

WITNESS TO THE MAD CITY ASYLUMS  
COMPOSING THE SELF IN EARLY COLD WAR  
MADHOUSE LITERATURE

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate  
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## Abstract

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“Witness to the Mad City Asylums” examines a wide range of autobiographical and biographical texts—fictional, nonfictional, and poetic—written by and about women and men who were institutionalized as “mad” in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. Placing emphasis on contemporary discourses of sex/uality, marriage, family, and psychiatry, the project closely considers the generic, institutional, and cultural forms within which new kinds of literature take shape. It focuses, for instance, on the appearance of several new subgenres of “madhouse literature” in the texts of mostly noncanonical writers, including Mary Jane Ward, Fritz Peters, Paul and Marie Hackett, Carl Solomon, and Allen Ginsberg. These writers adopt a variety of literary strategies in order to resist the notion of identity as self-contained, a resistance that is particularly evident in their in/ability to form interpersonal bonds, blur the worlds inside and outside the madhouse, and incorporate or exclude the perspectives of their fellow patients, family members, and hospital staff. They also evade the demands of linguistic and literary conventions and prevailing scientific and popular psychiatric discourses by creating a distance between their “sane” and “mad” selves which enables them to write with the authority of a (former) mental patient without being regarded as an unreliable “madman.”

By destabilizing binaries such as in/sanity, writer/subject, self/other, and inside/outside the mental institution, multiplications of the self in these texts suggest productive new readings of categories of identity and difference in and beyond madhouse literature. In closely examining this body of texts, it becomes possible to recuperate an important chapter in the history of twentieth-century literature and culture.

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## Introduction

My dissertation examines autobiographical and biographical texts written by and about women and men who were institutionalized as “mad” in the United States between 1940 and 1960. I map the emergence of several emerging subgenres of “madhouse literature” at a time when the population of mental patients in the U.S. had reached its peak and therapeutic practices such as lobotomy and shock therapies were most widely used.<sup>1</sup> Bearing in mind that representations of madness reflect the societal attitudes of the eras in which they are composed, I explore how the generic and formal choices of madhouse writers facilitate or thwart their attempts to challenge the authority of contemporary scientific and popular psychiatric discourses. This approach has enabled me to consider how we might read the historically specific modes of mental health dynamics to which texts bear witness. I am particularly interested in examining the various rhetorical and poetic strategies that writers employ to evade rigid categories of identity, including the insidious notion that psychiatric diagnoses determine identity.

The printed spectacle created by madhouse literature represents a two-fold process of subjectivization in which writers simultaneously construct their subjectivity and enable their own subjection. These texts play a conspicuous part in the creation of a system of knowledge that subjects as they give rise to an intricate production of acts and definitions via the organization, codification, normalization, and naming of madhouse writers, their fellow patients, staff, and those who reside outside the hospital. Generic conventions and social values which are largely determined by contemporary psychiatric discourse shape this system of knowledge. Even the most avant-garde madhouse writers find that they are

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<sup>1</sup> There were more than 560,000 patients in state and county mental hospitals in the U.S. at the end of 1955. See Gerald Grob, *From Asylum to Community*, 260. Insulin Shock therapy, lobotomy, and electroshock therapy were respectively introduced in 1933, 1936, and 1937.

regularly deprived of a language with which they can articulate their victimization or plot their escape. As Marta Caminero-Santangelo suggests, “any counternarrative must strategically begin with the space opened by existing discourse and must work to reveal the fundamental assumptions and ‘givens’ which are simultaneously revealed and obscured by such discourse.”<sup>2</sup> Madhouse texts that attempt to deviate from generic norms are almost always couched in the very terms and adopt the same forms as the systems of thought that they attempt to disrupt or defy. A writer’s decision to use a particular genre or form can only bring about momentary freedom from a variety of literary and linguistic limitations. For that reason, I do not regard the words of madhouse writers as authentic or attempt to determine their mental health through a probing analysis of their texts. Instead, I call attention to the ways in which these texts are shaped by their experiences as mental patients and the generic expectations of madhouse literature.

