ross’s experience of the irrational world of combat – an impossible project, given that all texts are inherently part of the rationalist process which Robert ultimately acts against – Findley instead deploys self-consciously distancing strategies which align the reader, not with Robert Ross, but with the researcher, who is engaged in the task of constructing coherent meaning from the

fragmented reality of a society gone mad. The emphasis is not on Robert's experiences, but on his attempts to process and assimilate those experiences. The novel begins, as Ricou points out, "stammering":

It begins – in the Prologue and first three sections – four times, in four different ways. It begins with a startling scene from near the end of the story, then as a fireside tale, and then, in the impersonal second person, as an invitation and a directive to the reader (Ricou 129).

Although Simone Vauthier, in her article on *The Wars*, disagrees with Ricou, arguing that, rather than beginning four separate times, "the initial double frame is duplicated," she does agree, as do I, that "the result is the same. The repetition of the beginning gesture, far from delimiting more neatly the overall story, makes limits hazier and focuses attention on the storytelling and its difficulties" (Vauthier 31). The focus in *The Wars* is not only the construction of Robert Ross's story, but also its interpretation; the process of reading is given as much attention as the process of storytelling.

At its simplest, the premise of *The Wars* is, as Findley has written, "that the human race has gone mad and one of them decides that – before it's too late – the other inhabitants of the planet must be saved" (Findley Papers vol. 17-3). The benevolence which Robert demonstrates toward the horses is so out of step with the sanctioned behaviour of soldiers at war, that his society is unable to comprehend his actions, except as the isolated actions of a madman. The true madness, however, is located, not in Robert's actions, but in the social reality which surrounds him; he inhabits a world in which – as Mrs. Ross observes – people send their own children off to be killed, and then "sing about it" in church (55). In *The Wars*, Findley depicts the madness of a world at war: the "wars" of the title include not only the central and most obvious war in this text

– World War I – but also the many scenes of domestic strife, which, as Lorraine York has pointed out in *Front Lines*, are constructed according to models of military combat. “Behind the scenes of military confrontation,” York writes, “wars of gender, domestic life, and the wars of human history play themselves out in increasing complexity” (York 1991:59). In this text, the military and the domestic do not exist as two separate ontological categories, but rather as systems of perceiving and structuring experience which contaminate one another; the discourse of military warfare permeates the domestic scenes, just as the language and imagery of the domestic sphere are invoked to bring comfort to those in the trenches. As York writes: “Specific incidents in the domestic lives of the Ross family gain, in retrospect, a decidedly warlike cast; in turn, features of Robert’s life in the trenches begin to assume a peculiarly domestic aura” (1991: 32). The juxtaposition of the horrors of war with comforting domestic images – as seen, for example, in the “surrogate family” of the “stained glass dugout” – reveals the young soldiers’ attempts to comprehend their experiences by placing them within a familiar context.

Conversely, the association of the domestic with images of war shows how the discourse of warfare has infected the realm of everyday life. From the family photographs, filled with images of soldiers and parades, to the words selected by Mrs. Ross to describe Robert’s childhood bruises – “[j]ust like a savage painted for the wars” (23) –to the way Mrs. Ross interacts with her family, as York writes, “in a pattern that is suggestive of a type of domestic trench warfare” (1991: 33), the extent to which the discourse of war has permeated the fabric of civilian life is, for Findley, an example of

the larger madness which has infected human society. As Findley wrote in his preparatory notes for *The Wars*:

The madness is demonstrated as being infectious – like a plague. The Great War is the perfect example of this plague – as virulent and absolute as the great bubonic plague of the dark ages (Findley Papers vol. 17-3).

This madness, Findley goes on to say, “can strike anyone – and it does – although it is, in some cases, resistible...[b]ecause it is recognized and abhorred early enough to ‘immunize’ some people against it.” Although Robert attempts to conform to the norms of his society, as is expressed through his desire to find a model “who killed as an exercise of the will” (24), he nonetheless possesses a profound sensitivity to the suffering of others which makes it impossible for him to fully emulate such a model. When he himself – through his rape – becomes the victim of this madness, his imaginative identification with the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of the violence of war is complete. A number of other characters in *The Wars* are also “immunized” against the madness of war, notably Lady Juliet D’Orsey and Marian Turner, the two women who, significantly, provide the only directly reproduced first-person accounts of Robert’s life, and who together provide the researcher with “the end of the story” (120). Juliet, in marked contrast to her sister Barbara, is an eternal child; although her voice is elderly, it communicates a “wisdom [which] remains a child’s” (164). Although Findley’s researcher notes that this contradiction can be explained by the fact that she is reading from diaries she had written as a child some sixty years earlier, he<sup>4</sup> observes that she is comfortable with this childish voice, which seems to be “the voice of her mind and consistent with the sound of [her] thought” (164). As a child, Juliet is on the margin of

the drama enacted by her sister Barbara, which Findley characterized as “the Dionysian ritual of that war particularly, and of wars up until that time” (Aitken 85). She describes her childhood self as “a malapert dwarf with a notebook” and “Boswell in bows” (168); she is an observer of, rather than a participant in, the destruction wrought by the war and by Barbara’s serial hero-worshipping, with her perception sharpened by her dual status as both a child and a social outsider. In Findley’s work, children are accorded a clarity of perception which is not available to those adults who, by virtue of their immersion in modern culture, are unable to gain a clear perspective on that culture. Juliet – who subsists on a child’s idea of an adult diet: “gin and cigarettes”(164) – continues to see the world through a child’s eyes, and is thus “immunized” against the “plague” of madness, and is able to view Robert’s actions with a clarity that is lacking in the majority of the people whom the researcher interviews. Juliet disagrees with the accepted view of what Robert did, identifying as “maniacs” those who interpret Robert’s act as “something evil” (111), and recognizing Robert’s true sanity in contrast with the values and actions of an insane world. Marian Turner, on the other hand, is very much an adult, but she is aligned, by virtue of her benevolence, with characters such as Robert, Harris and Rodwell. A nurse, she is a nurturing and kind figure who sympathizes with Robert and instinctively comprehends the meaning behind his actions. She is the first to articulate the view that Robert’s act was both sane and understandable:

**It was the war that was crazy, I guess. Not Robert Ross or what he did...Looking back, I hardly believe what happened. That the people in that park are there because we all went mad (12; my ellipsis).**

It is Marian who characterizes the human race in the twentieth century as “monstrous, complacent and mad” (12), and points out that “[i]t’s not the extraordinary people who’ve prevailed upon [this century’s] madness,” but rather “the *ordinary* men and women who’ve made us what we are” (12; emphasis in original). Robert has thus proven himself to be *extraordinary*; only by breaking out of this complacent refusal to question the norms of society, the text suggests, can one rise above the madness that pervades society. It is significant that Findley chooses these two women – neither of whom is aligned with the masculine discourse of war – to provide the context within which the reader evaluates Robert’s actions. As Donna Pennee notes, the first-person narratives of Marian Turner and Juliet D’Orsey introduce several issues familiar to readers of Findley’s fiction, “most notably madness, and the assertion of identity, permanence, and personalized history in the face of apparent chaos and loss” (Pennee 50). These issues, central to the text, resonate with the words of Euripides that Findley has selected for the first epigraph to *The Wars*: “Never that which is shall die.” Their location in the narratives of Marian and Juliet provides an alternative to the discourse of institutionalized violence which dominates the society depicted in this novel; by according these counter-discourses the privilege of a first-person narration, Findley thus urges the reader to interpret Robert’s action through the eyes of these two women, who see it, not as the futile gesture of a madman, but as a life-affirming act of resistance to the norms of a society engaged in the large-scale destruction of all living things.

Marian and Juliet are not the only characters who are able to recognize their society’s reaction to the war as “madness”; to a certain extent, Mrs. Ross also questions



and resists societal norms. At the beginning of the novel she appears to be positioned on the side of senseless violence against both human and non-human nature, as is exemplified in her insistence that Robert must kill Rowena's rabbits "BECAUSE HE LOVED HER" (20; emphasis in original). While Mrs. Ross's insistence that Robert participate in such an act of barbaric cruelty seems irrational, it is no more so than the majority of actions and reactions upon which war is predicated. As York points out, "[i]rrational or vengeful acts, however, form the very substance of human warfare" (1991: 54). York continues, with a quotation from Clausewitz: "It is quite possible for such a state of feeling to exist between two States that a very trifling political motive for War may produce an effect quite disproportionate – in fact, a perfect explosion."<sup>5</sup> Thus, Mrs. Ross's behaviour at the beginning of the novel can be read as an analogue for the actions of the political powers who control the discourse and practice of warfare; she is clearly implicated in the very *production* of those violent and destructive social norms that eventually destroy her son. However, Mrs. Ross's later actions do demonstrate a recognition of – but *not* an overt resistance to – the irrationality of war. Lorraine York has described the scenes between Robert and his mother as "a battle between domestic armies," an example of how Findley "has even constructed the domestic dialogues so as to resemble wartime attacks and retreats" (1990: 45-6). While York suggests that Mrs. Ross's behaviour throughout the novel amounts to a "war of attrition" (1991: 36), the term suggests a volition that, I would argue, is absent from her early behaviour when, for example, she *fails* – rather than refuses – to bid farewell to Robert when he is posted overseas. Rather than either succumbing to or taking a stand against the war machine to

which her son's sacrifice is imminent, she is instead rendered powerless and immobile by a terrifying vision of "trolley cars" (73), the metonymic representation of the unstoppable mechanized violence which threatens to destroy modern society, and a repetition of the event of her brother's death<sup>6</sup>. She is prevented from "reasonable" behaviour – bidding farewell to her son at the train station – by her recognition of the immense power of the discourse of war, and by her realization – correct metaphorically, if not literally – that "if she tried to cross the tracks," to bridge the gap between the family and "the wars" with a humanizing gesture, "then she and everyone would be struck down" (73). According to York, Mrs. Ross's action – rather, *lack* of action – "marks her as an impassioned rebel, a woman willing to question or disrupt male systems of authority" (1991: 37). I disagree with this interpretation of her character; Mrs. Ross is no rebel, but rather another of Findley's Cassandra figures, albeit an arrested Cassandra whose prophecy remains unspoken, except to her companion Miss Davenport. Unable to step outside the codes and conventions of contemporary society in order to critique them, Mrs. Ross's rebellious impulses are stifled; seeing her son with a snowball in his hand, she thinks: "[t]here were half a dozen people she would like him to throw it at" and then promptly dismisses this thought with another: "but of course that was madness" (54). Although she recognizes the insanity of the present situation – "[w]hat does it mean – *to kill your children?* Kill them and then...go in there and sing about it!"(55; emphasis in original) – she does not actively challenge it. After exiting the church with the sermon still in progress, Mrs. Ross tells Miss Davenport that "I was afraid I was going to scream" (55), but apart from these quiet and ultimately impotent words which elicit no response, she remains silent;

although she *feels* like screaming, she stifles that impulse for fear of shattering the conventions of propriety which structure her world. Likewise, after collapsing onto the steps outside the church, she forces herself to stand when she notices a watching child, realizing that “she had to stand or else the child would think that she was mad – and the world had quite enough adults gone crazy as it was” (56). Although she is able to *see* the reality of insane social systems with a clarity that matches that of Marian Turner and Juliet D’Orsey, her actions demonstrate, not resistance, but complicity with the systems of authority, which she herself implements and sustains. When she stands up in order to preserve appearances, “reason [is] restored” (56), and the status quo is upheld, rather than challenged.

Although Mrs. Ross sees the horror of what her society is doing to its children, she does not act, but rather turns her anger inward, against her own reasoning mind; while Robert is in France, she “began to seek out storms” (154), wandering Lear-like through the ravines, valleys and streets of Toronto:

Mrs. Ross took pleasure in the rain and snow. She pushed her veiling back and let them beat against her face. She never spoke to anyone she met. If someone known should come along the street, she’d close her eyes and let them pass unseen. She carried a stick – (she refused to carry an umbrella) – and often struck the lamp posts as she passed (155).

Mrs. Ross’s apparent retreat into madness is a direct response to the madness she observes around her in her country’s response to the war, and to which she has actively contributed in her earlier insistence that Robert kill Rowena’s rabbits. Like Shakespeare’s King Lear, her attraction to storms lies primarily in their ability to block out her thoughts; by retreating into the cacophony of nature, both Lear and Mrs. Ross are able to defer the

confrontation with what Lear calls “the tempest in my mind.” (*King Lear* III, iv, 12). As Lear states to Kent, “This tempest will not give me leave to ponder/On things would hurt me more” (III, iv, 24-5). For Mrs. Ross, the storm provides respite from the truth about what has happened to Robert, and the knowledge that she, as his mother, was not able to protect him from the chaotic violence of the modern world. She has possessed this knowledge from the beginning of the novel; on the night she visits him in the bathtub, she predicts her inability to save him from the world: “I know you’re going to go away and be a soldier. Well – you can go to hell. I’m not responsible. I’m just another stranger. Birth I can give you – but life I cannot. I can’t keep anyone alive. Not any more” (25). From this moment on, Mrs. Ross attempts to escape the horror of this knowledge, retreating deeper and deeper into herself, and blocking out the world of human beings. Upon receiving the news that Robert is missing in action, Mrs. Ross declares – with “not a trace of emotion left in her voice” – “I’m blind...I’ve gone blind” (213). The calmness with which she delivers this statement suggests that her blindness – unlike her earlier inability to move from her seat to bid goodbye to her son – is to some extent a choice, a form of protest. Here, she is less Lear than Oedipus, who inflicts blindness upon himself in order to punish his eyes for what they had seen: “You,/ you’ll see no more the pain I suffered, all the pain I caused!” he exclaims, as he proclaims himself “Blind/ From this hour on! Blind in the darkness—blind!” (Sophocles 237) In spite of being in possession of the faculty of sight, he had been powerless to affect his reality, to alter the course set for himself and his family. Similarly, while Mrs. Ross’s insight into the madness of her world – in which she, herself, has participated – grows throughout the novel, she remains

powerless to stop its spread. I agree with Donna Pennee that Mrs. Ross must be excluded from what John Hulcoop described as Findley's "Euripidean chorus of Trojan women"(Hulcoop 183), which comprises Mrs. Ross, Juliet and Marian. As Pennee notes, "Mrs. Ross's critique of contemporary discourse cannot have the effect of Lady Juliet's or Marian's because it is confined to closed quarters; her suffering is unspoken" (Pennee 50-1). Significantly, her only acts of protest – madness and blindness – are directed inward, toward her own faculties of reason and perception; she is an amalgam of Cassandra, Lear and Oedipus, reduced to madness and blindness by her inability to cope with the knowledge that her insight brings.

The fates of Rodwell and Levitt – two inhabitants of the "stained glass dugout," whose fragile civilization is under siege by the chaotic violence of war – are similar to Mrs. Ross's retreat into madness in the face of the reality of a world at war. Rodwell's "hospital" for wounded animals, which Robert discovers under his bunk, immediately identifies him as one who shares Robert's benevolence and respect for non-human life. Robert's thought upon finding Rodwell's cages is contained in one word: "Rowena" (97). This indicates that Rodwell's character is a variation on that of Robert's hydrocephalic sister, whose innocence, benevolence and non-participation – by virtue of her medical condition – in the dominant discourse which made the war possible, accord her a privileged position in Robert's mind, and in Findley's text. The death of Rodwell by his own hand adds to *The Wars's* long list of deaths of innocents which begins with the deaths of Rowena and her rabbits and culminates in Robert's shooting of the horses to spare them further suffering. Rodwell, as an illustrator of children's books, combines the

two main symbols of innocence immediately recognizable to those familiar with Findley's work – children and animals – with the heightened perceptive and representational capabilities of the artist. Rodwell can see beyond appearances, and can translate his perception into art, as his portrait of Robert, which depicts Robert's affinity for animals, demonstrates: "Of maybe a hundred sketches, Robert's was the only human form. Modified and mutated – he was one with the others (158). The fact that Robert's is the only human portrait suggests that Rodwell finds little that is worth representing on the front; human beings involved in military combat do not engage his artist's imagination. Rodwell intuitively recognizes that Robert, unlike the other soldiers, possesses the potential for the salvation as well as the destruction of life, and thus he is set apart from human beings who in this novel are associated primarily with ritualized, mechanized killing. Predictably, given Rodwell's apparent preference for the company of animals over that of humans, it the torture of animals, which other soldiers force him to witness, which drives him over the edge. When he is assigned to a company "who'd been in the trenches all through the fire storms without being relieved" he finds that "some of them were madmen" a fact which is identified as "understandable, perhaps" (154), given the unspeakable horrors they themselves must have witnessed:

When Rodwell arrived, he found them slaughtering rats and mice – burning them alive in their cooking fires. Rodwell, being Rodwell, had tried to stop them. They would not be stopped – and, seeing that he took an interest, they'd forced him to watch the killing of a cat. Half an hour later, Rodwell wandered into No Man's Land and put a bullet through his ears (154).

The qualification of the soldiers' actions as "understandable, perhaps" removes the burden of culpability from the individual soldiers and places it instead on the discourse

and practice of war itself, which strips away the humanity of men until they are reduced to madmen who sadistically destroy any vestiges of innocence left in their fallen world. This slaughter appears to be a vengeful, irrational act of the same type as Mrs. Ross's insistence on the murder of Rowena's rabbits, and thus bears a synecdochic relationship to the sanctioned killing which routinely occurs in times of war. While Rodwell and Robert share a sympathy and respect for the innocent victims of such slaughter, they differ in their reactions; Rodwell does not attempt to free the animals being tortured by the soldiers – perhaps accepting the inevitability of such horrors – but merely removes himself as a witness. Rodwell's suicide is an escape from – rather than an active rejection of – the horrors of war, a choice which Robert himself later rejects when he refuses Marian Turner's offer of assisted suicide with the words "not yet" (189).

In contrast to the characters of Robert and Rodwell – who share the benevolence which Clausewitz identifies as that which causes the worst errors during wartime – is Levitt, who turns to Clausewitz for a framework within which to attempt to understand his own experiences. Levitt, who arrives at the dugout carrying a sack of books, including *Clausewitz on War*, defends his choice of reading material by saying "someone has to know what he's doing" (98). Ironically, Levitt's reverence for and dependence on the words of the war theorist make him the one occupant of the dugout who does *not* know what he is doing. His adherence to the aestheticized and orderly picture of combat that is portrayed by Clausewitz renders him ultimately unable to cope with the reality of his situation. After a land mine explodes directly outside the dugout, Levitt's only concern, as he crawls out from under a table "still clutching Clausewitz," is for his books

and the ordered version of reality which they contain:

“I’m doing my best to clean things up and get this place in order. You fellows just keep knocking everything down and putting things where they don’t belong! Leave my books alone!” There was an edge of craziness in his voice that sounded dangerous (128).

The explosion and its aftermath emphasize the difference between Levitt’s idea of war – based on Clausewitz – and the reality, in which any pretence to symmetry, order and structure can be easily shattered by irrational violence. Robert, on the other hand, understands that, in their situation, the only logical use for Levitt’s books is as level surfaces to support the candles which will provide the light necessary for assessing the damages wrought by the explosion. Here, it is Levitt’s adherence to an idea of war as an art form which is shown to be irrational during combat, in which “civilization,” as represented by the “stained glass dugout,” can be destroyed in an instant. When Robert and Rodwell attempt to search for Poole, Levitt again becomes agitated, protesting that they are “messing everything up!” (129) In Levitt’s mind, the preservation of “order” takes precedence over the preservation of human life, just as Clausewitz emphasizes the formal, organizational aspects of war over the human experience; both fail to see that, in such situations, the desire to maintain “order” is profoundly irrational. Unlike the deluded Levitt, Robert and Rodwell recognize that they are engaged in a struggle for life – their own, the animals’, and Poole’s – and not the “serious, formal minuet” (102) suggested by Clausewitz<sup>7</sup>. Levitt fails to recognize this fact, and continues to rely on the descriptions in books to structure his experience, when, indeed, such things defy description; in the words of the narrator, “there are no good similes” (76) for the conditions on the front. Similes that aestheticize the war, and compare it to an intricately patterned, stylized, and



even enjoyable art form such as a minuet – as Rodwell says, “[e]verybody likes to dance” (102) – are particularly troubling for Findley; he introduces Clausewitz<sup>5</sup> into his text in order to enact a critique of the problematic view of war propagated by that author’s books. The comparison of war to “a minuet” is revealed to be particularly absurd: after the explosion, “Rodwell was heard to say to Levitt: ‘Some minuet’” (121). For Findley, it seems, this impulse to ritualize violence, to see it in formal, organized, aestheticized terms, is far more insane than the redemptive action of Robert Ross.