Since madhouse writers must conform to some degree to prevailing generic and institutional norms in order to establish a “sane” identity from which they can describe the events of their past, such as providing readers with the details of their recovery and cure or adopting their doctors’ view of them as mad, I consider all representations of in/sanity, reality/delusion and ambiguity/certainty in madhouse texts as potential literary strategies that writers employ to authorize their stories. These strategies were essential to writers in the increasingly therapeutic culture of the U.S. during the early Cold War, a time during which the canonization of madhouse texts allowed for standardized narratives of the experience of madness and mental institutions to be impressed on the minds of the reading public. Among other things, reader expectations were informed by the availability of an increasing number and variety of madhouse texts, which included

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<sup>2</sup> Marta Caminero-Santangelo, *The Madwoman Can’t Speak*, 25-26.

autobiographies, novels, newspaper and magazine articles, films, and television shows.<sup>3</sup>

The familiarity of readers with generic and institutional norms compelled writers to portray the madhouse with some degree of accuracy and to produce narratives that included descriptions of their diagnoses, institutionalization, recovery, cure, and release.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, readers typically define madhouse writers in broad categories like “madman” and “psychopath,” as well as more specific ones like “maniac” and “schizophrenic,” and then search their texts for evidence of their in/sanity. Madhouse writers find themselves in this double bind because their decision to write about madness requires them to identify themselves as (former) mental patients. The generic limitations within which these writers find themselves prompt me to ask, how can writers who have been labeled “mad” write authoritatively if they are writing about a subject that disqualifies their words in advance? How do their texts anticipate readers who paradoxically consider their texts as evidence of their experience in the madhouse while regarding them as “madmen” who are fundamentally unreliable sources of information?

As madness might be best described as a state of consciousness which is either not guided by reason or which is misguided by unreason, what happens to the indeterminate or uncertain nature of one’s “mad” memories or thoughts when they are forced to

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<sup>3</sup> These texts include Charles Jackson’s novel *The Lost Weekend* (1944), part of which takes place on the alcoholic ward of a mental hospital, and the film by the same title which was based on Jackson’s novel (1945); Albert Deutsch’s *The Mentally Ill in America* (1938) and his daily column for the newspaper *PM* in the 1940s that focused on the mistreatment of mental patients. Deutsch later published some of these articles in *The Shame of the States* (1948), in which he offered a harsh critique of state mental hospitals; Albert Maisel’s “Bedlam 1946: Most U.S. Mental Hospitals are a Shame and a Disgrace” in the May 6, 1946 issue of *Life Magazine*; mystery shows on television whose “favorite device,” according to Marie Hackett in *The Cliff’s Edge*, “is to solve the mystery by blaming some escaped lunatic or to have the character go mad” (79); and magazines like *Redbook* in which readers were encouraged to diagnose the psychiatric disorder of women and men whose problems are detailed in a section entitled “Psychologist’s Casebook.”

<sup>4</sup> My dissertation concludes with an analysis of the works of Allen Ginsberg and Carl Solomon, whose generic and formal choices enable them to escape from the confines of this standardized narrative much more successfully than the other writers I discuss.

conform to literary genres and forms? The composition of madness into a coherent (i.e. reasonable/reasoned) whole seems to signal the erasure of the very madness that is being described. That is, “rational” (organized, coherent) accounts of madness tend to erase “essential” aspects of the experience of madness, such as its irrationality and its escape from “proper” social forms. The paradox that writing about madness brings about its erasure leads me to ask if certain literary genres, forms, or perspectives grant more flexibility than others because they are more “adapted” to the expression of non-rational emotional states and thus allow writers to evade the demands of linguistic and literary conventions, all of which necessitate some degree of coherence. While the writers I discuss adhere to the demands of some of these conventions, such as identifying incidents in their past as symptomatic of their madness, they also consistently frustrate the dual subjection of madhouse literature. For instance, they offer self-diagnoses that simultaneously echo and undermine or contradict those offered by their doctors, rarely apply unambiguous terms like “insane” or “schizophrenic” to themselves or others, and refuse to identify a definitive cause of their madness. They also refuse to illuminate fully their stories by interweaving throughout their texts different types of gaps that their readers cannot conclusively fill. Textual gaps enable madhouse writers to re/compose their memories of madness without bringing about their erasure. Ultimately, these unaccounted for spaces, which can include incidents that occurred before, during, and after their institutionalization, enable madhouse writers to move beyond textual coherence and resist interpretation.

Besides inserting gaps into their texts, the writers I discuss continue a long-established tradition of madhouse literature by multiplying their “I” in order to relate the story of a

not entirely distinct “other.” This process of multiplication grants them an authority similar to that which is bestowed on autobiographers when they distance themselves from the personal perspective. Paul de Man refers to this ability as the “doubleness of specularity” (922),<sup>5</sup> a mirror-like quality that facilitates a division in the text between the narrator and subject which enables the former to step outside of her/himself in the moment of remembrance and document that moment in the text. The recurrence of this “I” multiplication in madhouse texts suggests that we should always “interpret autobiography as a re-presentation, that is, a structuring of events, motives, and so on in an effort to position one’s story within a discourse of truth and identity—in short, as an attempt to authorize the autobiography.”<sup>6</sup> This multiplication of the “I” grants writers the authority to relate their experiences with madness without unambiguously defining themselves as “insane,” typically by establishing a temporal distance between a “mad” self in the past and a “sane” self in the present. Another standard feature of twentieth-century madhouse literature is the multiplication of the “I” that arises as numerous versions of the central character emerge in the text. The difference between these two types of multiplication is that the former posits two discrete “I’s” whereas the latter signals a continual procession of selves over the course of the narrative.<sup>7</sup> While these methods of multiplication are idiosyncratic, not only do they occur simultaneously throughout the text, but the latter is necessary for the former to come into being. In fact, the interweaving of the two generates a series of complementary, albeit often

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<sup>5</sup> Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” *MLN* 94.5 (Dec. 1979): 919-930.

<sup>6</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, 122.

<sup>7</sup> Just as both aspects of the multiplied “I” represent a mirror image (however distorted) of the other “I,” in the procession of “I’s” the former versions of the self are always present to some degree in later ones.

contradictory, perspectives that destabilize binaries such as sanity/insanity, inside/outside, past/present, and fact/fiction.

Notable examples of madhouse writers who have multiplied their “I” prior to the mid-twentieth century include Elizabeth Packard, who communalizes her “I” by publishing the stories of her fellow mental patients alongside her own, including the autobiography of a fellow patient named Sophie Olsen. In doing so, she constructs an anthology of “I’s” that “provide[s] complementary, alternative visions that rarely duplicate Packard’s story but help create a multi-voiced narrative about life within the asylum.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, “[h]er stories of other inmates work against the perception that those labeled insane are undifferentiated in their lack of subjectivity.”<sup>9</sup> Whereas Packard’s multiplication suggests a communal “I,” other madhouse writers multiply the “I” in order to create auto/biographical divisions that isolate them within the madhouse. Clifford Beers, for instance, doubles his “I” in order to position himself as a reliable source of information whose sanity has never been in doubt. He describes an intrapersonal “mental civil war” that takes place between a rational “I” and an “unnatural self.” This war is defined by a series of victories by the external, irrational part of Beers until his rational “I” emerges triumphant.<sup>10</sup>

While two of the writers central to this study, Mary Jane Ward and Fritz Peters, distance themselves from their former “mad” selves by writing autobiographical novels, their respective use of the third- and first-person perspective facilitates different types of

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<sup>8</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 28. Wood points out that Olsen’s narrative was incorporated in “a later edition of [Packard’s] autobiography, *Modern Persecution*.” It “appears in the appendix of the first edition,” which was originally published in 1868 as *The Prisoner’s Hidden Life; or, Insane Asylums Unveiled* (28).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 48.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford Beers, *A Mind That Found Itself* (1908), 1. Beers founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene in 1909, shortly after his release from the madhouse.