The reactions of Rodwell and Levitt when confronted with the reality of war are illustrative of the prevalence of psychiatric breakdown during war. In *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War*, Richard A. Gabriel examines this phenomenon, concluding that “military history amply demonstrates that no one is immune to battle stress,” and that “[g]iven enough time in combat, every soldier will eventually suffer a mental collapse” (Gabriel 4). Indeed, Gabriel argues, due to the sustained stresses which battle imposes on the human mind and body, psychiatric breakdown is almost inevitable:

Fear and psychiatric debilitation are constant companions in any war. Engaging in battle is one of the most threatening, stressful, and horrifying experiences that man is expected to endure...Severe emotional response to battle is neither a rare nor an isolated event (Gabriel 62; my ellipsis).

Findley has returned to this thematic concern in later works; for example, in the story “Stones,” Findley depicts the mental deterioration which results from the stress of having to ignore one’s human instinct and obey the rules of combat. David Max, “a natural leader” (*Stones* 215), is reluctant to follow orders and lead his men to what he knows will be certain death on the stony shore of Dieppe; as a result, his men become “sitting ducks” (216) for the enemy troops and he is branded a coward and a murderer, dishonourably

discharged and returned to his family, who immediately recognize that he “had gone mad” (213): “There was not a mark on his body, but – far inside – he had been destroyed. His mind had been severely damaged and his spirit had been broken” (203). Gabriel writes that “[p]sychiatric breakdown has nothing to do with being ‘weak’ or cowardly. It is an inevitable result of the nature of war” (Gabriel 17). If military combat is understood as, neither a test of masculinity nor a “formal minuet,” but as a profoundly irrational and dehumanizing process, then the breakdowns of David Max, Rodwell, and Levitt can be understood not as acts of weakness or cowardice, but as rational responses to an irrational situation.

As Brydon writes, the central question of *The Wars* is one of interpretation:

How do we interpret Robert’s actions and the final meaning of his life? Is he defeated or has he won a personal victory? And on what basis can we ground our judgements when sometimes things are what they appear to be, however unlikely... but sometimes they are not...? (Brydon 1986a: 78-9; my ellipses)

The task facing the reader, then, is that of reading the text of Robert’s life and arriving at a judgement: was he mad or sane? The use of photographs in *The Wars* – or rather, of written descriptions of the fictional photographs which the researcher views in the archives – mirrors the fragmentary nature of our knowledge of the facts which would assist us in making that judgement. The researcher and the reader are each charged with the task of assembling the fragments into a coherent narrative; the process of selecting, ordering and arranging these fragments is as much one of interpretation or reading as it is one of narration or writing. Reading, in this text, extends beyond the reading of written texts to encompass the reading of photographic, historical and social texts; the researcher reads the photographs and the interviews with Marian and Juliet in the same way as he

reads Robert's actions. Through their foregrounding of the interpretive act, the photographs lead the reader forward to the climactic interpretive challenge presented by the text, in which the reader must judge the "sanity" of Robert's act. Through the use of photographs in *The Wars*, Findley seems to suggest that the notion of a single, verifiable reality is illusory, that the "true" or "correct" interpretation does not exist. In *The Other Side of Dailiness*, Lorraine York writes that photography's "dual status" – that it seems to both reproduce and transform reality – "makes it an ideal vehicle for examining the assumptions about perception and knowledge which one finds in literary texts" (York 1988: 9). There is a tendency to accord privilege to the version of reality presented in photographic images, which Findley repeatedly undercuts through the written captions which are affixed to these photographs. Through creating a situation in which the reader expects the images to be accurate representations of "the real," and then confounding those expectations, Findley problematizes the notion that any one version of reality is more "right" than another. The role of photographs as the primary source for the narrator's archival research indicates the tendency to accord privilege to the photographic image over all other texts, what Susan Sontag refers to as the "presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness" (Sontag 1973: 6). In spite of this presumption, Sontag points out, "the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth" (Sontag 1973: 6). If a photograph is understood to be an interpretation of reality, rather than its exact representation, then it does not merit the automatic assumption of authority. Indeed, the problematic relationship between representation and reality and the danger of conferring

authority to any one particular version of reality is at the centre of *The Wars*. By not including actual photographs within the novel, Findley further denies the reader any search for a “pure” or “authoritative” text; the reader must accept that the text he or she is given is always mediated by the narrator’s perception of it.

Findley further confounds the search for definitive meaning, through the addition of captions to the backs of the photographs. Frank Webster has written that “[b]ecause photographs are open to a variety of interpretations, they have a desperate need for words which can fix a particular interpretation” (Webster 162). Findley’s use of photography in *The Wars* problematizes this desire for fixed meaning; the captions on the back of the photographs from which the researcher attempts to construct a coherent narrative complicate – rather than facilitate – the task of interpretation. For example, the words on the back of the photograph of Meg – “*Meg – a Patriotic Pony*” – are clearly at odds with the researcher’s interpretation of the image:

[She is] draped in bunting, standing in a garden. Her ears lie flat. She is either angry or frightened. Meg is very old. Just at the edge of the picture, Stuart can be seen squinting at the sun. He wears an Indian headdress and he holds a baseball bat (9-10).

The same image which is interpreted in one context, by one viewer, as “patriotic” – one can assume that the irony of this juxtaposition of image and description was neither intended nor perceived by the writer of the caption – is described for the reader in terms which clearly suggest the opposite. The imposition of the accoutrements of “patriotism” – the bunting draped over her back – inspire fear and/or anger in the unsuspecting animal; these are not emotions which one typically associates with patriotism. While the researcher comments very little on the photograph, the words which he chooses for his

description encourage the reader to view the photograph in the same way as he does. Given that, in Findley's body of work, animals – along with children – typically embody nature in an uncorrupted state, this image suggests the co-option of innocence by military power; furthermore, when read in the context of Robert's affinity with animals, it provides us with a photographic analogue of Robert's own experience of carrying the burden of patriotism. In another photograph, the identity of a "small white dot" is immediately apparent to the researcher, but not to the writer of the caption:

The small white dot can barely be seen. Nothing else is visible but sea and sky. Just above the arrow, written in bold black ink is the question: 'WHAT IS THIS?' All too clearly, the small white dot is an iceberg. Why whoever took the picture failed to verify this fact remains a mystery (10; emphasis in original).

The use of these photographs highlights the subjective nature of the act of reading; a conclusion which is obvious to one person is not immediately so to another. The contrast between the narrator's interpretations of the various images and those of the unidentified caption-writer(s) mirrors that between the two opposing views concerning the sanity or madness of Robert's actions.

The relationship between perception and reality, which is implied by the use of the photographs, is further illuminated by the progression of the narrative of *The Wars* through a series of interpretive (more accurately, *misinterpretive*) moments, in which the relationship between appearance and substance, perception and reality, is arbitrary and unstable. The first of these interpretive acts involves an encounter between Robert and a Flemish peasant, in which each man forms an immediate impression of the other's identity, based upon the language which he speaks. To Robert, the Flemish dialect is

heard as “gibberish” (80), causing him to assume that the man is an escapee from Asile Desolé, “an asylum for the mad” (79). Robert’s initial impression of the man’s insanity is based on the fact that the words the man utters do not fit *Robert’s* framework of meaningful, intelligible language; the identification of a person as sane or insane is thus proven to be a subjective act of interpretation which is reliant on the context of the perceiver. This incident, which foreshadows the later public perception of Robert himself as insane, shows that language – like behaviour – is an unreliable indicator of sanity; “madness” in this novel exists solely in the eye of the perceiver.

The incident with the Flemish peasant is followed by several which draw the reader’s attention to the difficulty of interpreting events and objects from within the context of a fallen world which is no longer safe, predictable, or familiar. In an episode which closely follows the encounter with the Flemish peasant, Robert and his batman, Poole, have become disoriented while riding through fog, and they begin to attempt to re-orient themselves by identifying the noises which fill the fog that surrounds them. Poole’s identification of the noises as birds, is at first dismissed by Robert as being implausible: “I’d be very surprised if any birds had survived in this place” (82). This initial scepticism is dispelled almost immediately, when “something flew out of the ditch” (82). The interpretive challenge now shifts to the identification of the species of bird; Robert’s eventual decision that “they must be ducks” is not based solely upon the evidence at hand, but is contaminated by the associations precipitated by other sounds:

The birds were coming back. There was also the sound of lapping – of movement out in the field – and the sound reminded Robert of the early morning slap-slap-slap from the diving raft at Jackson’s Point (84).

Robert immediately associates the sound of “[s]omething floating in the water” (84) with the sound of floating rafts, which he remembers from his childhood. The unconscious desire to cast his experiences in the context of the familiar, comfortable past leads him to interpret the sounds from within the framework of past experiences, and to conclude that the birds must be of the same species as those found at Jackson’s Point. Through Robert’s attempts at making sense of this world and his experiences in it, Findley explores the urge to place into a familiar context events and objects which cannot be assimilated into our understanding of the world. Of this urge, Lorraine York writes, “The psychological implication of course, is that the war experiences are so utterly inconceivable, so ‘unlike’ anything known to man, that they must be recast in the guise of the familiar”(York 1985: 224). This desire, then, complicates the act of perception; the notion that our perception of an object or event is a straightforward representation – and not an interpretation or translation – is revealed as false. Robert and the reader are forced to confront this gap between the perceiver and the object perceived when it is revealed that the objects which he had associated with the sound of “rafts” were in fact the dead bodies of soldiers like himself. The birds which he had identified as “ducks” were in reality crows, feeding on the human bodies:

From the gap, when Robert’s eyes had cleared, he cast a single look back to where the man had been. He saw that the whole field was filled with floating shapes. The only sounds were the sounds of feeding and of wings. And of rafts (90).

In this description, the word “rafts” is used, although Robert has already recognized the objects floating in the water as dead bodies; this knowledge is so difficult to assimilate that Robert’s mind continues to register the dead bodies as something which they are not.

This incident emphasizes the point, introduced by the use of photographs, that every act of perception is necessarily one of interpretation, and that objective reality cannot be extricated from the subjective impressions of one's experience.

Perception and reality are not always in opposition, however; another incident in the novel shows that, occasionally, reality does indeed accord with our interpretation of it. While leading his men through the mud of the trenches, Robert tells his men to head for "that thing that looks like a ski pole" (137). By this point, Robert has learned enough from the experiences discussed above, that he expects there to be a gap between his perception and the object he is perceiving. He is not so naïve as to assume that the thing *is* a ski pole; he chooses his words carefully, limiting himself to what he knows – that it *looks* like a ski pole. After reaching the point toward which they had been heading, "he turned and examined the thing they had thought was a ski pole. It was a ski pole" (139). The agreement between Robert's perception of the object and the physical fact of the object itself comes as a surprise to both Robert and the reader; accustomed to the atrocities of war, he – and the reader – no longer assumes that his perceptions accord with reality. A ski pole, like the diving raft Robert imagines in the earlier scene, while a common article in the comforting realm of the domestic, is clearly an anomaly in this wartime world of atrocities. The juxtaposition of this episode – in which things *are* what they appear to be – with the earlier one – in which appearance and reality are at odds – serves to illustrate the unstable and unpredictable nature of the relationship between appearance and reality; sometimes things are what they seem, sometimes they are not, and one never knows what the case will be.



In another scene, a German soldier watches Robert and his men through his binoculars, but does not shoot them, instead indicating that they should go free. For Robert, the only reasonable explanation for the German soldier's non-violent behaviour is that he is insane: "Maybe he's crazy – but he isn't going to kill us" (148). In the context of war, killing the enemy is normal behaviour; not to do so seems unthinkable to Robert. Thus, when the German soldier reaches for something, Robert's assumption that the object he is reaching for is a gun is a logical one, given the context in which their encounter occurs. The world has become a place in which murdering one's fellow human beings has become "normal" behaviour, and any deviation from this expected behaviour is questioned, and thought to be "crazy". Robert's immersion in the world of war leads him to misread the German soldier's decision to preserve, rather than take, life; after he has killed the soldier in what he thinks is self-defense, he discovers his error:

He could have killed them all. Surely that had been his intention. But he'd relented. Why?

The bird sang.

One long note descending: three that wavered on the brink of sadness.

That was why (150).

According to Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, bird song was a common motif in memoirs of the First World War, serving as "evidence that ecstasy was still an active motif in the universe" (242)<sup>10</sup>. The bird's song reawakens in Robert an awareness of the beauty and fragility of all life, and thus serves as an explanation for the German soldier's unexpected sparing of Robert's life and those of his men. For the soldier, as for Robert, the non-human witnesses to and casualties of human violence

inspire a respect for life in the midst of the death-seeking violence of war. Just as Robert's rescue of a rat trapped in a hole is prompted by the thought "*here is someone still alive*. And the word *alive* was amazing" (131; emphasis in original), the soldier's refusal to kill Robert and his men is explained by the presence of a bird which continues to sing through the horrors which men inflict upon one another. The sound of birdsong is so unexpected that, when Robert first hears it, he expects it to be a deception perpetrated by the enemy, and it makes him "extremely nervous" (145). After Robert shoots and kills the German soldier, the bird's identity is verified, as is the soldier's intention to let them escape; Robert was mistaken in both instances. The narrative reveals that the sound of the bird singing "would haunt [Robert] to the day he died" (150), a reminder of the actions of a soldier who – unlike Peggy's beau and Captain Leather – acted, beyond reason, in the interest of life, rather than death.

In Findley's work, aggression and violence are shown to be accepted by our society as "normal" behaviour, while the "mad" – or those labelled as such – are the victims of such normal men. The most shocking instance of misinterpretation in the novel is Robert's rape at Desolé, an insane asylum being used as a bathhouse for soldiers; his first assumption is that his attackers are inmates, but in the final moment before losing consciousness, he learns that "[h]is assailants, who he'd thought were crazies, had been his fellow soldiers. Maybe even his brother officers" (201). His first instinct is to interpret the rape as the irrational action of insane men; the knowledge that it was perpetrated by "normal" men is nearly impossible to assimilate into the framework of "rational"

behaviour. Immediately after the rape, the narrative begins to “stammer,” mirroring Robert’s inability to process this information:

Robert stood in the centre of the room.  
 He wanted a clean shirt.  
 He wanted a clean pair of underwear.  
 He wanted his pistol (201).

Throughout the novel, as Robert witnesses firsthand the violence of a civilization gone mad, his mind responds by “stammering”: the doubt which Robert feels in the face of the militarization of his society “stammers in his brain” (8); later, when he witnesses Taffler and the Swede engaged in sadomasochistic homosexual activity, “his mind began to stammer the way it always did whenever it was challenged by something it could not accept” (45). Following the rape, it is not merely the violence enacted upon his body, but the attempt to contextualize and understand the incident, which causes Robert’s mind to stammer. While reason would seem to demand that Robert’s rapists are insane, they, like the men in Rodwell’s company, are merely enacting the logical extension of the code of “normal” military behaviour. The scene provides an answer to the question – “what are soldiers for?” (21) – which Robert first asked of Peggy’s beau. Soldiers, in *The Wars*, are “for” the destruction of beauty, innocence and life: a soldier facilitated the killing of Rowena’s rabbits; the soldiers in Rodwell’s company were responsible for the torture of animals, and the torture of Rodwell, by forcing him to watch; and Robert himself was responsible for the killing of the German soldier who, by sparing the lives of “the enemy,” was not behaving like a soldier. Robert’s own complicity in this violence directed against the innocent is further illustrated when Juliet tells the researcher that Robert himself “had a great deal of violence inside,” and recalls observing him “firing his

gun in the woods at a young tree" (179). There is no position from which one can remain external to and immune from the insane violence of a world at war; although he "doubts the validity" of the "martialling of men" (8) which is central to the military project, Robert – by virtue of his participation in that project – cannot escape complicity in the destruction of innocence and beauty.

Although Findley's editors had urged him to remove the rape scene before the book's publication, he refused, insisting that the scene was integral to the novel: "[I]t is my belief," he writes, "that Robert Ross and his generation of young men were raped, in effect, by the people who made that war. Basically, their fathers did it to them" (Findley 1990: 151). According to Thomas Hastings, "the military constructs a monolithic masculine identity" which works to transform men into "warriors" through the reduction of individual identities to the single principle of "kill or be killed." The rape of Robert Ross, then, illustrates the "enforced submission to an oppressive phallic authority which, according to Findley, locates its power symbolically in the historical and cultural figure of the father and literally in the institution of the military" (Hastings 98). The soldier who best epitomizes what Hastings refers to as the "warrior ethos" is Captain Leather; taciturn and single-minded in his pursuit of the military ideal, he responds to all reports with the phrase "just so": "Leather even said 'just so' when Robert explained that he hadn't been able to locate his men and that he feared they had all been killed" (133). When Robert points out that the position Leather has chosen for the new gun beds is "a death trap," "Leather said: 'Just so' and seemed very pleased" (133). Leather does not recognize the human factor in war, but rather views it as an exercise in strategic planning, not unlike

Clausewitz's "minuet." When Robert approaches Captain Leather with a request to make a strategic retreat with the horses and mules in order to save them, Leather refuses, because such a move would be at odds with accepted, "normal" military behaviour: "What would it look like?" he said to Robert. "We should never live it down" (209-10). This response, demonstrating a concern with protocol and appearances over a regard for human and non-human life, causes Robert to conclude that "Leather is insane" (210). Of course, Captain Leather is *not* insane, just as the men of Rodwell's company and Robert's rapists are not insane; rather, Leather's attitude and conduct are entirely consistent with the officially sanctioned behaviour of war, in which, as Clausewitz writes, "the errors which proceed from a spirit of benevolence are the worst." Robert's protest – "It cannot be called disobedience to save these animals when they'll be needed, for God's sake, half-an-hour after this is over" (210)– reveals a way of thinking that is out of step with the world of institutionalized violence in which he lives, in which the saving of lives is seen as not only disobedience but the *worst* kind of error.

Through his liberation of the horses, Robert is finally able to articulate his distrust of the very project in which he is enmeshed, acting on doubts which have been present, but inarticulate<sup>11</sup>, since before he became a soldier. Robert's decision to "break ranks and save these animals" (210) is in direct disobedience to the orders of Captain Leather, of whose actions he thinks: "[i]f an animal had done this – we would call it mad and shoot it" (212). It is this logic which leads him to shoot Leather, after which he shoots those animals not killed by the first barn fire; both actions, while they participate in the very violence which the novel seeks to oppose, are nonetheless inspired by a profound

benevolence toward non-human life<sup>12</sup>. Robert's rejection of Captain Leather's view as the authoritative one is punctuated by Robert's tearing of the lapels from his own uniform, which signifies his break with the code of military behaviour; he has learned "what soldiers are for" and has actively rejected it. Robert's subsequent desertion and his final act of defiance – freeing one hundred and thirty horses from railway cars and installing them in three abandoned barns – cannot be comprehended by the military powers as anything other than the actions of "a man gone mad" (219), and it is this interpretation of Robert's actions which leads to Major Mickle's decision to "dispense not only with mercy – but with reason" (219) in dealing with Robert. Robert's words are as incomprehensible to Mickle as his actions; to someone immersed in military culture and strategy, for whom "we" must necessarily refer to more than one human being, the words "we shall not be taken" (220) suggest the presence of an accomplice and present a challenge to which Mickle rises. Mickle's narrow interpretation of Robert's words leads to the deaths of the horses, the dog, and the injury and eventual death of Robert himself.