“I” multiplication. Even though Ward’s employment of the third-person perspective in *The Snake Pit* further distances her from her protagonist, Virginia Cunningham, she fashions an anthology of “I’s” similar to Packard’s via a complicated interweaving of personal pronouns that causes “I,” “you,” and “she” to blur. In contrast to Ward’s inclusive multi-perspective, Peters’s narrator-less first-person perspective in *The World Next Door* bestows on his protagonist, David Mitchell, what I refer to as a blind “I/eye” that resists being multiplied until the end of the novel. David overcomes this isolated perspective, which makes him a mere expression of the madhouse, only after his bonds with other patients allow him to recognize that his identity is the effect of a contingent set of relations. Paul and Marie Hackett’s collaborative composition of their respective autobiographies, *The Cardboard Giants* (1952) and *The Cliff’s Edge* (1954), which I also treat at length in the dissertation, enables them to multiply their stories in a number of ways. Most importantly, they compose two distinct versions of Paul; namely, a “sane,” God-fearing Paul who is Marie’s husband and the father of her children, and a “mad,” godless Paul who is a criminal and adulterer. And as I show in the final section of the dissertation, Allen Ginsberg multiplies his “I” in *Howl* (1956) by using the relative pronoun “who” to distance himself from and ally himself with the all-inclusive “mad generation.” Indeed, throughout their texts, Ginsberg and Carl Solomon destabilize the binary self/other more radically than the other writers I discuss by consistently depicting madness and identity as essentially fluid and contradictory.

A number of works on the history of madness are indispensable to a critical study of the literature of madness. Perhaps the most important text of this type is Michel

Foucault's *History of Madness* (1961), which draws attention to the impermanence of popular and scientific discourses that shape cultural understandings of madness.

Similarly, Roy Porter's *A Social History of Madness* (1987) emphasizes the language, historical circumstances, and cultural attitudes that pertain to questions of in/sanity during various time periods. In the first half of the twentieth century, Mary Elene Wood notes that "the mental hygiene movement stressed that mental illness could be prevented by active attention to laws of mental health, laws promoted by experts who increasingly concerned themselves with the healthy as well as the sick."<sup>11</sup> Echoing Beers and other mental hygiene advocates, asylum autobiographers such as Jane Hillyer and Marian King petition for the increased financial support of preventative measures and aftercare services for all Americans.<sup>12</sup> Among other things, such intense scrutiny of the mental health of the general public led to the psychological examination of over fifteen million men during WWII, two and a half million of whom were deemed mentally unfit for military service.<sup>13</sup> As one might expect, the extension of the jurisdiction of psychiatric professionals into the most intimate aspects of people's personal lives coincided with a rapid increase in mental patient population in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, each of the writers I discuss indicates that people were often institutionalized, to

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<sup>11</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 127.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Hillyer, *Reluctantly Told* (1926). Marian King, *The Recovery of Myself* (1931).

<sup>13</sup> See Ian Dowbiggin, *The Quest for Mental Health*, 135-36. These men were rejected for numerous reasons, including their perceived educational, psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems. For an excellent discussion of the rejection of homosexuals from military service in WWII, see Allan Bérubé's *Coming Out Under Fire*, 8-34. Also see Frank L. Wright's *Out of Sight Out of Mind* (1947). Wright, a conscientious objector who worked in a mental hospital during WWII in lieu of military service, compiled myriad harrowing accounts of life inside mental hospitals from across the U.S. Nonetheless, he ultimately celebrates the "amazing strides" of psychiatry (135) and calls for the increased support of the mental hygiene movement due to what he considers the detrimental effects of mental illness on military and industrial productivity in the U.S.

borrow Carl Solomon's words, "for the most absurd of reasons: for spending hours at a time in the family shower, for plotting to kill a soldier, for hurling refuse at a lecturer."<sup>14</sup>