In the epilogue of *The Wars*, Findley has the fictional "Irish essayist and critic Nicholas Fagan" (226)<sup>13</sup> write the following meditation on perception and reality:

[T]he spaces between the perceiver and the thing perceived can...be closed with a shout of recognition. One form of a shout is a shot. Nothing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as our killing of it (226).

The act of verification is dependent on the elimination of alternative possibilities and interpretations, and as such is an inherently destructive act which, Findley suggests, should be resisted. The foregrounding – through the use of photographs – of the gap which separates the perception of a thing from its reality, and the problematizing of the

authority of the written word which attempts to close that gap, prepares both the researcher and the reader for the interpretation of the act that defines Robert as a “madman.” This label, Findley seems to be suggesting, signifies merely one of many possible interpretations of Robert’s act; if meaning is endlessly open and resists fixity, then all interpretations are equally valid. However, the epilogue to *The Wars* reveals that the narrative does itself accord privilege to one particular interpretation, and here I take issue with Anne Geddes Bailey’s statement that “[w]hether Robert Ross is or is not a hero, is or is not a symbol of compassionate humanity, is never finally decided in the novel as a whole” (Bailey 1998b:100). While it is true that the novel consists of “competing narratives” which “challenge and question the political, ideological, and aesthetic assumptions inherent within various interpretations of Robert Ross’s life” (1998b: 100), the text clearly reveals its bias toward the view of Robert as a hero. While all other photographs represented in the novel are at odds with their written captions, in the final photograph of “*Robert and Rowena with Meg*” the written and visual texts coincide:

Rowena seated astride the pony—Robert holding her in place. On the back is written: ‘Look! you can see our breath!’ *And you can* (226; my emphasis).

In the photographs discussed above, the identity of the caption-writer(s) is unknown; in the photograph of Robert and Rowena, the phrase “you can see *our* breath” clearly identifies Robert himself as the author. Robert’s “otherness” – his resistance to “normal” systems of thought and behaviour – seems to confer upon his own version of reality a measure of authority which is denied to other photographic and written texts in the novel. The belief, evident in much of Findley’s work, that the mad possess access to “some kind

of absolute clarity” (Findley 1990:181), contradicts the assumption – implicit in *The Wars* in the self-conscious deployment of techniques which draw attention to “the spaces between the perceiver and the thing perceived” (226) – that it is impossible to ascribe “truth” to any one version of reality. The fact that Robert alone possesses the clarity of vision which is able to close the gap between the perception and reality, and which is denied those characters who align themselves more readily with society’s norms, suggests a profound distrust of those norms. While there is nothing in Robert’s characterization to suggest mental pathology, his judgement by his society as “mad” is consistent with the orthodox psychiatric approach to mental illness, in which, as Sean Sayers writes in his article “Mental Illness as a Moral Concept”: “the prevailing social environment is made the very criterion of normality, and the individual is judged ill insofar as he fails to adjust to it” (Sayers 3). Unlike Mrs. Ross – and, in previously discussed works, Vanessa Van Horne and Ruth Damarosch – Robert is not merely a “Cassandra” who recognizes that the present social environment is “off course,” but is unable to adopt a position of resistance; in his shooting of Captain Leather and Private Cassles and his freeing of the horses, he alone takes decisive action for the preservation of life, and therefore is labeled a “madman” by a society in which the taking of life – as evinced by the cruel and destructive actions of Captain Leather – is seen as “normal.” Many readers may be troubled by the fact that Robert’s actions, while ostensibly committed in the name of the *preservation* of life, involve the *taking* of lives; however, the murders of Captain Leather and Private Cassles can perhaps best be understood according to what David Cooper refers to as a “revolutionary morality,” which is based



on “a fully conscious knowledge and therefore mistrust of the repressive systems we are caught up in” (Cooper 1978: 15). In *The Language of Madness*, Cooper argues that the true love of life involves “the violation of bourgeois violence in all its forms of oppression,” and, while, according to Cooper, “revolutionary loving may mean killing,” it is “as counter-violence, not as violence” (Cooper 1978: 15). In other words, Robert’s acts of violence – unlike those of Cassles and Leather – are committed, not from a position of antipathy toward the natural world, but from one of empathy with the denizens of that world, who have been violated by the agents of so-called “civilization.” The novel clearly rejects society’s labelling of Robert as clinically insane – going as far as to encourage the reader to see Robert as the one truly sane character – and uses the notion of a relative account of insanity to question the values, norms and indeed the very sanity of a civilization that can only interpret benevolence as madness.

**“She prayed for rain”: *Not Wanted on the Voyage*’s gesture toward other possible worlds**

*And you, are you still here*

*tilting in this stranded ark  
blind and seeing in the dark.*

from Phyllis Webb, “Leaning.” Epigraph to *Not Wanted on the Voyage*.

In *Inside Memory*, Findley writes: “Hearing these words [from Phyllis Webb’s poem “Leaning”] – I made a sort of strangled sound – like *oomph!* It was just as if I had been struck in the solar plexus. In that moment, the whole of *Not Wanted on the Voyage*

fell into place. All of it” (1990: 220). At this moment, Findley’s novel-in-progress about an “abusive farmer,” a “gin-loving farm wife,” and her “old, blind female cat” became transformed into what Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths refer to as a “radical interrogation of the [biblical] story of the flood” (Ashcroft et al. 98). The catalyst for this transformation is the image of what Findley describes as “the whole of modern civilization crowding into the Leaning Tower of Pisa...[which] begins to fall in slow motion” (1990: 219-20; my ellipsis). This apocalyptic image resonates with Findley’s own vision of the current state of human civilization; he has told Donald Cameron that “[w]e have destroyed nature...we are destroying ourselves, the human experiment is ending” (Cameron 51). While this grim prophecy is reflected in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, the novel ends with a gesture toward the possibility that human beings will recognize the wrong-headedness of the project of civilization, and will refuse to participate in its continuation. The source of this glimmer of hope is located in the final line of Webb’s poem – “blind and seeing in the dark” – which, for Findley, seems to suggest that those who are excluded from “normal” society are alone able to see “in the dark” of modern civilization, to recognize its destructive tendencies, and thus potentially to stop humanity from destroying itself. As Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths point out, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* reveals that the construction of an authoritative civilization is dependent on the creation and exclusion of an “other”:

As Findley’s novel demonstrates, the construction or salvation of any such system, civilization, or tradition as authoritative precludes ‘Other’ developments; the ‘rise’ of any culture is not just coincident with the demise of other forms and possibilities, it involves the active suppression and/or annihilation of forms of ‘Otherness.’ It closes off alternative tropes or modes (Ashcroft et al. 97-8).

It is this position of “otherness,” then, that contains the potential for subversion; however, like a number of the works I have discussed thus far, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* addresses the difficulty of extricating oneself from that civilization which one recognizes as destructive in order to embrace redemptive alternatives.

Critics of this novel have tended to emphasize its dichotomized vision of the world; W.J. Keith writes: “The book becomes a vindication of the human qualities of considerateness (sic) and compassion against the rigidity of a tyrannic God,” (128) while Carinne Demousselle argues that the characters “can be neatly split” into “the death-oriented versus the life-oriented characters, representing, respectively, the ‘male’ versus the ‘female’ attitudes towards life” (Demousselle 47). Both statements overlook the extent to which the “life-oriented” characters – particularly Mrs. Noyes, Ham and Lucy – are implicated in the regime which oppresses them; in the world before the flood, Mrs. Noyes participates in the murder of her own son<sup>14</sup> and does not stop Noah from performing experiments on Mottyl’s kittens; Ham performs a sacrifice even though he objects to it in principle; Lucy kills Emma’s dog and turns his body to ashes<sup>15</sup> for no other reason than that she is afraid of dogs (58, 75). Similarly, I disagree with Anne Geddes Bailey’s claim that *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is a novel “where evil is clearly placed in a polarized universe,” and can therefore be distinguished from the majority of Findley’s novels, “in which seemingly humane and innocent protagonists are implicated in the very violence they abhor” (Bailey 1998b: 147). The “life-oriented” characters in this novel are as heavily implicated in the madness of the world as are Vanessa Van Horne, Ruth Damarosch and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, and Findley’s depiction of that

world is no more polarized than in any of his other novels. Certainly, while *The Last of the Crazy People*, *The Telling of Lies*, *The Butterfly Plague*, *Famous Last Words*, *The Wars*, and *Headhunter* do indeed attempt to reveal our complicity in the violence of our society, Findley's universe is ultimately a moral one, with one ideological position always seen as more benign – and more “right” – than another. Like the character of Lucy, whose “greatest fascination seemed to be with the outcasts and the pariahs, the strangely formed and excessively delicate” (275), Findley, too, favours those characters who exist on the margins of “normal” human society and are thus able to recognize its shortcomings. In *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, he finds such characters in the world of the animals, which is governed by a “natural” code of conduct characterized by compassion, co-operation, and decency, and is presented as being infinitely superior to that of the humans, which is driven by a lust for power and control over one's fellow creatures<sup>16</sup>.

*Not Wanted on the Voyage* is largely a cautionary tale about the danger of unquestioning obedience to authority. When Yaweh, the old testament God, cries: “behold, the great world is overcome with madness” (88), the human behaviour which he identifies as symptomatic of madness is *not* the violence which has reached epidemic proportions, but the disobedience and disrespect directed at Yaweh himself. *En route* to the Noyes's farm, he finds himself “reviled and spat upon and jeered” by the human beings whom he had created to serve and respect him (88). While, nominally, it is the prevalence of sin which concerns Yaweh – “Pride and lechery; envy and anger; covetousness; gluttony and sloth are, everywhere, all that One sees!” (89) – this excuse rings false, as the Noyes family and Yaweh himself are themselves equally guilty of these

sins. The human race is destroyed because it no longer unquestioningly accepts God's authority, and the Noyes family is chosen to survive the flood and regenerate the human race, not because they are "just," but because they are obedient. Yaweh's true objection is to the loss of the "[d]evotion and subservience to the greater glory," which, he reveals, was "all that was intended in the gesture of Creation" (88). Yaweh's declaration that the world is "overcome with madness" is rooted in his own understanding of what constitutes "normal" behaviour, an understanding which is implicit in what he believes to be the moral of the story of the orchard: "Was it not monstrous that even the wisest of the wise should attempt to usurp their God?" he asks the Noyses. "That they should ask of God: *why and how?*" (110; emphasis in original) In a world which is being destroyed by those in authority, yet in which it is "monstrous" and "mad" to question authority, clearly only those who are, themselves, seen as "monstrous" or "mad" can provide an alternative to the apocalyptic vision of dictators such as Yaweh and Noah.

Of those characters in the novel who are able to recognize the "madness" of the prevailing social reality, only Mottyl the cat is literally "blind and seeing in the dark." She is the only character who realizes the extent of Dr. Noyes's propensity for evil, and she alone recognizes the fallibility of God: "Her Lord Creator was a walking sack of bones and hair. She also suspected, from His smell, that He was human" (66); by virtue of her instinct, made more acute because of her blindness, she is the only one who understands "the meaning of the crown of flies" and who realizes that "[b]y entering the carriage, by seating Himself in their presence and by closing the door, the Lord God Father of All Creation had consented to His own death" (112). With the help of her

instincts – or “whispers” – Mottyl is able to “see” more clearly than many of the sighted characters whose ability to critique the present social reality is constrained by their immersion in it. Because she is both blind and an animal<sup>17</sup>, and as such is doubly excluded from this social reality, she is able to identify its shortcomings. Similarly, Mrs. Noyes’s rebellion against her husband does not begin in earnest until she leaves the society which Noah has created on the upper decks of the ark, and forced to rely upon her own instincts:

But she did have moments – wandering through the fields or walking along some trackless path – when she felt that civilization was falling away from her shoulders, and she was gratified. What a burden it had been!... Carrying all that *behaviour* – all those strictures: “sir” and “madam” – bowing and scraping and kissing hands – falling down and rising up on cue... The oppression of time – the daily ritual of violence – all that prayer and blood and wine – and the dreariness of protocol: having to ask permission to speak and touch and move. And the lies...and the empty smiles...and the hidden jars of gin.... (146; last three ellipses in original)

This experience – prompted by her departure from the ark upon learning that her desires are of no consequence to her husband, who has begun to recreate himself in God’s image as an absolute authority – marks the beginning of Mrs. Noyes’s rebellion. I disagree with Catherine Demousselle’s statement that, “[f]rom the start, Mrs. Noyes constantly rebels against Noah’s patriarchal regime” (Demousselle 51). On the contrary, while Mrs. Noyes does abhor killing, she does nothing to stop either the sacrifices carried out by Noah in the name of God or the experiments for which Noah kills Mottyl’s kittens in the name of science. Prior to her departure from the ark – her first act of disobedience – Mrs. Noyes functions as an agent of control and conformity: when the reader first encounters Mrs. Noyes, her “voice was hoarse as usual, from yelling at Emma” (8) because of the latter’s

inability to conform to Noah's expectations of how a daughter-in-law should behave; when Mrs. Noyes hears of Yaweh's impending visit, she "looked around the yard, distraught, as if she wished there was time to rearrange the trees," (9) expressing a wish to alter the natural world in accordance with the expectations of Noah and Yaweh; and finally, when Japeth returns from his journey "naked and blue and almost silent" (23), Mrs. Noyes "made him sit all day in a tub of lye, while she screamed at him; 'scrub! scrub! scrub!!'" (16). Her actions at the beginning of Findley's narrative are thus designed not to subvert authority, but to uphold it.

Mrs. Noyes does not actively participate in the evil and violence which characterize the world before the flood, but she nonetheless condones it through her obedience and her failure to act in accordance with her beliefs. Although she does not agree with Noah's actions, she does not openly disobey, retreating instead to a gin-fuelled reverie, in which she is able to close her eyes to her husband's violence and destructiveness and enter an idyllic, peaceful fantasy world:

Gliding back and forth in her platform rocker on the porch, Mrs. Noyes hoisted her jar of gin and cheered on the singing – whispering lest she be caught – waving her salutations to the sun. What else could heaven be, she wondered, but a world afloat like this? Nothing connected; nothing hard or real to fall against or stumble over; everything distant, everything benign – just as it was in this painless dusk, forever (18).

Like Ruth Damarosch, who anticipates being able "to look back and to say, it never happened" (*The Butterfly Plague* 344), Mrs. Noyes's attempted denial of reality amounts to a complicity with – not a rebellion against – the power structure. When Mottyl disappears on board the ark, Mrs. Noyes acknowledges the escapist desires inherent in her fondness for gin, asking: "Why is it always me that has to do this – come up first to

the surface when all I want to do is *sink*. When all I want to do is *stop*. When all I want is my *gin*” (230; emphasis in original). Through the drinking of gin, she is able sink further into a complacency which enables her to ignore the implications of her own compliance with her husband’s authority. Although she privately objects to the practice of sacrifice, she does nothing to stop it; her rebellion occurs only in her mind, and is therefore ineffectual:

*Mrs. Noyes went at once and kissed it on the forehead and picked it up and held it and carried it all the way down the hill in her mind and gave it back to the field from which it had been taken....*

In fact, Mrs. Noyes looked askance, unable as always to let the animal see her eyes, for fear it would think she was the cause of its betrayal. Which she was – because she could not put her hand out to stop the blow. She could not even say *no*. And so she said nothing and looked away at the sky (26; emphasis in original).

Mrs. Noyes’s inability to “say no” to her husband implicates her in his project, a fact which critics have largely ignored. When Noah later burns all those animals who are “not wanted on the voyage,” Mrs. Noyes is again unable to voice her opposition:

If only her voice would come. If she could even summon a remnant...

*Noah...!*

*Stop!*

But there was nothing. Nothing came of the words – and the only sound was the sound around her of all *her* cattle – all *her* sheep – all *her* horses – all the dogs and all their cries being driven towards cremation in the name of God (124-5; first two emphases in original).

The narrator’s use of the possessive pronoun is interesting, and complicates the conclusion reached by Demousselle that, while “Noah views animals as inferior creatures, classified according to their sacrificial value, Mrs. Noyes’s bond with the animals of her farm... is not based on hierarchy but on relatedness and trust” (Demousselle 49-50; my ellipsis). While I do not argue that Mrs. Noyes’s view of



animal-human relations is considerably more benign and sympathetic than that of her husband, there is nonetheless a proprietary relationship here that has gone unremarked by critics. Mrs. Noyes's objection to Mottyl's exclusion from the ark is that "SHE IS MINE" (128; emphasis in original), betraying a hierarchical view of her relationship with "her" animals which is consistent with that of her husband. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write that:

[T]he hierarchical structures on which [Noah's] power depends must be policed for 'difference' and everyone/thing rigidly categorized on a scale of value whose successive boundary lines are clear. Noah is below God, his sons below him, the women below them, the animals below them and so on (Ashcroft et al. 102).

In accepting this hierarchical structure, Mrs. Noyes is, albeit unwittingly, supporting Noah's – and, by extension, Yaweh's – dominance. Her acceptance of this hierarchy is evident in the songs which she teaches the sheep; she teaches them to sing praises to Yaweh, thereby endorsing the hierarchical vision of a god who made man "in his own image" (Genesis 2:27) and gave him dominion over woman<sup>18</sup> and over "every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 2:28).

Strangely, both Lorraine York and Demousselle view Mrs. Noyes's teaching of the sheep to sing as subversive. Both cite the incident in which Mrs. Noyes begins a song which the animals, one by one, join, as an example of the uses of song as "an act of protest against male hegemony" (York 1991: 114). While it is true that song in this instance "becomes a form of communion between all the animals" (Demousselle 50), the words, which provide the content of what York and Demousselle suggest is an inherently subversive form, cannot be ignored. The song, which Mrs. Noyes begins and which the

animals take up, is the hymn “Eternal Father, strong to save,” a hymn of praise to the very authority figure who has placed them in their present predicament (231). This hymn, like the hymns which they sing prior to the flood – “Glory to God on high” (64), “Lord God, Heavenly King” (67), and “Shall we gather by the River” (94) – implicates them in their own oppression. Critics of the novel have tended to read the singing sheep as a sign of an antediluvian paradisaic state; York writes that, “[i]n the antediluvian sections of the novel, female language is fluid, able to dissolve boundaries between itself and the natural world. It is, after all, Mrs. Noyes ... who can teach the sheep how to sing” (1991: 114; my ellipsis). I would argue, conversely, that Mrs. Noyes’s instruction of the sheep in the singing of Christian hymns and British folksongs indicates, not a “dissolving of boundaries” but a delineating of them; in her role as teacher/choirmaster, Mrs. Noyes establishes herself as the “authority” and proceeds to offer the sheep instruction in the dominant discourse. While this could be interpreted as a transgression of the barriers which divide animal from human, such an interpretation fails to recognize that, because the sheep will never ascend the hierarchy which divides human from animal, Mrs. Noyes’ instruction merely serves to further the *illusion* of equality and to support the very system which keeps the sheep subservient to humans. In this context, the sheep’s failure to respond to Mrs. Noyes’s attempts to lead them in song can be read as a *refusal* to participate in the discourse of the oppressor<sup>19</sup>:

Mrs. Noyes sat watching them – all the sheep and lambs – huddling together – excluding her. Her mouth hung open. No more songs and no more singing...

“Baaaa”

*Only* baaa.

The sheep would never sing again (347-8; emphasis in original).

In their rejection of human language in favour of a syllable – baaaa – innocent of any human content or meaning, the sheep are effectively rejecting the hierarchical world view that defines them as inferior to human beings; in what amounts to a political act of refusal, they choose to speak their own language, rather than imitating<sup>20</sup> the language of their oppressors.

It is not until after the rape of Emma, the death of the unicorn, the stillbirth of Hannah's child and the sacrifice of the silver kitten that Mrs. Noyes begins to realize the implications of the choice of songs which she teaches "her" sheep; the Christian hymns and British folk songs are themselves instruments of the very ideology which has resulted in Noah's tyranny and the murders committed in the name of God and civilization. Mrs. Noyes, realizing the connotations of the hymn *Lamb of God* – it recalls the sacrificial role which they themselves play in human beings' worship of God (48-9) – which she intends to teach a new lamb, instead chooses *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*, a song which expresses a nostalgia for a lost, idyllic homeland "where the fields are fresh and green" and "where your heart will feel no pain":

And when thy old friends welcome thee  
 Thy loving heart will cease to yearn.  
 Where laughs the little silver stream  
 Beside your mother's humble cot,  
 And brightest rays of sunshine gleam  
 There all your grief will be forgot.

In the context in which it appears in the novel, this song suggests the existence of an antediluvian world in which animals and humans coexist in peace and harmony, and in which pain and suffering do not exist. The sheep are aware that such an idyllic image is a

fabrication, and refuse to continue to participate in the propagation of this myth. The world before the flood, like the world on board the ark, is one in which animals are routinely slaughtered in the name of God or human progress, and in which human beings are captured and made into chowder. While it is true, as W.J. Keith writes, that “much of what was best in Findley’s world before the flood – the unicorn, the Faeries, the communication between human and animal – is lost” (Keith 130), he fails to note that none of these things appears to have been a regular, accepted part of prediluvian life: the unicorn is “rarely encountered” (52); Noah dismisses the Faeries’ existence as foolishness on the part of his wife (40); and the communication between human and animal appears limited to those humans who are in some way “sensitive” to the existence of non-human life. In its depiction of antediluvian reality, as well as its portrayal of life on board the ark, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, like *The Wars*, *The Butterfly Plague* and *The Telling of Lies*, presents a portrait of a corrupt and dehumanizing social reality; this is a formation which has gone “off course.”

This sheep’s refusal to participate in this society, while neglected or misread by many critics, is, I would argue, a pivotal political moment in the text. It is closely followed by Mrs. Noyes’s own overt, articulated refusal – her first – of Noah’s actions. Through the process of being relegated to the “lower orders” of society, Mrs. Noyes has moved from innocence or denial to knowledge, and finally to resistance, as represented by this first emphatic “No!” She has begun, not only to realize the extent of her society’s madness, but to move beyond this recognition to an overt resistance. This process is aided by Lucifer, the fallen angel<sup>21</sup>, who has assumed a female form and joined the Noyes

family on board the ark as Ham's wife, Lucy. Dr. Noyes's dominance is dependent on the maintaining of binary oppositions between normal and abnormal, upper and lower, and – as indicated by his surname<sup>22</sup> – prohibition and inclusion; as Peter Dickinson writes, it is Lucy, “with her ambiguous sexuality, her hybrid human-angel status, and her camp vernacular, who most obviously disrupts the familiar binary oppositions of this world (male versus female, human versus animal, upper orders versus lower orders, old world versus new world)” (Dickinson 139). Lucy's very presence on the ark is the result of her refusal to accept the boundaries and restrictions set by Yaweh; as Michael Archangelis reminds her, “All you ever said was *why?* Why this and why that and why everything. How dare you. How *dare* you” (108; emphasis in original). Lucy's questioning of Yaweh's totalitarian view of the world amounts to blasphemy, and she leaves heaven in search of a world which accepts difference:

Where I was born – the trees were always in the sun... The merciless light. It never rained – though we never lacked for water. *Always fair weather!* Dull. I wanted storms. I wanted difference. And I had heard this rumour... about another world. And I wondered – does it rain there? Are there clouds, perhaps, and is there shade in that other world? I wanted somewhere to stand, you see, that would give me a view of deserts and of snow. I wanted *that* desperately. I wanted, too, someone I could argue with. Someone – just once – with whom I could disagree (282; emphasis in original).

Lucy's desire for someone “who would tell me the sky was green... that dry is wet – and black is white”(282; my ellipsis) lead her to join the human race, where she discovers that the world of humans has merely replaced one totalitarian view with another, and therefore does not represent a satisfactory improvement over the world she has left. As Bailey writes: “What she discovers is that using the same language differently is not always sufficient for lasting change. Noah, after all, does say that ash is snow and that

paper rainbows are real” (152). Having recognized the inadequacy of the present civilization, as represented by Noah and his family, she declares her intention to continue her search for a world which embraces difference:

[W]here I was born, the trees were always in the sun. And I left that place because it was intolerant of rain. Now, we are here in a place where there are no trees and there is only rain. And I intend to leave this place – because it is intolerant of light. Somewhere – there must be somewhere where darkness and light are reconciled. So I am starting a rumour, here and now, of yet another world (284).

Lucy’s refusal to admit defeat is indicative of a vision which extends beyond the narrow confines of Noah’s world to acknowledge the possibility of other worlds not limited by conventional understandings of time and space. It is Lucy who is able to interpret the sign for infinity which the faeries reveal to Mrs. Noyes as “a warning: *time is not what you think it is. Beware*” (151; emphasis in original). At the time that it is shown to her, Mrs. Noyes is unable to understand this warning, and after puzzling over it, she dismisses it from her mind. Only after she states her willingness to accompany Lucy in her search for another world, does Lucy tell her: “you have begun to understand the meaning of your sign” (284). After having been relegated to the “lower orders” of her husband’s world, having lived with non-human creatures whose existence is governed by “natural” laws of benevolence and co-operation, and having witnessed the consequences of unquestioning obedience to authority, she is able to open her mind to the possibility of other worlds.

While York has interpreted the revolt of the lower orders as a “revolutionary and freeing act” which “reveals a progression towards a more humane type of conflict” (York 1991: 120-1), I agree with the conclusion reached by Bailey: “The revolutionary ‘feminist’ war against Noah in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* can only occur when the

community below decks begin to behave like ‘men’” (Bailey 1998b: 212). The efforts of Mrs. Noyes, Ham and Lucy – who has transformed herself into an aggressive male figure – to overthrow their captors merely repeat the methods of the system which they are attempting to overthrow, and therefore can only end in a stalemate:

Technically, the situation between the two factions might have been called a draw. Since Japeth was still incarcerated in the Armoury and only Ham knew how to set him free...there was no one to do battle. And without battle, there could be no decisive victory.

There were, however, defeats on both sides. Ham had been overpowered – and had lost control of his prisoners. Shem, Hannah and Doctor Noyes were free. But so was Ham free, and his mother and Lucy and Emma (348; my ellipsis).

Redemption, it seems, is not attainable within the boundaries of a profoundly flawed social system; however, the sign of infinity which the faeries revealed to Mrs. Noyes, and with which Findley begins every passage in this novel, points toward an alternative, as does Lucy’s final transformation into Cassandra<sup>23</sup>. Although she expects that her “words, like an animal’s warning cries, would be ignored” (344), unlike Findley’s earlier Cassandra figures, Lucy’s prophecies *are* heeded, if only by those who are sufficiently removed from the power-structures of society – and sufficiently attuned to the natural world – that they are able to resist them. Mrs. Noyes listens to Lucy’s words and believes them, declaring that she – and those others who have been relegated to the lower orders – will accompany Lucy in her search for another world: “Even if it takes a thousand years – we want to come with you” (284). In this context, Mrs. Noyes’s final act – she prays for rain – suggests a willingness to wait until this “other world” presents itself; until then, she will remain in her present situation on board the ark, in a stalemate or “draw” with Noah and his allies:

And now, Noah wanted another world and more cats to blind. Well – damn him, no, she thought. “No!” she said. Mottyl heard her – and stirred. Mrs. Noyes said; “I didn’t mean to wake you. I’m sorry. Sorry – but not sorry. Watch with me, Motty – you blind and me with eyes, beneath the moon. We’re here, dear. No matter what – we’re here. And – damn it all – I guess we’re here to stay” (352).

Until the discovery of a world which embraces difference, Mrs. Noyes does not intend to allow Noah to exert dominance over a new society, by praying for rain, she not only actively attempts to prevent him from doing so but also expresses hope for the future and faith in Lucy’s “rumoured” world.

In retelling one of the myths which are at the foundation of Western society, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* provides a critique of the values and assumptions upon which our contemporary civilization is based. As Donna Pennee writes:

Findley’s revision sadly amplifies the significance of this text that God created humankind “in His own image,” since we, too, are following his model to the letter, destroying the planet in the name of such principles as progress and our supposed God-given and/or evolutionary superiority over all other species (Pennee 88).

*Not Wanted on the Voyage*, like *The Butterfly Plague*, offers a dystopian vision of a world characterized by exclusion, violence, and the abuses of power; however, unlike that earlier novel, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* ends with a gesture toward an alternative to the present situation. The refusals of the sheep and of Mrs. Noyes to uncomprehendingly or unwillingly support an oppressive regime that is destroying the world point toward a possible regeneration of what Findley has referred to as “the human experiment,” as does Mrs. Noyes’s faith in Lucy’s “rumour of another world.” As in *The Wars*, the glimmer of hope at the end of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* rests with those who have “left the



formation”; it is those who are in some way able to extricate themselves from civilization who possess the potential to redeem it.

**“Save the children”: *Headhunter*'s schizophrenic saviours**

So we have to overcome the false disciplines and find the true discipline. Schizophrenia is an abortive and always aborted attempt to achieve some degree of this sort of sanity.

David Cooper, “Beyond Words,” *The Dialectics of Liberation*, 201.

Psychiatry could be, and some psychiatrists are, on the side of transcendence, of genuine freedom, and of human growth. But psychiatry can so easily be a technique of brainwashing, of inducing behaviour that is adjusted, by (preferably) non-injurious torture.

R.D. Laing, “Preface to the Pelican Edition,” *The Divided Self*, 12.

In a 1993 interview, Timothy Findley referred to his novel *Headhunter* as “the last in a sequence of books” – beginning with *The Butterfly Plague* (1969) and *Famous Last Words* (1981) – which present an apocalyptic view of the world. I would argue, however, that this view is not merely limited to these three novels, but that Findley’s entire *oeuvre* is marked by what he refers to in this interview as “an obsession...with the civilization we’ve created, with this century, with who we are and what we’ve done” (McGoogan C1). While *Headhunter*, like *The Telling of Lies*, *The Butterfly Plague*, *Famous Last Words*, *The Wars*, and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, presents a highly critical portrait of a profoundly disordered social reality, it differs from those earlier texts in the degree to which its narrative focuses on clinical mental illness as, paradoxically, both the symptom and the cure of the pathology which characterizes the contemporary human condition.

Toronto – the city in which *Headhunter* is set – is depicted as a city in the grip of a collective psychosis; dominated by its psychiatric institutions, Findley’s Toronto teems with the mentally damaged casualties of the contemporary age:

Civilization – sickened – had itself become a plague. And its course, in Marlow’s world, could be followed by tracing the patterns of mental breakdown. The Parkin Institute was not alone in being overextended. Psychiatric case loads, everywhere, carried alarming numbers. Broken dreamers, their minds in ruin. This was the human race (388).

Three of the central characters have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, the members of the city’s elite are all psychologically troubled and undergoing psychiatric treatment at the Parkin Institute of Psychiatry<sup>24</sup>, and the children of the city’s wealthy families are vanishing, only to reappear, deeply traumatized and silent, at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. While the novel presents an apocalyptic vision of a corrupt humanity participating – even revelling – in its own destruction, this vision is not without hope; the possibility of an alternative to the present reality – in which crimes against humanity are encouraged, yet benevolence is deemed “madness” – is represented by the figures of a Laingian psychiatrist and a schizophrenic librarian, who are able to leave the “formation” – which is represented, for the former, by the institution of conventional psychiatric practice, and for the latter, by the “sanity” provided by the anti-psychotic medication, Modecate – and put an end to at least one small part of the insanity which has become characteristic of the contemporary condition.

As the novel opens, the city of Toronto – and, in fact, the entire continent – is ravaged by a disease known as “Sturnusemia,” which, while thought to be caused by starlings, is eventually revealed to be “the direct consequence of human activities” (545),

a fact which has been concealed from the population by their governments. Thus, while the city is ravaged by this literal plague, the narrative recognizes that the true “plague” is the abuse of power by those in positions of authority and privilege. Examples of such abuse abound in this novel; these include Kurtz’s manipulation of the secrets of his patients, Freda Manley’s practice of “bonking her way to the top” (125), and the Club of Men’s mistreatment of local children, including their own. Like *The Butterfly Plague*, *Famous Last Words*, and *The Telling of Lies*, *Headhunter* deploys the trope of concealment; as in those previous novels, the concealment of the truth is the province of those who possess wealth and privilege. Like Ruth Damarosch, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, and Vanessa Van Horne, Rupert Kurtz is a member of a privileged élite – he is the son of a wealthy and successful father, and has become the “Director and Psychiatrist-in-Chief of the Parkin Institute for Psychiatric Research” (53) – and is thereby given access to information whose continued concealment would bring him personal gain. Unlike those earlier characters, however, whose motives for concealing the truth are complex and ambiguous, Kurtz’s deliberate and conscious decision to conceal the truths of both the source of “Sturnusemia” and the activities of the Club of Men is motivated solely by a desire for personal power. Kurtz deliberately seeks his “clients” – the choice of this word over “patients” indicates his commodification of the doctor-patient relationship – from among Toronto’s wealthy and famous; his professional credo is “[a]ccess to the personal obsessions of the élite equals access to the pockets of the élite” (604). In the seventeen pages of notes which Kurtz accidentally loses at the Metro Toronto Reference Library, he reveals his egoism and all-encompassing lust for power:

We psychiatrists... must necessarily appear to the mentally ill as being in the nature of gods. We approach them with miracles up our sleeves. "Save us!" they cry – and we do...

And: ...*with a simple pill, we can exert a power for good that is practically unbounded...*

Here, the words for good had been excised with a single stroke, leaving the sentence bereft of decency (603; emphasis and ellipses in original).

Bailey reads *Headhunter*'s juxtaposition of wealthy, socially prominent characters with scenes of extreme moral degeneration as a "critique of capitalism and Canada's consumer society" (Bailey 1998b: 198); the desire for power and material gain, Findley seems to suggest, has an unparalleled power to lead society "off course" through its ability to alter the boundaries of the permissible and morally acceptable. Thus, Warren Ellis – who has heretofore revealed no attraction to men – is willing to seduce his mother's male lover for the sole purpose of gaining control of the Beaumorris Corporation; children are willing to submit to the desires of the Club of Men in exchange for a payment of two hundred dollars apiece; and Kurtz is able to manipulate the city's population into doing his bidding through the careful concealment and selective revelation of the secret insights and desires of his "clients."

In his portrayal of Toronto's élite, Findley explores the depth of the human hunger for power, and shows the dehumanizing and destructive potential of this hunger. Kurtz's concealment of his awareness of the activities of "the Club of Men" – a group of upper-middle-class, professional men who engage in pornographic activities with local children – is prompted by his hunger for money and power; through sanctioning and even encouraging the city's élite to indulge their most perverse and dangerous desires, Kurtz is

able to obtain “payment” in the form of donations to the Parkin, which in turn strengthens his personal and professional power:

**Kurtz had other clients who, like Robert, should be prevented and pulled in from their perverse activities. Brought, so to speak, to psychic heel. But he was waging a war of necessities – and in order to survive, he needed those activities to continue. It was part of his scheme – his plan. He wanted to see what could be accomplished by giving what he called permissions. Let a psychosis have its way with a client – and see what the client would do in return for permissions having been given... (207)**

One of the “permissions” given is for the rape and murder of young children. During one of the sessions of the Club, a young boy is killed, and it is gradually revealed that his own father was one of those directly responsible for his rape and murder, and that Kurtz had not only been aware of the actions of the “Club of Men,” but had provided them with an experimental drug called “Obedion” (613) which renders the subject compliant to the wishes of others: “All the way from: *do you want to take my picture to do you want to kill me now?*” (613; emphasis in original) In order to satisfy his lust for power, Kurtz has waged a war with the human will: “Sometimes,” he tells Marlow, “the will can be purchased – bought. Sometimes it can be bent by force. But when all else fails, the will must be broken. And drugs will break it” (612). Aside from his role in the “plague” of violence against children, Kurtz is implicated in the “plague” of Sturnusemia; upon being informed by a patient that the disease is not carried by birds, but is, in fact, the result of human interference with the natural environment, Kurtz does not reveal this fact, but rather has the patient committed to Penetanguishene, an institution for the criminally insane. Kurtz is aware of the stigma which accompanies the label of “mad”; by falsely attaching this label to the patient, Kurtz effectively silences him, ensuring that his claims

will be dismissed as the ravings of a madman. As it is Kurtz's position as a member of the psychiatric establishment which gives him the power to access his patients' secret desires and to manipulate their lives, it is ironic that it is a schizophrenic – a member of the very group which psychiatry attempts to silence – who is the key to exposing his crimes; In opposition to the self-interested, single-minded Kurtz, who is oblivious and dismissive of anything that does not bring him personal gain, Findley places Lilah Kemp, a schizophrenic librarian who is open to the myriad worlds of the human imagination.

This openness to alternative worlds – including those dismissed as “fiction” – is reflected in *Headhunter's* complex narrative structure, in which references from the canon of Western literature are layered upon a plot which borrows from – and updates – Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*. Findley's protagonists – Kurtz and his nemesis Marlow – are “released” from *Heart of Darkness* by Lilah Kemp, who functions as a “medium” between the worlds of “fiction” and “reality.” As with *The Butterfly Plague's* fire in Alvarez Canyon, the ontological reality of this event is left ambiguous; while Kurtz does indeed seem to have an existence prior to having been “set free” by Lilah at the Metro Toronto Reference Library – he is a successful psychiatrist and the director of the Parkin Institute for Psychiatric Research – on a metaphorical level, Rupert Kurtz is Conrad's Kurtz. For Lilah Kemp – and, one suspects, for Findley – the terrible power of *Heart of Darkness* is its revelation of “[t]he horror of what had been done in the name of civilization – the people enslaved...the sexual depravity – the blood sports with human victims” (46; my ellipsis). This is the very horror in which *Findley's* Kurtz is also

implicated, and which Findley attempts to convey in his twentieth-century reworking of Conrad's text. The epigraph to the first section of Findley's novel is taken from *Heart of Darkness*: "And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth." The "dark place" to which Marlow refers in this statement is England, and the "darkness" is a moral darkness – corruption, ignorance, fear, savagery – which belies the superficial image of the supposedly civilized and progressive "heart" of the nineteenth-century British Empire. Findley transfers the significance of this observation to twentieth-century Toronto through the use of a second intertext in Findley's novel: the work of the artist Attila Richard Lukacs. Lukacs, a Canadian visual artist whose works have been shown internationally, is infamous for his enormous paintings of sexually aggressive skinheads, which both enthrall and repel the viewer. Findley's fictional artist, Julian Slade, whose painting *The Golden Chamber of the White Dogs* is purchased by Kurtz for the foyer of the Parkin Institute, appears to be a thinly-disguised representation of Lukacs<sup>25</sup>. Both Lukacs and "Slade" create enormous canvasses which convey a sense of power and strength, which combine dark colours and gold leaf, which present nude male bodies as objects of both desire and fear, and which are explicit in their portrayal of violence and sexuality. Christopher Hume, reviewing Lukacs' *E-Werk* exhibit in 1989, observed that "[f]ew artists have understood their times better than this 27-year-old painter from Edmonton. The skill with which he creates visual metaphors of decay and destruction is unnerving. This is the age of high-tech barbarism, and Lukacs is one of its most brilliant chroniclers" (Hume E23). Aside from his ability to understand and chronicle the barbarism of the Western world at the end of the twentieth century, Lukacs

also possesses considerable technical skill, which enables him to quote works by artists such as Caravaggio and Rembrandt, even as he is depicting figures who are relentlessly twentieth-century. Thomas W. Sokolowski, in an essay for the catalogue of Lukacs's 1989 exhibit at the *49th Parallel* in New York City, credits the artist's juxtaposition of techniques and images taken from both the "Old Masters" and the twentieth century for the complex and often contradictory public reaction to Lukacs's work:

It is impossible to have a neutral response to the paintings of Attila Richard Lukacs. By dint of their enormous size, pungent compositions, and aggressive stance, they engage the viewer in a manner that both intoxicates and repels. Employing the compositional devices and tenebrist palette of Old Master painters, Lukacs melds a lush pictorialism with a keen, perhaps even Machiavellian, understanding of the seduction of modern advertising (Sokolowski 1).