Feminist scholars have often attended to the relationships that exist between gender roles and cultural constructions of madness. Major works in this field that focus on the history of madness and/or the literature of madness include Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1972), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985), and Jane Ussher's *Women's Madness* (1991). The works in this tradition that have been most important to my project are Wood's *The Writing on the Wall* (1994) and Marta Caminero-Santangelo's *The Madwoman Can't Speak* (1998). Wood's focus on the autobiographies of women institutionalized as "mad" in the U.S. from 1868-1932 is characterized by a double move: she reads madhouse texts as the products of individual women *and* as the products of women with distinct relations to discourses such as reason, motherhood, race, and class. Rather than rely on the binary "asylum world/outside world," she demonstrates that a flow of ideas constantly travels in both directions because the line between these worlds is less clear than it appears. Madhouses, in other words, "are institutions whose practices feed and are fed by ideologies and practices in the 'outside world.' [...] The players in the asylum world act out the social, medical and legal belief systems of the larger society" (21-22).

Caminero-Santangelo's work on women writers in the U.S. post-WWII is noteworthy in part because she points out the potential danger posed by feminist critics and theorists who celebrate the liberatory power of madness. She rejects the notion that madness can provide women with ways to free themselves from oppressive discourses, suggesting that

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<sup>14</sup> Carl Solomon, *Mishaps Perhaps*, 38.

no representation or examination of madness can disrupt an oppressive social order. Caminero-Santangelo contends that madness is antithetical to the collective action that defines feminism. Consequently, she argues that madhouse texts “all ultimately point toward the impossibility of political solidarity among the mad” (24). While the degree of patient solidarity to which Caminero-Santangelo refers is not the norm in madhouse texts, writers’ generic and formal choices ultimately determine their ability to form interpersonal and textual unions with their fellow patients. Like the double bind in which writers place themselves when they identify themselves as (former) mental patients in order to tell their stories, the communal perspective simultaneously enables writers to access the memory and knowledge of their peers and associates them with others who have been institutionalized as “mad.” Thus, even though the communal perspective is circumscribed by madhouse policies that divide, define, and disorient mental patients, it is essential to madhouse writers because it allows them to write about their experiences without commenting directly on their own in/sanity.

Communal bonds play an increasingly central role in each successive chapter of my dissertation. While Virginia Cunningham in Ward’s *Snake Pit* is unable to form the type of alliances with her fellow patients to which Caminero-Santangelo refers, she does suggest that alliances between mental patients are both possible and meaningful. Early in the novel, for instance, Virginia relies on the communal perspective to overcome her isolation and confusion in the madhouse. As in many other madhouse texts, the communal perspective not only informs Virginia’s decisions throughout the novel, but it also shields her and others from madness by excluding patients who have been labeled “truly insane.” The communal perspective plays a more central role in the formation of

identity in the other texts I discuss. In Peters's *The World Next Door*, David Mitchell is able to participate in his own life story only after he recognizes himself as an "other," in others, and as a part of a "special company" (336). He recognizes the necessity of the communal perspective after he develops a bond with a fellow patient that is based on reciprocity and love. Apart from excluding the "truly insane," David's "I" also resists communalization at points when in/sanity and sex/uality are linked in the novel. Unlike Ward's and Peters's novels, the communal perspective appears both inside and outside the madhouse in the works of the Hacketts, Ginsberg, and Solomon. In *The Cardboard Giants*, for example, Paul Hackett orally composes a play with his fellow patients in which they undermine the expertise of their madhouse doctors. They also acknowledge that their chance to be released from the madhouse and continue living at home depends on the behavior of current and former mental patients who live inside and outside the madhouse. After Paul is released, he forms a "Psychotics Club" with his fellow (former) patients which meets in the Hackett home on a weekly basis. Unlike Ward, Peters, and the Hacketts, Ginsberg and Solomon regularly signal the interdependence of identity by constructing an all-inclusive communal perspective that allows them to undermine binaries such as self/other, writer/subject, and in/sane. Ginsberg develops this perspective in *Howl*, for instance, by uniting with Solomon and other members of the "mad generation."<sup>15</sup>