Through his manipulation of the codes, conventions and techniques of the old masters, Lukacs's paintings subvert the meanings of the works which they reference while, at the same time, they expose the contradictions inherent in and perpetuated by our society as we approach the next millenium.

My purpose here is to suggest that Findley's allusion to Attila Richard Lukacs provides the reader with a key to reading the novel. *Headhunter*, filled with disturbing images of violence and depravity, attempts, like Lukacs's works, to jolt the reader out of a posture of complacency, to force a recognition of the barbarity of contemporary society and our complicity in it. *Headhunter*, like the works of Lukacs, is parodic, drawing heavily on characters drawn from "past masters" such as Joseph Conrad, Gustave Flaubert, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and even Beatrix Potter. Findley, like Lukacs, uses these quotations to subvert accepted meanings and to expose the gap between fantasy and



reality. Findley's novel is filled with characters and situations which recall earlier texts. Apart from Marlow and Kurtz, the two most immediately recognizable figures in this novel are Emma Berry and Jay Gatz, lifted from the pages of Flaubert and Fitzgerald, respectively. Like Flaubert's heroine, Findley's Emma is fueled by an obsession with the lives of fictional characters; she "lived entirely through other people's lives" (213). While Flaubert's Emma seeks adventure through romance and sexual experience, in Findley's dystopia, his Emma's desire for something to make her feel alive has no outlet except the pursuit of a secret life as "a whore...who can blow a man to heaven" (278; my ellipsis). This fantasy life she creates for herself leads, not to a reawakened sense of life and adventure, but to an emotional death, which is repeated and reflected in nearly all of *Headhunter's* central characters, who have succeeded in gaining beauty, wealth and power only at the cost of spiritual fulfillment. These intertextual elements function to position *Headhunter* firmly as a text within a literary context, encouraging the reader to reflect upon parallels between real and fictional worlds, while simultaneously precluding any tendency on the reader's part to naïvely identify with the characters and situations presented in this novel. Findley's novel ends with the words "It's only a book...That's all it is. A story. Just a story" (625); these words refer to *Heart of Darkness*, yet they also implicitly refer to *Headhunter* itself. By enclosing his version of the decline of the human race within a self-referentially textual framework, Findley is also able to reflect on the works which comprise that framework, reinterpreting them in a time and place which, Findley seems to suggest, is even more vicious, more corrupt, and more "mad" than the worlds experienced and imagined by Conrad, Flaubert or Fitzgerald.

In this dystopian world, the madness can only be controlled – if not stopped – by one who can recognize the “heart of darkness” which lies beneath our civilized exterior, and who has already rejected the accepted version of “reality”; namely, a schizophrenic.

In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing writes:

If the human race survives, future men will, I suspect, look back on our enlightened epoch as a veritable Age of Darkness... They will see that what we call “schizophrenia” was one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed minds (Laing 1967: 90).

In his portrayal of the schizophrenic characters Lilah Kemp and Amy Wylie, Findley echoes Laing’s understanding of schizophrenia as a “successful attempt not to adapt to pseudo-social realities” (Laing 1967: 43). Although both characters possess symptoms which conventional psychiatry identifies as “schizophrenic” – Marlow is able to diagnose each by “the jerkiness...the brevity of focus...the stilted speech” (326; my ellipses) – Findley nonetheless presents a idealized view of madness, which is evident in the narrator’s statement that “the emotional range of [Lilah’s] enthusiasms – the mania for books – the abhorrence of darkness” (10) can be understood retroactively as the early traces of schizophrenia. If a full range of feeling, an intense love of literature and a preference of light over darkness are indicative of madness, then madness can be seen as somehow desirable, a view which is consistent with Laing’s belief that “[t]he cracked mind of the schizophrenic may let in light which does not enter the intact minds of many sane people whose minds are closed” (Laing 1965: 27). “Schizophrenia,” in Findley’s novel, seems to be synonymous with “spiritualism,” which cannot be understood rationally and is therefore termed “madness”:

She was diagnosed according to her raising of the dead and her conversations with literary characters and famous persons from the past. The hallucinatory aspects of her otherwise unique behaviour were a perfect match with the hallucinatory aspects of paranoid schizophrenia. Spiritualism, then, was just another disease. Like measles or the mumps. A medicated end to it could be arranged (42-43).

What is being questioned here is not schizophrenia's *existence*, but rather the invalidation of the experiences of those who have been so diagnosed. The characterization of Lilah Kemp suggests that schizophrenia can be understood as an openness to alternative realities and, as such, represents a means of seeing beyond the rules and restrictions of our rational civilization. The primary manifestation of Lilah's "madness" is an ability to transcend the boundaries between death and life, past and present, fiction and "reality"; this ability allows her to glimpse potentially redemptive alternatives to the present way of being. This ability to transcend the limitations of "normal" society is regarded with fear and distrust by the medical establishment, and is therefore targeted for destruction through aggressive medication. Given this view of madness as potential liberation, the psychiatric establishment, which persists in attempting to force the schizophrenic into the narrowly understood category of "normal" existence, thus becomes the enemy of those who seek an alternative to the present social reality. The attempts by the psychiatric system to control Lilah's condition are read as negative intrusions into an inner world which, like that of Lily Kilworth in *The Piano Man's Daughter*, is the source of wonder and redemptive potential; rather than attempting to understand Lilah's version of reality as a viable alternative to the prevailing social reality, the medical establishment attempts to destroy those elements of her experience which do not accord with their rational understanding of the world: "The object of the confinement had been to separate Lilah

from her ‘imaginary’ companions. The drugs were meant to eliminate these companions altogether. Murder by milligrams” (43). The literary and historical figures whom Lilah releases into the world are not considered “real” by the standards of rational thought, and are therefore deemed “other” and marked for destruction by the medical establishment, whose attempt to control the unknown and contain it within a rational framework effectively closes off potential alternatives to the present reality. In attempting to “cure” Lilah, *Headhunter* states, her doctors had “deprived her of her world of wonders [and] had tried to take away her powers” (44). Interestingly, the problems that arise from Lilah’s “release” of Kurtz are caused, not by her illness, but by her medication:

The drug was meant to control paralogical thinking – and to curb delusions. But in Lilah’s case, it merely incapacitated her ability to control her outcast’s behaviour. If she had not been drugged, Rupert Kurtz might not have appeared (44).

Thus, it is not Lilah’s openness to alternative modes of reality that is potentially dangerous, but, rather her attempted denial of these alternatives through the taking of medication designed to induce “sanity,” which, although “more relaxing” and “[p]eaceful” (512), limits one’s perception and experience of the world. Medication offers Lilah “a way of giving up” (512) her version of reality in favour of sanity, an option which she accepts, until she realizes that continuing to conform to society’s expectations in this way implicates her in the murders of the children of Toronto’s élite by their parents; her “duty” to do anything within her power to preserve human life must take precedence over any perceived social obligation to conform to “normal” behaviour by choosing sanity over madness.

At the heart of *Headhunter* is the choice between these two possibilities; faced with the knowledge that children are being murdered in bizarre and mysterious circumstances, Lilah finds herself torn between two competing voices: one which reminds her of her “*duty to be sane*” (507; emphasis in original), that is, to take the medication that allows her to continue functioning in the world of “reason”; and one which commands her to “*save the children*” (507; emphasis in original), to temporarily refuse her medication and give free rein to her illness. This latter choice, paradoxically, is the only way to stop Kurtz and restore sanity – fleeting as it may be – to the city. Not surprisingly, given the Laingian view of madness which runs through all of Findley’s novels, Lilah chooses the latter, a choice which is consistent with the views expressed in Laing’s writings. By choosing to temporarily stop taking the medication which allows her to function within “normal” society, Lilah is able to extricate herself from a society in which the behaviour of Kurtz, Freda Manley, and the Club of Men set the standards of normality:

Today, she was to have her Modecate injection and she dreaded it. It had occurred to her in the night that if she were to go on placing herself in the drug’s protection, she would lose her ability to follow Kurtz to the end. She might lose sight of him and that would be a disaster. It was her mission, now, to save the children in the photographs. She could not afford to have her contact with them broken, even though she did not yet know who they were (506).

Through opting to give up her medication, Lilah chooses to “abandon herself to a future she could not predict – but in it, she might find the missing children” (513). Lilah’s success in finding the children and stopping Kurtz depends on her willingness to transcend the narrow constraints of “normality” and open her mind to other possibilities; she must not only “hear voices,” but *listen* to them. In *The Language of Madness*, David

Cooper writes that the hearing of voices denotes an awareness “of something that exceeds the consciousness of normal discourse and which therefore must be experienced as ‘other’” (Cooper 1978: 34). Through listening to voices which more “rational” minds would ignore – those of the dead woman Martha, her son Stuart, the cat Fam, and the children in the box<sup>26</sup> – Lilah is able to discover the truth behind the disappearances of the children. Once she has learned of Kurtz’s responsibility, she sets out to destroy him through a ritual which involves her further surrender to the irrational, represented by the shoes which she believes to belong to Peter Rabbit:

Lilah was reading page 93 of *Heart of Darkness*. She was seated at her kitchen table, early – very early – in the morning following a sleepless, drugless night... Peter Rabbit’s shoes were lying close at hand, in their opened tissue wrapping paper – touched, from time to time, by Lilah’s fingers seeking magic.

*Page ninety-three. Oh, page ninety-three, she chanted. Deliver Kurtz to Marlow and to me... (574; emphasis and second ellipsis in original).*

The issue of whether or not Kurtz’s death is a direct result of Lilah’s incantations is left equally ambiguous as the question of whether Kurtz has indeed escaped from *Heart of Darkness*; however, the narrator suggests a cause and effect relation by ending one chapter with the image of Lilah’s satisfied smile after commanding Kurtz to appear, and beginning the next with the line “The first indications that Kurtz was not well...” (576; my ellipsis). This juxtaposition implies that Kurtz’s death has indeed been brought about through the strength of Lilah’s connection to the imagination, a connection which anti-psychotic medication, according to the text, is designed to destroy.

Interestingly, Lilah resumes her Modecate injections after her vanquishing of Kurtz. Although the medication interferes with her ability to merge “fictional” and “real”

worlds, without a certain amount of compromise with a society which regards her as “other,” she would lose both her autonomy and her ability to bring about social change: “without her drugs, she could be forced to become a permanent resident of that part of Queen Street where they locked the doors. And that would be intolerable. That would be death” (44). Sequestered in an institution, Lilah would be silenced, and would no longer have any influence on those who have locked her away. Lilah’s choice – a choice which the text endorses – is a compliance with the standards of the world in which she lives, in order to make possible her calculated rebellions against those standards. Lilah’s decision to first relinquish and then resume her medication is not reducible to the compulsions of her “illness”; rather, it represents a calculated – and hence not strictly “irrational” – decision to oppose the different terms of domination in modern civilization. This middle space which Lilah occupies is neither fully inside nor outside of reason, which suggests that, for Findley, the “solution” to our civilization’s problems requires an affirmation of the moral imagination, a faculty that must be simultaneously “sane” and “mad” in order to survive the ongoing crisis of modernity.

Lilah is not *Headhunter*’s only schizophrenic character. Amy Wylie, the schizophrenic poet, is, according to Findley, the only “truly civilized” character in the novel; she best represents “what [civilization] might have been” (Canton 4). Amy’s schizophrenia, like Lilah’s, not only represents a rejection of the prevailing social reality, but provides a means of challenging and altering that reality; while Lilah’s illness allows her to take a stand against a world in which children are raped and murdered, Amy’s illness allows her to rebel against a world in which it is illegal to show kindness to

animals. Amy is forcibly hospitalized after staging a hunger strike for endangered species; in her case, as in Lilah's, schizophrenia is portrayed as a generally harmless sensitivity<sup>27</sup> to other modes of being, which society in general fails to share or understand:

[Amy's] madness was benign – excepting that it held her in its thrall. There was little outright violence to it. None that was harmful. Only the yelling – and it was always defensive. The fact was, Amy Wylie suffered, Marlow conceded, from a madness called *benevolence*. And it was killing her (524).

Like Hooker Winslow, Lily Kilworth, Ruth Damarosch, Mrs. Noyes, and Robert Ross, Amy Wylie transgresses the values of her society by recognizing the right of non-human beings to share the world with humans. Through her questioning of the human dominion over animals which “rational” civilization seems to take for granted, Amy has a liberating effect on the life of her sister, who is cajoled into fulfilling a promise to feed Amy's birds, an act which is illegal in the age of Sturnusemia, in which birds, along with other animals, are the targets of mass annihilation at the hands of humans. Through following her sister's example, the formerly restrained and “civilized” Peggy Webster tastes freedom for the first time and learns that, “[t]o be free, after all, one must break the law” (531), a statement which, in *Headhunter*, can be expanded to include the transgression of the “laws” of rational self-interest. Amy's other sister Olivia notes that Amy lives in “a world reversed...*Or real*” (355); the text thus suggests that Amy's world – in which the slaughter of animals is acknowledged, spoken of, and openly challenged – may be more authentic than Olivia's world, in which alienation and emotional sterility can provide an excuse for the abortion of a child<sup>28</sup>. In addition to the emotional gulf in her marriage, Olivia's anxiety regarding her impending motherhood – similar to *The Piano Man's*



*Daughter's* Charlie Kilworth's anxiety about becoming a father – is caused by her fear that Amy's condition might be hereditary. Olivia's eventual decision not to terminate her pregnancy represents an embracing of the irrational aspects of life; it is influenced, not only by the recognition of Amy's benevolence – which, it seems, is inextricably linked to her illness – but also by the pleas of her unborn child. Thus, the “saving” of Olivia's child is, like Lilah's saving of future would-be victims of the Club of Men, a result of the willingness to pay attention to those voices which the “sane” may disregard, ignore or destroy. Peggy's liberation from the rules and restrictions of her society and Olivia's choice of life over death are part of the novel's movement toward the rejection of self-interest in favour of social responsibility. While both Lilah and Amy have been clinically diagnosed with schizophrenia, and while both of these characters struggle with the debilitating effects of their illnesses, the text nonetheless appears to contradict the medical model of madness through the presentation of a view of madness as a sort of “social activism.” The doubled figure of the “schizophrenic saviour” has undeniably disturbing implications; as in Laing's work, the view of schizophrenia as potentially liberating overlooks the seriousness of its pathology. To suggest – as does Laing – that schizophrenia is a “voyage” of self-discovery and liberation, or – as does Findley – that it is primarily a means of communion with deceased, fictional, or non-human beings – is to ignore the involuntary, violent, and distressing nature of the disease. As Siegler, Osmond and Mann write: “it is heartless to suggest, without the most exact explanation and qualification, to those suffering from tuberculosis, cancer, or schizophrenia that they should look on this as a rare opportunity for self-understanding” (141). Nonetheless, the

figures of Lilah and Amy provide the novel with a gesture – similar to *Not Wanted on the Voyage*'s symbol of infinity – toward possible alternatives to our present civilization, which is dominated by alienation, violence and fear.

The redemptive potential of madness represented by Lilah and Amy and recognized by Marlow is contrasted with the destructive vision of Julian Slade. Slade, who tells Kurtz: "I look forward...to my life as a madman" (85; my ellipsis), represents the indulgence of humanity's destructive impulses; in his introduction to an exhibit of his paintings, he writes: "You will see here...savage acts which have been done too long in darkness. It is my belief they should be done in the light" (95-6; ellipsis in original)<sup>29</sup>. While Slade's *Shreds* exhibit consists of "paintings of people flayed – torn away from who they were" (87), and his *Golden Chambers* exhibit offers a record of the corrupt and dehumanized condition of contemporary humanity, neither exhibit provides an alternative to the degradation they portray. Slade's schizophrenia seems to provide him with insight into the nature of our civilization's degeneration; as in the characterizations of Amy and Lilah, Findley seems to be suggesting that the schizophrenic is possessed of insight into human nature which is withheld from those who conform to the conventions of thought and behaviour deemed "normal." Through the character of Slade, Findley repeats a paradigm which first appears in *The Butterfly Plague*, namely, the problematic nature of the artistic representation of violence and horror, and the dilemma of the artist who seeks to avoid implication in the acts which are being represented. Ultimately, Findley seems to suggest, the responsibility rests with the audience; Slade, first through his silence and later through his absence, leaves his works to speak for themselves. What they "say" is

dependent upon the individual viewer: Griffin Price calls Slade “the Mengele of art,” for what he perceives, in his paintings of tortured human bodies, as his ability to imagine ways “to improve the human race” (86); David Shapiro, who is seeking permission to indulge his perverted and destructive fantasies, sees, in Slade’s *The Golden Chamber of the White Dogs*, a source of titillation and validation; Kurtz, who seeks new methods of gaining control over the human mind, sees a means to manipulate the emotions and behaviour of those who cross his path – by placing Slade’s triptych in the lobby of the Parkin, Kurtz hopes to “lift [visitors] off the floor and drop them in our hand” (170). In contrast, while Kurtz sees only “the wonder” of what Slade has created, Marlow – in an ironic appropriation of the words of *Conrad’s* Kurtz, recognizes “the horror” in this “hymn to violence” (203). Lilah, too, responds to the painting with horror; she recognizes Slade’s vision of the world as her own, noting that “there was something disturbingly familiar about what she saw” (410). However, the painting also helps her to solve the mystery of the fate of the missing children; it speaks to Lilah – who, unlike Kurtz or Shapiro, is sensitive to the secrets held by works of art – and implies that Kurtz is responsible for the violence which it depicts:

For the first time, Lilah saw the four human heads stuck up on their poles.  
She did not speak.

...

Who did this to you?

*Guess.*

I can’t. You frighten me.

*Think where you are.*

The Parkin Institute of Psychiatric Research.

*So?*

Lilah’s chin went up.

Kurtz. The horror-meister.

Kurtz, the headhunter (411; emphasis in original; my ellipsis).

While Slade and Lilah – as schizophrenics – are both able to recognize the barbarism of contemporary civilization, Lilah, unlike Slade, does not *revel* in the nightmare vision of a world gone mad, but rather assumes responsibility for lifting the human condition out of the depths of depravity to which it has sunk. One suspects that, for Findley, this sense of engagement and social responsibility is what is required for society to get “on course”; Lilah and Amy possess the benevolence and sensitivity which represent what humanity *could* be, if it could free itself from the alienating and dehumanizing effects of what we call “civilization.” Interestingly, both Lilah and Amy – unlike Lily Kilworth, Robert Ross, and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley – survive the struggle between their society’s expectations and their sense of moral duty. At the novel’s conclusion, each is in much the same situation as at the novel’s opening; both are living on their own and are being given medication on their own terms. Neither has relinquished her autonomy, and neither is being forcibly treated for her illness. Rather, they have served an instrumental function, alerting their society to the consequences of remaining blind to the abuses of power which are commonplace in their society.

Like Mrs. Ross, Ruth Damarosch, and Lucy, both Lilah and Amy are prophetic figures who are sensitive to the meanings and consequences of human action; Lilah’s insistence on the interconnectedness of “the imagination” and “reality,” and Amy’s assertion that human and animal realms are inseparable are both dismissed as the ravings of madwomen in a world which is founded upon exclusionary practices and binary distinctions. Unlike many of Findley’s “Cassandras,” who fail to find anyone who will listen to their prophecies, both Lilah and Amy *have* found someone who believes them –

Charlie Marlow, a psychiatrist whose primary influence seems to be the theories of R.D. Laing, and who is open to “the logic of madness”:

The logic of madness was central to Marlow’s own technique with his patients. Never to draw the patient towards reality for reality’s sake alone, but only for its place in the madman’s sense of logic. It was Marlow’s opinion – shared for the most part by Austin – that modern psychiatry depended far too much on placating the mad by stressing the comforts of reality – ignoring almost entirely the madman’s fear of it. This way, drugs had played too large a role in the lives of too many patients. Drugs could be fashioned to be dictatorial – which is why they had champions such as Kurtz and Shelley (396).

Unlike Doctors Kurtz, Shelley and Sommerville, who attempt to force – through drugs and other methods – the patient into the version of reality which they regard as authoritative, Marlow respects the experience of the individual patient and does not accept a binary view of madness and sanity. Marlow’s approach to madness is radical in its acceptance of the possibility that the reality perceived by the schizophrenic is as accurate – if not more so – than that perceived by the so-called sane. This is evident in his treatment of Amy Wylie. Marlow, recognizing that conventional treatment would leave Amy sedated, with “no poems, no birds... no other world but the dead world out there now” (572; my ellipsis), offers her family the option of providing her with “a minimum of medication. Only enough to reduce the extremities of her anxiety” (572), but not enough to destroy the inner world which he recognizes as being no more “insane” than the world in which he is living. Similarly, Marlow begins the treatment of each patient by recalling the words of G.K. Chesterton which hang on the wall of his office:

*The madman is not the man  
who has lost his reason. The  
madman is the man who has lost  
everything except his reason (196).*

Marlow's credo contradicts the perception of madness as reason's excluded "other"; madness, then, is not the *absence* of reason, but an equally rational alternative to the accepted and authoritative version of reality. This view is shared by Austin Purvis<sup>30</sup>, a psychiatrist who, like Marlow, concerns himself with understanding the perceptions and experiences of the insane, and rejects the practice of forcing patients to accept the standards and codes of behaviour put forth by "sane" society:

*We are not here to drag them willy-nilly back into our world!* [Purvis] had yelled one day at Doctor Shelley, who was overly fond of somnificating her patients. *We are here to drag our perceptions forward into theirs!* (189; emphasis in original)

While Marlow is able to join forces with Lilah Kemp in order to bring about Kurtz's downfall, Purvis – like *The Wars's* Rodwell – is unable to cope with the horrors which he is forced to witness, and escapes by committing suicide, first exhorting Marlow to fight Kurtz's power in his stead: "You're strong, Charlie. I'm weak. I gave in. I didn't fight back" (402). He ensures that Kurtz's actions will not continue to be concealed, by providing Marlow with the files which contain the evidence of Kurtz's crimes and enlisting him to fight the battle which he, himself, did not possess the courage to fight:

In his mind were the words *save the children*. Somewhere, he knew, he had written them down. It barely mattered where they were – *Charlie will find them. SAVE THE CHILDREN. Charlie will deal with it. Charlie will...*

Suddenly, Austin lifted his hand and made a fist of it, banging it down on top of the files. "Someone has to make this stop!" he shouted. "You, Charlie! Please!" (402; emphasis and ellipsis in original)

With his discovery of the Club's activities and Kurtz's involvement in them, Marlow is forced to come to terms with the human capacity for evil. As he comes to realize, the statement "[p]eople do not kill their own children" (427) is a lie, and the notion that

human beings are rational creatures is merely an illusion; beneath the veneer of civilization and rationality lies a darkness that cannot be comprehended by the reasoning mind. Upon discovering the photographic evidence of George Shapiro's murder, Marlow's initial impulse echoes the gestures of denial of Vanessa Van Horne and Ruth Damarosch; he tells himself that "[t]here are no dead children...no naked boys; no velvet armchairs; no shackles and no manacles. No dead children. None" (426; my emphasis). He is unable to sustain the lie, however, as he realizes that he has a moral responsibility to prevent Kurtz from continuing to abuse his power.

While *Headhunter* depicts civilization at its most barbarous, it nonetheless contains several gestures toward redemption. In her article on the novel, Marlene Goldman reads *Headhunter* in light of the tradition of apocalyptic eschatology, and writes that "both structurally and thematically, *Headhunter* systematically draws on traditional elements of apocalyptic discourse." According to Goldman, these include a "recursive structure, panoramic vision, glaring images of destruction," and finally, the "depiction of the elect locked in their struggle with the demonic host" (Goldman 33-4). *Headhunter's* "elect" comprise those who move beyond the narrowly defined binaries of contemporary civilization toward a way of being which transcends the boundaries between reality and fantasy, truth and fiction, sanity and madness. As Goldman writes, "the biblical prophets' sacred visions have become the property of secular spiritualists and schizophrenics such as Lilah Kemp and Amy Wylie" (Goldman 38). Marlow, too, acknowledges the interpenetration of "fantasy" and "reality," and has sufficient faith in the power of fictional worlds to transform lives that he includes them in his psychiatric practice:

**Marlow used literature as psychotherapy. He believed in its healing powers – not because of its sentiments, but because of its complexities. No human life need ever be as knotted as Anna Karenina’s life had been – since the living had the benefit, as she had not, of her own example (186).**

**In contrast to Lilah, Amy and Marlow, all of whom regard the world of literature with reverence, Emma Berry and Jay Gatz do not learn from their fictional counterparts, and thus are doomed to repeat their mistakes. Similarly, Kurtz seems oblivious to his own literary predecessor; when he meets Marlow, he fails to mention the coincidence of a “Kurtz” and a “Marlow” working together:**

**Kurtz himself said nothing regarding their names. He had seemed, when they had first encountered one another in Boston, not to have noticed. But he could not have been unaware of the coincidence (197).**

**To Marlow, who not only acknowledges fictional worlds but regards them with the utmost respect, such a lack of awareness is unthinkable; for Kurtz, however, nothing exists beyond his own journey up “the stream of human endeavour” to the “point of absolute power” (604).**

**In addition to Marlow, Lilah Kemp has another ally in Nicholas Fagan, the writer and literary critic<sup>31</sup>, “who is clearly a member – if not the leader – of the elect” (Goldman 39). Findley makes a connection between Fagan’s practice of attentive reading and Lilah’s schizophrenic conjuring of fictional lives:**

**Fagan, too could “raise up persons from the page” – though he never left them stranded as Lilah did, among the living. Back they went and stayed between their covers until he called them forth again – in his role as teacher and critic (40).**

**It is Fagan who provides the most convincing answer to the question of whether Lilah has in fact “released” Kurtz from his fictional world:**



**“Kurtz is with us always,” he said. “I don’t think you can blame yourself for that. The human race cannot take a single step, but it produces another Kurtz. He is the darkness in us all” (373).**

Lilah, then, is not responsible for the existence of evil in the world, but she is one of the few who are able to recognize it for what it is, by virtue of her willingness to “pay attention,” not only to the visible, physical world, but also to the myriad possible worlds created by the imagination. Fagan’s fable – “The Assassination of Jean-Paul Sartre” (382-386) – functions as a warning about “the dangerous consequence of failing to pay attention – and the savage consequence of ignorance” (387). In this fable, the French philosopher attempts to take refuge in his blindness, wilfully ignoring or denying the existence of those around him: “I see nothing, now, he said, but what I want to see. Whether it is actually there or not is of no importance” (384). He adopts a solipsistic, utilitarian view of human relations, explaining to the guests at his dinner party that each individual exists for the other solely according to the role that he or she plays in serving that other person’s needs:

**“We pay attention to one another according to our functions in one another’s lives,” Sartre said, as the wine was poured. “I desire wine – I call the waiter. The waiter, at first, is nowhere to be seen. I call again. I conjure him – according to my needs. *Poof!* He appears – and my glass is filled. And once my glass is filled, then – *poof!* – he is gone. The waiter no longer exists. He has, you see, an obligation – from my point of view – to exist only in terms of my need for his services” (384; emphasis in original).**

Sartre’s failure to recognize that the waiter does indeed exist in other terms – the terms of an assassin – costs him his life. This narrow view of reality, Fagan and Findley suggest, is not only limiting, but profoundly dangerous; failure to “pay attention” to the full range of possibilities results, not only in Sartre’s assassination, but in the various “plagues” –

sturnusemia, megalomania, pedophilia – that pervade Findley’s fictional landscape. Lilah’s vision of reality, which conflates the imaginative and the real, is an antidote to this limited perspective.

At the core of *Headhunter* is a warning to “Pay attention.” Sartre fails to pay attention to the waiter/assassin; Emma Berry, Jay Gatz, and Rupert Kurtz fail to pay attention to the fates of their fictional predecessors; and Lilah Kemp and Amy Wylie teach – by example – those around them to begin paying attention. Similarly, *Headhunter* itself, through its layering of textual worlds, alerts the reader to the redemptive power of the imagination and the consequences of closing one’s eyes to the world – or portions of the world – in which we live. In conversation with Jeffery Canton, Findley says:

You want to pick up *Heart of Darkness* and say, “Pay attention!” Immediately after this was written, we went into this century and – holy shit! – you can’t become more barbaric than we are right now, even though we think of ourselves as ultra-civilized (Canton 7).

*Headhunter*, then, is Findley’s exhortation to “pay attention,” not only to the world which we call “reality,” but also to the imaginative representation of the human condition offered to us in works of art such as *Heart of Darkness*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Madame Bovary* – and the writings of Timothy Findley<sup>32</sup>. To ensure that our attention does not waver, he creates an “ideal” reader in Lilah Kemp: she is engaged with all aspects of life, including the non-human and non-rational; she embraces wonder and the imagination; she is selfless enough to be willing to sacrifice her personal freedom in order to save others; and she is sensitive to the insights that fiction is able to contribute, and prepared to use these insights to bring about change in the “real” world. Schizophrenia, in *Headhunter*, functions as a metaphor for the sum of these qualities.

### CONCLUSION: "...A MADNESS CALLED *BENEVOLENCE*"

In Frank Davey's 1993 article on *The Wars*, he criticizes the text on the basis of the fact that, in his view, it fails to offer a viable alternative to the violence and destruction of a world at war with itself. He writes:

[T]he only 'remedy' that it offers – the 'innocence' of animals – is nowhere near as available to humanity as is the similarly extra-social power of universal nature in [Joy Kogawa's] *Obasan*, or event the 'Green Grass World' of [Rudy Wiebe's] *Big Bear*. This 'innocence' lies not only outside the social order (which is perhaps why Robert must die) but also, as Swift suggested some two hundred years earlier, nearly outside human experience: an illusion of breath in a fading sepia photo (Davey 126-7).

I disagree with Davey; the alternative which *The Wars* – and, in fact, all of Findley's texts – offer to the alienating norms of modern Western civilization is not a return to "the innocence of animals," but, rather, a connection – forged through the imagination – to all living beings, and the exercise of a spirit of "benevolence." If, as Findley believes, "the human experiment is ending" (Cameron 51) because of our calculated destruction of nature, then perhaps the key to redeeming the human race lies in the recognition and embracing of all forms of life, all modes of "reality." In Findley's novels, it is often the "mad" who, unconstrained by the strictures of "normality," are able to feel empathy for non-human beings, and to recognize that, as Lily Kilworth tells her son, human beings "are not alone" on this planet.

Findley's fiction is characterized by an emphasis on benevolence toward animals, a fact which puts Findley at risk of being accused of idealizing the natural world. As Thomas Hastings points out, "*The Wars* – like a number of Findley's other novels – asks readers to consider that the suffering and death of horses and cats is more important than

the suffering and death of a human being” (352). Through “creating more sympathy for the suffering of animals than humans” (352) Findley is not presenting an alternative to the human world, but revealing – in all its horror – the destructive effects of the war which the human race has declared on the natural world. As Hastings correctly points out, “[f]or Findley, the cruelty that humans inflict upon animals is the surest sign of their barbaric nature” (355); the many animal deaths which fill the pages of Findley’s novels serve to underscore the madness and brutality of so-called civilization. Conversely, empathy and benevolence toward animals is a sign of the persistence of a trace of human goodness in spite of the alienating effects of our civilization, and it is here, Findley suggests, that an alternative is located. The solution which Findley gestures toward in his novels is not – as Davey suggests – the abandoning of human society in favour of communion with animals, but the extension of empathy toward non-human nature, which involves the exercise of the imagination.

In an interview with Findley, Barbara Gabriel asks him whether, in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, he is “in danger of giving us a pre-Darwinian nature, almost never red in tooth and claw?” Findley replies in the negative, saying that that novel “is very open and honest and absolutely direct about Mottyl and killing. She kills the mice and even sets out the ground rules for butchering them” (Gabriel 33)<sup>1</sup>. The “natural” violence of the hunting habits of Mottyl, and the abduction and slavery practiced by Lily Kilworth’s ants, are contrasted with the “unnatural” violence of Dr. Noyes’s experiments on Mottyl’s kittens, and Lyon’s destruction of the ant-cities. For Findley, who maintains a Rousseauian view of nature as the location of “goodness,” a violence which is part of the

natural order of things is preferable to the “unnatural” violence imposed upon nature by civilization. Similarly, in *The Piano Man’s Daughter*, Lizzie’s brain surgery is presented as a grossly intrusive interference of rational science in the realm of nature. Although Lizzie’s “natural” brain tumour will kill him, Findley seems to suggest that such a death would be preferable to the grisly way in which Lizzie meets his end<sup>2</sup>. This paradigm of the destruction of the natural by the instruments of reason is repeated in other novels, as in the proposed destruction of Amy Wylie’s imaginary birds by medication, and Lyon’s destruction of Lily’s ants with the same instrument with which Doctor Warren kills Lizzie. While many of Findley’s protagonists do commit acts of violence, these acts – Hooker’s killing of his family, Robert’s shooting of Leather and Cassles, Meg’s murder of Calder Maddox – can be classified as acts of what David Cooper calls “counter-violence”; these are acts of violence which are committed, not *against* nature, but out of a profound sympathy for nature.

In Findley’s works, the world of nature functions as a reminder of what we have lost on the journey toward “civilization”; however, while his fiction certainly does present an idealized image of nature and animals, he is nonetheless able to avoid over-sentimentalizing, and thus his work is not reducible to what Paul Fussell refers to as “calendar-art sentiments.”<sup>3</sup> I agree with Anne Geddes Bailey that Findley’s seemingly simplistic identification of the natural world with truth, beauty, and moral goodness is, to a certain extent, complicated by his scepticism “not only of technology, but also of romanticism, modernism, and elitism” (Bailey 216). Because Findley’s novels foreground their own complicity with the very systems which they critique, he is able to

produce texts which are nostalgic for a lost state of nature, while simultaneously taking a critical view of such nostalgia, and to create characters with whom readers – and even Findley himself – long to sympathize and identify, but who also commit acts for which it is difficult to absolve them<sup>4</sup>.

In two of his most recent novels – *Headhunter* and *The Piano Man's Daughter* – he gestures toward more viable solutions to the present “dying civilization” (54), through identifying a space which is neither entirely of reason nor of madness. In the former novel, two schizophrenic characters negotiate positions on the margins of “rational” society, submitting to the intervention of Western medicine, but only enough to preclude their exclusion from the world of human experience. They are thus able to function as prophetic figures, remaining among the “sane” world, but attempting to alter it through their influence. Hope for humanity is also located in those characters who, while not mad, are able to reach out to others through the imagination. These characters include Charlie Marlow, who has “sympathy for monsters” (316); Nicholas Fagan, who possesses insight into the human imagination, and recognizes, in Kurtz, “the darkness in us all” (373); and Emma Kilworth, who like her grandmother Lily, is aware that “[w]e [a]re not – and we will never be – alone” (461). It is this ability to “pay attention” to reality – including the realities of nature and the imagination – that, for Findley, represents hope for the future of humanity. Findley’s texts repeatedly exhort the reader to “pay attention” to the violence and suffering which human beings are inflicting, not only upon ourselves, but upon other living things. In conversation with Bruce Meyer and Brian O’Riordan, Findley expresses the opinion that, besides entertaining, fiction should “stimulate what, in

my opinion, is a dying civilization.” When asked what can be done to save this civilization, Findley replies:

**Pay attention. Pay attention to real reality... Squalor is reality, the horrors that surround us as we live here are reality. But art is also reality. The mind is reality. The imagination is reality. We must return to the fact that we have been given the most extraordinary equipment alive, and we're not doing anything marvellous with it, are we? The marvellous is what you want (Meyer and O'Riordan 54).**

The human imagination provides a means of seeing beyond the limited and limiting possibilities available within the narrowly defined boundaries of western technological society, in order to allow for the difference and wonder which that society excludes. While Findley's novels show both the need to “leave the formation” and the impossibility of doing so, they point toward a solution which is located in the human imagination. In conversation with Alison Summers, Findley denied that he is advocating a return to a state of nature, explaining that “I'm not saying in a sentimental way that we should go back and sit in a garden, but rather that we should try to make that contact again with what we are, because that's the only thing that can save us” (Summers 109). This contact can be made through the imagination, which perhaps alone can provide human beings with a viable way to leave the formation.

For Findley, madness represents a means of accessing the imagination and, through it, the “goodness” which resides in a state of nature. His “mad” characters – Hooker Winslow, Minna Joyce, Lily Kilworth, Robert Ross, Amy Wylie and Lilah Kemp – are, to a certain extent, able to take up positions of resistance against the repressive and stultifying norms of the modern “civilized” world. Findley does, however, acknowledge the limitations of madness as a form of resistance; any liberatory potential is threatened

by the sane world's fear of unreason and the consequent desire to contain and control it. Moreover, the liberatory potential of simply affirming madness is further undercut when one considers that any set of norms or standards can only be authoritative if they can be justified in some way, and the process of justification involves giving *reasons* for preferring, for example, certain types of conduct over others. The inescapable reliance upon reason thus suggests that our moral task is not to flee into irrationalism, but rather to construct a more inclusive sense of reason – one that is not insecurely founded upon a hostility to nature, madness, and the imagination<sup>5</sup>. In other words, as Findley's work, at its best, is perhaps uniquely capable of revealing, reason is not inescapably in the business of denying difference; in the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that his work contains, in the subtle complicities it uncovers, and in the logics of exclusion it ceaselessly criticizes, Findley's fiction – again, at its best – succeeds in convincing both mind and heart that there are better, more humane, and more reasonable ways of living our lives.



## NOTES

### Notes to Introduction

<sup>1</sup> While “madness” is difficult to define, due to the social and political implications of the term, I accept Lillian Feder’s definition of madness “as a state in which unconscious processes predominate over conscious ones to the extent that they control them and determine perceptions of and responses to experience that, judged by prevailing standards of logical thought and relevant emotion, are confused and inappropriate” (Feder 5).

<sup>2</sup> The connection between anti-psychiatry and other social movements of the period – such as anti-war, anti-capitalism, and anti-colonialism – is illustrated by the 1967 Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation in London, in which anti-psychiatrists joined with other “anti-establishment” thinkers to discuss “new ways in which intellectuals might act to change the world” (Cooper 1968: 11).

<sup>3</sup> See Cameron, Canton, Gibson, Summers, and “Alice Drops Her Cigarette on the Floor.”

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the aforementioned interviews, see also Aitken, Mellor, and the memoir *Inside Memory*. See also Anne Geddes Bailey’s account of Findley’s 1992 Graham Spry Lecture, given at the University of Toronto (10 December 1992) in the concluding chapter of her 1998 book (215-223). Finally, Ingham’s “Bashing the Fascists” refers to unpublished and unbroadcast materials in which Findley has expressed his views on fascism (54 n. 6).

<sup>5</sup> Examples of such alternate realities include like Lily Kilworth’s “ant-world,” Amy Wylie’s flocks of invisible birds, and Lilah Kemp’s “conjurings” of fictional characters.

<sup>6</sup> As I will discuss toward the end of this introduction, Donna Palmateer Pennee and Anne Geddes Bailey, in their studies of Findley’s works, do address the motif of madness, although it remains a peripheral concern to their respective projects.

<sup>7</sup> While Foucault’s ideas were embraced by Laing and Cooper – as is evident in Cooper’s introduction and Laing’s glowing review of *Madness and Civilization* (*New Statesman* 71, 843), Foucault did not align himself in any way with the proponents of the anti-psychiatry movement.

<sup>8</sup> The quotation is from Alan Bass’s translation of *Folie et déraison*.

<sup>9</sup> In “R.D. Laing and the British Anti-Psychiatry Movement: A Socio-Historical Analysis,” Nick Crossley writes:

*[The Politics of Experience]*... provoked a critical response from Laing’s fellow psychiatrists and finally pushed him beyond the bounds of their acceptance. Many felt that he himself had finally gone mad and one, in the U.S.A., even got a Federal grant to study the language of *The Politics of Experience* as a way of researching that possibility. Laing had reached the point of no return (884).

<sup>10</sup> The third, Lorraine York’s *Front Lines: The Fiction of Timothy Findley* (1991) – which focuses exclusively on the motif of war – is the only text of the three which does not address the prevalence of madness in Findley’s writing. York argues that Findley’s works “effectively encode human aggression as a male text” (xiv), and her study focuses on the construction of this text in Findley’s novels and stories. In York’s reading, the potential for resistance is situated, not in madness, but in femaleness. While she interprets characters such as Jessica Winslow, Ruth Damarosch, Vanessa Van Horne and Mrs. Ross as “female crusaders” against the norms of their masculinist, militaristic culture, she does not explore the issue in terms of the challenges presented by the irrational to a predominantly rationalist culture.

<sup>11</sup> This term is identified by Siegler and Osmond in their study *Models of Madness, Models of Medicine*. See my Chapter One for further clarification.

### Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> *The Butterfly Plague* will be discussed in Chapter Two, and *The Wars, Headhunter*, and *Not Wanted on the Voyage* will be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> This term is taken from Miriam Siegler and Humphry Osmond, *Models of Madness, Models of Medicine* (New York: MacMillan, 1974): 16.

<sup>3</sup> Laing and Esterson present only the first eleven cases in this book.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in the case of “Maya Abbot,” the symptoms which had led to the diagnosis of “schizophrenia” – including auditory hallucinations, impoverishment of affect, and autistic withdrawal – “seem to be quite in keeping with the social reality in which she lived” (32), according to Laing and Esterson. In writing of “Maya Abbot,” the authors note that “she lacked a sense of her motives, agency, and intentions belonging together: she was very confused about her autonomous identity” (16). After interviewing the members of Maya’s family – both individually and in combination with one another –

the authors concluded that this confusion was entirely consistent with Mr. and Mrs. Abbott's repeated alarm when confronted with any signs of developing autonomy on their daughter's part. Thus, Maya's "schizophrenic" symptoms and behaviour can be seen as having arisen from her adaptation to a reality in which her parents have identified "their daughter's use of her own 'mind', independently of them, as synonymous with 'illness', and as a rejection of them" (19).

<sup>5</sup> These include schizophreniform disorder (equivalent to schizophrenia in symptomatic presentation, but lasting less than six months), schizoaffective disorder (combining a mood episode with active-phase symptoms of schizophrenia, preceded or followed by a period of delusions without mood symptoms), delusional disorder (at least one month of delusions with no other schizophrenic symptoms), and brief, shared, substance-induced and non-specified psychotic disorders (DSM-IV, 274).

<sup>6</sup> In much of Findley's fiction, one can discern a strain of social criticism, directed specifically toward an Ontario élite which has adopted its predecessors' emphasis on the rules of social decorum, and which lacks any redeeming values of its own. In their membership in this society, the Winslows are the precursors of *Stones's* Joyces and *The Piano Man's Daughter's* Wyatts – both of whom will be discussed elsewhere in this chapter – and *Headhunter's* Wylies. A character in *Headhunter* comments that "snobbery" was the dominant "value" of the previous generation of this community, and "while snobbery is bad enough, the aping of it is vacuous" (89). As Findley writes in that novel:

Most of the great families – great, so-called – had adhered to social patterns that had been established in the early eighteen hundreds. Admittance to this core group was rarely granted – and only if the credentials presented were impeccable. Like most pioneer colonial societies, the rules of conduct were limiting and uncreative. *More British than the British* had been the motto then, which Griffin Price translated as *More Torontonion than Torontonians* (88).

<sup>7</sup> Findley is equally critical of normative notions of masculinity; Nicholas Winslow's withdrawal behind the masks of the "head of the household" and "good provider" – which is a repetition of his own father's socially sanctioned emotional reticence – is a central contributing factor to the general "malfunction" of the Winslow family unit. Elsewhere in Findley's oeuvre, the notion of the masculine is related specifically to military culture and the ideal of the soldier. This will be discussed further in my section on *The Wars* in Chapter Three. For a more detailed discussion of Findley's representations of masculinity, see Thomas Hastings's doctoral dissertation, *Into the Fire: Masculinities and Militarism in Timothy Findley's The Wars* (York University).

<sup>8</sup> The Winslows' retreat into their house and the past resonates with the case of the "Blair" family, described in Laing and Esterson's *Sanity, Madness, and the Family*: "Inside the Blair house, time has stood still since before the turn of the century... The inside is stuffy and dark. The living-room and front parlour are cluttered with Victorian and Edwardian bric-à-brac" (36). As in the case of the Blairs, whose daughter is diagnosed as "schizophrenic," the Winslows' suspension in the past has a marked effect on the way in which both Hooker and Gilbert relate to reality.

<sup>9</sup> According to the DSM-IV, such list-making is a symptom of obsessive-compulsive behaviour (DSM-IV 417-20).

<sup>10</sup> According to the DSM-IV, "psychomotor retardation" – the slowing down of speech, thought, and body movements – is one of the features of a major depressive episode (321).

<sup>11</sup> Cassandra, the daughter of Priam and Hecuba, was given the gift of prophecy by Apollo, who subsequently withdrew from her the ability to persuade people to believe her. Thus, while she was able to foretell the future, her prophecies were not believed and she was thought mad. Findley returns to the notion of prophecies which go unheeded with the characters of Cassandra Wakelin in *Can You See Me Yet?*, Mrs. Ross in *The Wars*, Ruth Damarosch in *The Butterfly Plague*, and Lilah Kemp in *Headhunter*. Interestingly, Lilah, a schizophrenic, is the only character who is ultimately able to affect reality and convince others of the accuracy of her prophecies, a fact which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>12</sup> According to the DSM, positive symptoms "appear to reflect an excess or distortion of normal functions," in contrast with negative symptoms, which "appear to reflect a diminution or loss of normal functions" (DSM-IV, 274).

<sup>13</sup> Findley repeats these words almost exactly in the story "A Bag of Bones" in his 1997 collection *Dust to Dust*, one of the two Bragg and Minna stories in this volume: "in the past, members of his family had been born with genetic defects. Club feet – cleft palates – schizophrenia – Down's Syndrome. Jesus. Enough was enough" (96).

<sup>14</sup> These include the rise of anonymous bureaucratic institutions, the massive expansion of scientific rationality (and the accompanying beliefs in technological progress and mastery), the development of advanced market economies and legal structures, and the spread of consumer culture.

<sup>15</sup> According to Jürgen Habermas, this passage appears in Foucault, *Wahnsinn und Gesellschaft*, 13 (a German translation of the French *Histoire de la Folie* – the translator is not credited), and does not appear in the English edition, *Madness and Civilization*.

<sup>16</sup> Findley initially based the character of Lily on his aunt Ruth, whom he credits with influencing his ideas about madness. He recalls that her illness gave her “incredible insights into what was really going on in the world around us” (*Inside Memory*, 179-180). Although he notes that the fictional character of Lily “wandered off very quickly from the image of my aunt,” both share “a magical connection with a world most people didn’t want to know was there and therefore didn’t see” (Conrad, Rick. “Findley gives voice to scorned.” *Rev. of Headhunter. Halifax Chronicle Herald* 12 May 1993: C2).

<sup>17</sup> Lily’s irrational identification of Karl Hess the flautist with “the Great God Pan” as he appears in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem “A Musical Instrument” is perceived as a madwoman’s “episode,” yet is retroactively understood by Charlie as an embracing of music, nature and life; her liaison with the musician is a creative, life-affirming act, directed wholly by unconscious processes, which ultimately results in Charlie’s own life, that of his daughter, and that of his narrative of his mother’s life. The poem “A Musical Instrument,” which Findley reprints within the text of the novel (451-2) celebrates the restorative power of music and art to heal the destruction inflicted by man upon nature and by nature upon itself. “A Musical Instrument,” written around 1860, can be found in volume 6 of *The Complete Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* and contains three stanzas (III, IV, VII) not included in Findley’s version of the poem.

<sup>18</sup> Music, for Schopenhauer, is an expression of the irrational will. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969): 257.

<sup>19</sup> In her article, “Finding Lily: Maternal Presence in *The Piano Man’s Daughter*,” Anne Geddes Bailey reads Frederick’s banishment of Lily as an enforced severing of the mother-daughter relationship in the service of the oedipal, patriarchal model of the family, in which the mother’s affection for the child is necessarily transferred to her husband (70). Bailey contrasts the “confining” space of the attic – “linked to oedipal triangulation and patriarchal oppression” – with the field in which Lily is born, which is a “space of intersubjectivity...both defined and made free by the presence of the other” (70). “Repeatedly,” writes Bailey, “this field is the place where mutual recognition is possible, between Tom and Ede, Ede and Lily, Lily and Lizzie, Lily and Charlie, and finally Charlie and Emma” (70).

<sup>20</sup> *The Piano Man’s Daughter* contains many allusions to nineteenth-century women writers and their works, most notably Charlotte Brontë, as mentioned above, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. As a young woman, Lily undergoes a prolonged episode in which she believes herself to be Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and her volume of the poet’s verses plays a crucial role in the solution to the “mystery” of the novel, namely Charlie’s paternity.

<sup>21</sup> Uncle John Fagan later reappears as the mysterious and frightening figure that Lily describes in her notebooks, who visits her in her bedroom at Number 84 St. George Street.

<sup>22</sup> The deaths of these individuals, then, is caused, not by Lily's madness, but by society's impulse to confine the mad behind the locked doors of an asylum.

<sup>23</sup> In fact, Lily seems more prophet than mere ambassador, as is suggested by the fact that her birthplace is marked by three monuments, formed of columns of hibernating ants:

Near the hollow where the birth had been completed - the place into which Ede had crawled in order to cut the cord - there were monuments in the snow. Three of them - tall conical markers, as if to say: an event of some importance once happened here.

"What are they?" Lizzie asked.

"Ants," said Lily. "Anthills" (p.219).

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the characters of Lucy/Lucifer in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* and Octavius Rivi in *The Butterfly Plague* stand on the margins of the socially constructed category of masculinity, and thus function as counterparts and companions to Findley's "mad" protagonists, whose otherness allows them to exist in a space outside the culturally defined "normal" which in Findley's novels is presented as apocalyptic.

<sup>25</sup> This statement is an extension of Lorraine York's remark that Robert Ross's entry into "the male enclave of the army," while voluntary, nonetheless implies "a wholesale conscription into heterosexuality" (*Front Lines*, 38).

### Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Laing's comments on the Vietnam war resonate with those uttered by Findley in a 1971 interview with Donald Cameron: "you can't bring up children with the attitude that they may pick up a gun and wander into the field and kill anything at random, and not expect to have the end product of that be the massacre at My Lai." Donald Cameron, "Timothy Findley: Make Peace With Nature, Now," *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973): 57.

<sup>2</sup> According to Collins, "[i]t was Harvey Weinstein's long talks with Jeremy Kinsman, then a political-affairs officer at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, that convinced Kinsman in 1983 to start loudly pushing for justice for the plaintiffs - the first loud words from any Canadian government official for some time" (218).

<sup>3</sup> While critics Donna Pennee and Diana Brydon do address the issue of Vanessa's complicity with the system against which she is ostensibly fighting, both nevertheless read the novel as a narrative of political awakening and challenges to male narratives: Pennee views Vanessa's journal as a record of her "politicization" and writes that Vanessa's final gesture "amounts to anarchy of the self" turned against "the masculine world" (Pennee, 100); similarly, Brydon writes that Vanessa has forged a "new alliance with the forces of nature and morality." (Diana Brydon, "A Post-Holocaust, Post-Colonial Vision," *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*, 586). I agree with Anne Geddes Bailey's claim that such readings ignore the significance of the fact that Vanessa is willing to murder another human being in order to prevent the truth from being revealed – "How can murder in one case be heinous and in another politically redemptive?" (Bailey, 153) – and are dependent on a misreading of Arabella Barrie's "Stonehenge" as a site of female resistance to the male discourse of power (Bailey 155).

<sup>4</sup> Republished in Anne Geddes Bailey, *Timothy Findley and the Aesthetics of Fascism* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1998):154. Subsequent references will be to the 1998 text of this article.

<sup>5</sup> On the first day of her daily recording of events, Vanessa admits that she has fallen "two days behind the incidents I next describe" (73). Therefore, only the events leading up to and immediately following the discovery of Calder's body are recorded on the same day they have occurred. From this point forward, as Vanessa is constructing her narrative, she is already aware of the very revelation which propels her story forward: the identity of the murderer. As Bailey points out, "the immediacy of Vanessa's journal is an illusion purposefully created by Vanessa herself. The timing of both the events and the recording of those events reveals that Vanessa is not writing a journal but a novelistic narrative which is directed towards an end which she already knows" (Bailey, 167). In continuing with nearly 300 pages of carefully plotted mystery narrative, Vanessa self-consciously engages in the "telling of lies" in order to manipulate the events into a desired shape. This calculated assertion of control over the "natural" rhythm and order of events places her in the company of ostensible "villains" such as Calder Maddox, Allan Potter, and Col. Norimitsu, all of whom exercise control over the elements of the natural world.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, *moira* is the ancient Greek word meaning "fate."

<sup>7</sup> Maddox's determination to count the stars recalls the image of Stella in "Bragg and Minna". Stella, named for "the six-pointed stars of [her] hands" (*Stones*, 20), represents those aspects of reality which are by their nature unknowable, uncontrollable and irrational, and which both Vanessa Van Horne and Calder Maddox seek to know and control.

<sup>8</sup> I agree with Bailey in her assertion that other critics have tended to misrepresent the role of Arabella Barrie and the other members of Stonehenge as one of resistance to patriarchal systems of authority. Arabella and the other occupants of the “Cockpit” – it is no accident that the nickname for their reserved place on the beach both suggests a centre of control and possesses a peculiarly masculine connotation – wield their social authority as ruthlessly as any patriarch. Like Bailey, I find it clear that “Arabella and her circle stand for exclusion throughout the novel” (158), and therefore believe that Vanessa’s collusion with Arabella at the end of the novel does not signify resistance to the established social order, but rather a resigned acceptance of it.

<sup>9</sup> Vanessa describes Mercedes’s family summer home on Larson’s Neck as “the centre of the world” (7).

<sup>10</sup> Etymologically, the English word “monster” derives from the Middle English/Old French *monere*, meaning “to remind, warn, advise, or instruct,” and the Latin *monstrare*, meaning “to show, point out, or indicate.” Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. Amsterdam, London and New York: Elsevier, 1967. Findley’s use of the word here has interesting implications; Vanessa attempts to contain disorder and cling to the illusion of an ordered, rational world by ignoring the warnings implicit in each of a series of “monsters”: Calder Maddox, the tyrannical head of a multimillion dollar pharmaceutical empire; Colonel Norimitsu, the oppressive authority who presides over an internment camp; and the iceberg, which “presents an eerie likeness to the Capitol Building in Washington” (28). Her refusal to recognize these warnings against what David Cooper refers to as “engulfment into the monolithic bourgeois bureaucratic system” (1968: 198), prevents her from recognizing her own complicity in the system which killed Michael Riches, and leads to her eventual participation in what Laing would consider to be the ultimate act of violence, namely the devaluation of another’s – here, Lily Porter’s – experience.

<sup>11</sup> Collins credits as her source a paper delivered by Cameron to the New York Center for Clinical Psychiatry in Dec. 1953, entitled “Observations on the Playback of Verbal Communication,” and a speech he delivered to the American Psychopathological Association in Feb. 1963, entitled “Adventures with Repetition: The Search for its Possibilities” (Collins, 255).

<sup>12</sup> The manipulation of an individual’s mind in order to prevent the revelation of certain truths is a pattern which is repeated in the torture of Hess in *Famous Last Words* (see Chapter Two).

<sup>13</sup> Unless specified, all references are to Findley’s 1986 revised edition of the novel.



<sup>14</sup> As Pennee points out, these attempts to come to terms with experiences whose reality is questionable, “present a paradigm to be repeated in Findley’s canon” (30). Lilah Kemp’s “conjuring” of Kurtz in *Headhunter*, which will be discussed in Chapter Three, is similar to Ruth’s sightings of Race; in both cases, the issue of whether these figures are “real” or “imagined” is left deliberately ambiguous.

<sup>15</sup> It is tempting to read *The Butterfly Plague* – like *The Telling of Lies* – as a female protagonist’s journey from innocence to awareness, ending with an awakened sense of identity and responsibility. Lorraine York gives the most optimistic reading of the novel, tracking Ruth’s journey from “female war victim” (*Front Lines*, 77) to “child survivor” (66) through her continuing protest against male authority, and Donna Pennee, too, views the ending as a positive assertion of identity and presence (Pennee, 34). While Heather Sanderson does fully acknowledge the problematic nature of Ruth’s “fascist infection,” (Sanderson, 118), she nevertheless writes that Ruth “has learned the importance of witnessing as a form of protest” (115), while neglecting Ruth’s later rejection of this lesson and reversion to passive acceptance of “everyone’s dream.” Anne Geddes Bailey alone acknowledges the profound pessimism of Findley’s vision, but while her focus is this novel’s “fascist aestheticism,” I will be concentrating on Ruth’s failure as a prophetic voice or redemptive figure.

<sup>16</sup> Findley has referred to this scene as “Ruth’s ‘rape’ of the Blond Man” (Gibson, 146).

<sup>17</sup> As Donna Pennee points out, the implications of the novel’s “parallels between the dream factory and the regime which masterminded and carried out the Holocaust” are highly problematic, in light of the fact that the Hollywood film industry was “owned and operated primarily by Jews” (Pennee, 30). In his book *An Empire of Their Own* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), Neal Gabler argues that the ideal of the “American Dream” which was promoted and disseminated through the films of the Hollywood studios was largely an invention of the Jewish film producers of the 1920s and 30s who arrived in America from eastern Europe and founded a powerful empire upon the creation of “a powerful cluster of images and ideas – so powerful that, in a sense, they colonized the American imagination” (Gabler, 6-7). The motivation for the creation of this empire, Gabler suggests, was a desire for assimilation, which was thwarted by the pervasive anti-Semitism of the 20s and 30s. Prevented from attaining a position among the upper echelons of American society; a surprising number of Jewish immigrants discovered that, through the creation of a “shadow America” on the nation’s movie screens, they could conquer and rule the very society which excluded them. Rather than immunize them against dreams of power and success, Gabler suggests, the destitution and exclusion which characterize the early lives of the Hollywood producers contributed to their ruthlessness in the pursuit of their dream of acceptance and led them to become tyrannical in their imposition of this dream upon others.

<sup>18</sup> Findley further explores the blind worship of surface glamour in *Famous Last Words*, in which Mauberley's worship of the Windsors is likened to Annie Oakley's obsession with Lana Turner and Ezra Pound's admiration of Mussolini.

<sup>19</sup> Shirer writes that the 1936 Berlin Olympics "afforded the Nazis a golden opportunity to impress the world with the achievements of the Third Reich," by carefully constructing the image that they would be presenting to the world:

The signs *Juden unerwünscht* (Jews Not Welcome) were quietly hauled down from the shops, hotels, beer gardens and places of public entertainment, the persecution of the Jews and of the two Christian churches temporarily halted, and the country put on its best behavior. No previous games had seen such a spectacular organization nor such a lavish display of entertainment. Goering, Ribbentrop and Goebbels gave dazzling parties for the foreign visitors – the Propaganda Minister's "Italian Night" on the Pfaueninsel near Wannsee gathered more than a thousand guests at dinner in a scene that resembled the Arabian Nights (Shirer, 232-233).

The preparations appear to have had the desired effect:

The visitors, especially those from England and America, were greatly impressed by what they saw: apparently a happy, healthy, friendly people united under Hitler – a far different picture, they said, than they had got from reading the newspaper dispatches from Berlin (Shirer, 233).

<sup>20</sup> The parallels between the figures of Letitia Virden and Adolf Hitler run throughout the novel, beginning in the first scene, in which the Little Virgin arrives at Culver City Railroad Station by train on August 28, 1938. On this date, Hitler was travelling by train in Germany, on a tour of the western fortifications (Shirer 378).

<sup>21</sup> The "brown and yellow cars" of the train on which Letitia, the blond man and Ruth are travelling and which crushes Bully Moxon under its wheels, represent both the brown uniforms of the S.A. storm troopers (Brownshirts) and the yellow stars which identified the Jews for extermination, combining – as in the symbol of the butterflies – both the perpetrators and the victims of fascist ideology in one symbol.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Sontag, writing of Riefenstahl's activities as a propagandist for the Third Reich, pointed out that "Riefenstahl was a close friend and companion of Hitler's well before 1932; she was a friend of Goebbels, too" (Sontag, 310). The inference is that these relationships, in addition to the Nazi funding of four of Riefenstahl's six films, suggest Riefenstahl's complicity with the Nazi regime, and support Sontag's argument that

Riefenstahl's films cannot be evaluated as anything but Nazi propaganda. According to Sontag, *Triumph of the Will* is "a film whose very conception negates the possibility of the filmmaker's having an aesthetic conception independent of propaganda" (Sontag, 308).

<sup>23</sup> While I am wary of attempting to speculate as to Findley's reasons for altering this and other passages, it is possible that he felt that this passage left no room for ambiguity, and stated Ruth's connection to fascism in too obvious a manner; he has stated, in an interview with Donald Cameron, that: "My biggest problem as a writer is the fear of not having made a thing clear, and I'll write the same thing into a novel several times so that by the time I've got it said, I've said it eight different ways, through eight different characters" (54).

<sup>24</sup> "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried..." (Ruth 1:16-17).

<sup>25</sup> Ruth's attempt to regain innocence through denying the reality of war is reflected ironically in Freyberg's words to Quinn in *Famous Last Words*:

Why, from what I hear, they *all* hated Nazis. Didn't they? I mean, I hear that every day. And if I was fool enough to believe it every time I heard it, I'd have to believe there weren't enough Nazis to form a quorum... And the war never happened. And Hitler was just an actor with a moustache made up to look like Charlie Chaplin... And no war (53).

Freyberg challenges not only Quinn's naïveté, but the naïveté of a society which unquestioningly accepts revisionist versions of history, in order to deny the truth of humanity's propensity for evil and preserve the illusion of innocence. If "they all hated Nazis" then the Nazis alone are responsible for the Second World War, and all other human beings are absolved of accountability. Findley, in both *Famous Last Words* and *The Butterfly Plague*, challenges this view through attempting to show that all humanity is implicated in the horrors committed during the war.

<sup>26</sup> When she accepts the swastika which the blond man tears from his arm band and thrusts down the front of her blouse, she is also accepting, as a further part of this composite identity, the symbol of complicity with the fascist ideology which the blond man represents.

<sup>27</sup> The narrator's description of Dolly's appearance, dressed head to toe in pale blue because "it showed up blood," prompts an immediate explanation: "Adolphus Damarosch was a hemophiliac" (8).

<sup>28</sup> The 1969 version of the novel tells that the plague was not over after all, but lasted until the spring of 1945, and ends with the beginning of a new plague – "the Fire Plague" – in September, 1968 (1969; 376).

<sup>29</sup> For transcripts of Pound's radio broadcasts, see *Ezra Pound Speaking: Radio Speeches of World War II*, ed. Leonard Doob (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin writes:

Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic (242).

<sup>31</sup> In an interview with W.M. Mellor, Findley insists that Mauberley's narrative is "[c]learly apologetic." He then goes on to say, "No – it is beyond apology; it is regret. 'Look what I did by being subservient to all this glamour'" (Mellor 94). Clearly, *Findley*, in writing *Famous Last Words*, is saying "Look what *our culture* is doing by being subservient to all this glamour," but I disagree with an interpretation which attributes this view to Mauberley, as I find insufficient textual evidence to support such a reading.

<sup>32</sup> As Anne Geddes Bailey points out, the fact that Freyberg's actions are often presented from the perspective of Quinn serves to "counter [the] distance between the outside reader and Mauberley"; the reader is thus seduced into echoing Quinn's dismissal of Freyberg's more critical view of Mauberley's actions.

<sup>33</sup> In the bar at the Hotel Grande Bretagne, Mauberley is distracted by a group of Blackshirts who are celebrating the fall of Addis Ababa, "flashing what seemed to be an inordinate display of strong white teeth, exuding an aura of masculinity that caused an imbalance in the atmosphere" (90-1). When one of them stands up to leave, Mauberley becomes excited at the thought of him passing his table:

And I began to perspire. I wanted so desperately to follow him, but I could only think of what Allenby had said; "you are some kind of pilgrim looking for a faith...under rocks."

And yet I turned in my chair and watched that young man going away. And I went away with him – in my mind. And knelt before his strength. And his victory (91).

Despite Allenby's accurate assessment of Mauberley's weakness, he continues to allow his political allegiances to be affected by the allure of surface glamour. He hungers for submission to the youth, vitality and power embodied by the Blackshirts, a fantasy of debasement which is realized in both his relationship to Wallis – he compares himself to a dog lying at her feet – and his literal licking of the blood from Reinhardt's hand.

<sup>34</sup> *The Trials of Ezra Pound* depicts the insanity defense as a blatant fabrication designed to save Pound from execution for treason. Findley has Dr. Wendell Muncie – a psychiatrist testifying on behalf of Pound – admit that, while he himself finds no evidence of Pound's insanity, he nevertheless intends to tell the court that he is insane and therefore unfit to stand trial for treason (30).

<sup>35</sup> For further information on Pound's arrest, incarceration, and hearing, see Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, E. Fuller Torrey, "The Protection of Ezra Pound," *Psychology Today* (November 1981) and *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths*, and John Tytell, *Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano*. All information regarding these events was found in these texts.

<sup>36</sup> See also page 64, on which Mauberley describes his love for Wallis as similar to "the way dogs have of loving the feet at which they lie."

### Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> The poem can be found in W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (Faber and Faber, 1939)..Although the line in Auden's poem reads "O teach me to outgrow my madness", Findley writes "O teach us to outgrow our madness," an alteration which brings the poem even more into alignment with his views on the collective madness of the modern world, which has its most explicit expression in war.

<sup>2</sup> The first epigraph, which appears on the dedication page of the novel, is from Euripides: "Never that which is shall die." By placing this line in a position of prominence, Findley emphasizes survival and hope in the face of the world according to Clausewitz. The sentiment is repeated within the text of the novel, in Rodwell's letter to his daughter Laurine: "Everything lives forever. Believe it. Nothing dies" (154).

<sup>3</sup> See Laurie Ricou, "Obscured by Violence: Timothy Findley's *The Wars*." *Violence in the Canadian Novel Since 1960*, eds. Terry Goldie and Virginia Hager-Grinling (St. John's: Memorial University Press, 1980); Simone Vauthier, "The Dubious Battle of Story-Telling: Narrative Strategies in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*." *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature*, eds. Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik (Edmonton: NeWest, 1985); Donna Pennee, *Moral Metafiction* (Toronto: ECW, 1991); Anne Geddes Bailey, *Timothy Findley and the Aesthetics of Fascism* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> While numerous critics have mistakenly pointed out that Findley does not identify the gender of his researcher, Catherine Hunter, in her review of Pennee's *Moral Metafiction* and York's *Front Lines*, corrects this error, drawing attention to the fact that the researcher is revealed as male by Marian Turner's sister ("Why don't you tell him, Mernie?") three pages from the end of the novel (223). "Text and Conflict: Two New Studies of Timothy Findley's Fiction," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 55 (Spring 1995): 145.

<sup>5</sup> *On War*, 110. Quoted in *Front Lines*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> For Findley, the trolley car as the instrument of death symbolizes the killing of the human spirit by our reliance upon – and reverence for – modern technology. This motif of death-by-trolley-car is repeated in Tom Wyatt's death in *The Piano Man's Daughter*.

<sup>7</sup> While this passage, as Lorraine York has pointed out (*Front Lines*, 34), does not appear in Clausewitz, Findley uses it to exemplify the misguided attitude toward war propagated by the books which form Levitt's own view of war.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this is not Findley's first reference to Clausewitz in his work. In *The Last of the Crazy People*, Gilbert Winslow has a copy of *On War* on his bookshelf (see Chapter One).

<sup>9</sup> Like the iceberg in *The Telling of Lies* and the "shape" in Mauberley's epilogue in *Famous Last Words*, the iceberg in this photograph represents the uncanny, that which reason is unable to contain.

<sup>10</sup> The author of one memoir writes of hearing the song of a nightingale in the trenches, and thinking that the bird, in singing, was "showing us and the Germans that there were better things to do." (*Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby, Italy, 1944* (1969):50 qtd. in Fussell 242).

<sup>11</sup> "He doubts the validity in all this martialling of men but the doubt is *inarticulate*" (8; my emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> Robert's shooting of the horses, like his destruction of Rowena's photograph immediately following his own rape, is "not an act of anger—but an act of charity" (204), intended to protect the innocent from further suffering at the hands of men.

<sup>13</sup> In the story "Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye," and the novels *The Wars* and *Headhunter*, Findley uses the character "Nicholas Fagan" – a literary critic – to directly express theories concerning the relationship between life and art, which would ring false were they not attributed to such a figure. In conversation with Jeffrey Canton, Findley states:

I have always used him as a point of reference. He could say things...that I, Timothy Findley, could not say, because they would be unacceptable. And given his academic standing, and given his mode of exploration, his passion for literature, he could say these things (Canton 6).

Interestingly, on the first page of one of Findley's preparatory notebooks for *The Wars*, underneath the words "The Wars," written backwards, Findley has written "by Nicholas Fagan". On the second page, he writes, "Nicholas Fagan is the pseudonym chosen by the brother of a well known but by no means famous Canadian writer" (Findley Papers vol. 16-13). Nicholas Fagan also appears in *Headhunter* – for further discussion of his function in Findley's work, see the section on that novel.

<sup>14</sup> Critics tend to ignore the fact that Mrs. Noyes killed her own son, Adam, because he did not conform to the accepted definition of normality:

"We killed him," she said. "I did...." She looked at Noah. "We did."

...  
"We drowned him," she said (165).

<sup>15</sup> Lucy's incineration of Barky's body resonates with Noah's burning of the bodies of those animals who are "not wanted on the voyage," a scene which York reads as "a concentration camp massacre recreated." (1991:108)

<sup>16</sup> Critics have remarked on the problematic "cuteness" of Findley's animals in this novel; he betrays more affection and sympathy for them than for his human characters. George Woodcock identifies "an element of touching and melancholy whimsicality, when Mottyl and her friends Whistler the groundhog and Bip the lemur converse, that reminds one of classic children's animal stories like *The Wind in the Willows*" (Woodcock 234), while W.J. Keith comments that the novel is occasionally marred by "an adventure-story cuteness reminiscent of *Watership Down*" (Keith 131). Barbara Gabriel, in her interview with Findley, asked whether he is, in this novel, "in danger of giving us a pre-Darwinian

nature, almost never red in tooth and claw?" (Gabriel 33) While Findley protests that Mottyl does engage in predatory behaviour, it is nonetheless difficult to deny that the animal world is characterized by benevolence and co-operation, and is free from the hunger for power and control which fuels human society.

<sup>17</sup> The implication here is that animals are closer to nature, and are therefore guided by their instincts, rather than by artificially imposed hierarchical power structures.

<sup>18</sup> "[T]hy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16).

<sup>19</sup> Here, I disagree with Bailey's reading of the scene, in which she suggests that Noah has "silenced" the animals' voices (Bailey 1998b: 149).

<sup>20</sup> The sheep's ability to produce human sounds does not progress beyond simple, uncomprehending mimicry – Noah complains that, because they do not understand the words they are singing, the "sheep, once started, could not be stopped until they recognized the end of a number" (94).

<sup>21</sup> As Bailey points out, "unlike Lucifer, [Lucy] has leapt, not fallen" (Bailey 138).

<sup>22</sup> In addition to the negative/positive dichotomy, the surname "Noyes" recalls the nineteenth-century idealist and practitioner of eugenics, John Humphrey Noyes:

At [Noyes's] Oneida Community, one of several socialist-Utopian "heavens on earth" created in the nineteenth century, a program called "stirpiculture" was begun in 1869. Based on Noyes's interpretations of Darwin and Galton, the program involved planned matings between the most "spiritually advanced members of the community; not surprisingly, Noyes fathered more stirpiculture babies than anyone else (Leahey 232).

<sup>23</sup> In an interview with W.M. Mellor, Findley speaks about Lucifer's transformation at the end of the novel: "By the end of her existence, Lucifer has become Cassandra. And that's the meaning of all the beehives. Beehives are the symbol for Cassandra" (Mellor 100).

<sup>24</sup> The "Parkin" is a thinly disguised version of Toronto's Clarke Institute for Psychiatry, which stands on the exact site on College Street which Findley identifies as the address of the Parkin. On the "Acknowledgements" page of *Headhunter*, Findley thanks, among others, "Dr. R.E. Turner, Dr. Sylvain Houle and staff of the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Toronto," and provides the following disclaimer:

There are great psychiatric institutions in Toronto, each of which offers excellent care and support to the mentally ill and their families. In part, this



novel tells the story of what could happen if the wrong people wielded authority in such institutions. Both the story and its characters are fictional. Except for certain geographical, historical and architectural details, the portraits of the psychiatric centres in this novel are also fictional.

<sup>25</sup> Lukacs is represented by Vancouver's Diane Farris Gallery, which is mentioned on the "Acknowledgements" page of Findley's novel.

<sup>26</sup> Lilah correctly interprets Stuart's monosyllabic warning ("*Curse*") to mean "Kurtz" (486, 489).

<sup>27</sup> While it is true that Lilah's illness resulted in the Rosedale Public Library being burnt to the ground, *she* did not set the fire; rather, it was set by "Otto the Arsonist," who "had been the student whom Doctor Goebbels had chosen to ignite the piles of books when burning them had been the first Nazi gesture of contempt for German culture" (61). Like Kurtz, this figure possesses a metaphorical existence; Lilah's identification of this figure as the author of the crime denotes both a recognition of the atrocities committed by the Nazis and an acknowledgement of the existence of such impulses in contemporary Western civilization.

<sup>28</sup> Olivia, unable to tell her husband, Griffin – or anyone else – about her pregnancy, eventually begins to consider abortion as a way of continuing to avoid the moment of revelation:

Sometimes Olivia found their situation amusing; most of the time it confounded her...The funny times were when she tried to imagine telling Griffin *we are going to have a baby*. These imagined conversations could not have been more gauche and awful if she had tried to write them for the movies. Other people came to mind to tell – her doctor, of course – her sister Peggy – one of the teachers at school. But no. The telling had always been set aside (17; ellipsis mine).

Her decision to give birth to the child is indicated to both the reader and the fetus – and, perhaps, to Olivia herself – by her spoken acknowledgement of her pregnancy to Griffin. Thus, the acts of communication and the revelation of truth are associated with the affirmation of life.

<sup>29</sup> Slade does not speak these words; rather, they are written on a piece of paper and read by Fabiana Holbach, the owner of the gallery. Slade's refusal to speak suggests an acknowledgement that the task of interpretation belongs to the viewer, not the creator of the work of art.

<sup>30</sup> Purvis is described as a “humanist psychiatrist” (450), and the struggle between the Reverend Curtis Purvis and his psychiatrist son is compared to that between “Michael and Lucifer” (450); consistent with the portrayal of “Lucy” in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, this “Lucifer” is open to the possibility of alternatives to the accepted version of “normality.”

<sup>31</sup> In an interview with Jeffrey Canton, Findley discusses his recurring character, Nicholas Fagan, and remarks that “[t]he interesting thing about Fagan is that he rises out of schizophrenia.” He continues:

When my aunt was in her mid-teens, at a point where her schizophrenia was not yet apparent but was beginning to emerge, she started writing secretly, and Nicholas Fagan was the name she called herself. It was not until her thirties that her schizophrenia fully manifested itself and she was declared a lunatic. But Nicholas Fagan was her great-grandfather who came to Canada in the 1840s from Dublin and was in many ways a kind of literary figure who wrote in journals and things. Well, in turn, I seized on him as a sort of tribute to her (Canton 6).

<sup>32</sup> Findley, himself, is an intertext in his novel. He is Marlow’s “Patient Findley” – who compares the task of the novelist to that of the psychiatrist: “We’re both trying to figure out what makes the human race tick” (202). He is also Fabiana’s “writing friend” who comments on the artist’s representation of his world:

My writing friend has looked in the mirror and what he sees is the whole world staring back. And he has the gall to say: *that is not me – it’s you*. He claims he is looking for someone else. Just like Julian Slade. Just like Amedeo Modigliani. *Look at you!* these fellows say. *Look – I saw you! There you are!* (341)

### Notes to Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Hooker Winslow’s cats engage in the indiscriminate slaughter of birds and mice, a “natural” violence which is contrasted with the death-by-technology of Clementine, who is crushed under the wheels of Gilbert’s car.

<sup>2</sup> The motif of the kitchen table brain surgery which kills Lizzie Wyatt is repeated in *Headhunter*. In that novel, Marlow’s house has an occupant of whom only Lilah is aware: a young boy who “had died on the kitchen table – *killed by a surgeon* who had tried and failed to cut away a tumour from his brain” (216; my emphasis). The repetition of this

horrific example of the violent intrusion of medical “expertise” into the “innocent” human body, and the subsequent failure of medical intervention to “cure” human suffering, amounts to a scathing critique by Findley of the medical establishment.

<sup>3</sup> According to Fussell, any writer who contrasts pastoral images with those of war runs the “terrible risk of fleeing into calendar art sentiments,” a term which he illustrates with the following bit of doggerel: “The roses round the door/ Makes me love mother more” (Fussell 269).

<sup>4</sup> The scepticism of Findley’s novels is contradicted to a certain extent by his tendency – revealed in interviews – to romanticize his characters’ actions, and even to overlook his characters’ complicity with fascist ideology; here, I am thinking primarily of his comments regarding Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Meyer and O’Riordan 49) and Ruth Damarosch (Meyer and O’Riordan 50, Summers 105-6).

<sup>5</sup> Donna Pennee similarly recognizes the impossibility of advocating irrationality without resorting to the construction of yet another rational system. She writes: “The dilemma becomes, then, how does one advocate the irrational, or that which defies a rational world view...without advocating that which would itself become a system? What is the gesture that can embrace difference but not deny difference its power?”(104; my ellipsis).

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