Generic and formal choices determine the degree to which madhouse writers are able to resist the notion of identity as self-contained, a resistance that is most evident in their

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<sup>15</sup> In *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile*, Ginsberg writes that the mad generation includes anyone who lived through the "decade 1945-55" (142).

inclusion of the communal perspective. Fittingly, the beginning of the twentieth century signals a generic shift in madhouse literature which is characterized by the diminishing role of this perspective.<sup>16</sup> Mental institution reform was the primary focus of mid- to late nineteenth-century madhouse writers like Elizabeth Packard. Autobiographers like Packard suggest that any challenge to madhouse policies and the laws that uphold them requires them to look away from their own stories and form alliances with their fellow patients. Though madhouse texts at the beginning of the twentieth century occasionally gesture toward institutional reform, their primary focus is the psychological journey of individual patients. Like David Mitchell throughout much of *The World Next Door*, these writers silence themselves by focusing almost exclusively on their own stories. Moreover, unlike reform-oriented madhouse texts, whose writers tend to rebuff their doctors' attempts to co-opt their writing and write their stories, personal journey autobiographers often include introductions that are written by psychiatric professionals who attempt to shape how readers interpret their texts. Instead of challenging those who diagnose and institutionalize them, these writers often accept the language of madness, declare that mental institutions are essential, and adopt a psychiatric gaze with which they diagnose themselves, others, and their own "mad" writing.

Each of the texts I discuss reflects the extension of psychiatric discourse into the family home during the early Cold War. Prior to this era, marriage was unfeasible for madhouse writers after their institutionalization. Nineteenth-century writers like Packard, Smith, and Lathrop redefined, dissolved, or abandoned the idea of marriage.<sup>17</sup> The subject of marriage is almost never broached in the personal journey autobiographies of

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<sup>16</sup> See Wood, *Writing on the Wall*, 125.

<sup>17</sup> See Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 32-35, 43-45, 99, and 102. Likewise, at the end of Peters's *The World Next Door*, David Mitchell realizes that marriage is no longer a possibility.

Beers, Hillyer, and King. In contrast, marriage plays a central role in post-WWII madhouse literature, a shift that coincides with the high birth rate and low divorce rate of the post-WWII “baby boom.” Though each text I discuss suggests the interdependence of marriage and madness in the early Cold War, the link between the two is most evident in Paul and Marie Hackett’s texts. The Hacketts repeatedly contrast their bond with the marriages of other mental patients that seemed doomed to fail. They also suggest that the likelihood that patients will be released and/or allowed to remain outside the madhouse depends on the success of their marriages and those of their fellow patients. Significantly, they imply that marriages fail as a result of the personality flaws and deviant behavior of individuals who have transgressed the marriage bond and/or social norms. The issues that destroy the marriages and minds of mental patients in the Hacketts’ texts include infidelity, childlessness, homosexuality, and interracial marriage. In contrast, Paul’s marriage to Marie, the soundness of which is reaffirmed with the birth of their fourth child a year after the publication of his autobiography, helps him overcome his madness, secure his release from the madhouse, and maintain his sanity.

Sexuality was also increasingly identified as a potential cause of madness in twentieth-century madhouse texts. For instance, Marian King explains that she had “a real liking for an older girl” (31) and is repulsed by the affections of boys (39-40). Her doctor then has her fill out a form that includes “a number of questions, which seemed to [her] useless, pertaining to sex” (72). These questions include, “Did you ever love a woman? Do you like men? [and] Which do you like better, men or women?” (71). Jane Hillyer regards her affection for another woman as symptomatic of her madness after her male cousin identifies it as deviant. She writes, “The fumes of distorted emotionalism, the

forerunners of madness, were pouring forth steadily and insidiously” (39). Similarly, Fritz Peters suggests the degree to which madness and homosexuality were linked in the early Cold War. During an interview with a Vocational Therapist, for instance, David Mitchell is repeatedly questioned about his homosexuality. Though he acknowledges that he has had sex with another man, he refuses to define himself or be defined as a homosexual. Later in *The World Next Door*, however, he labels a fellow patient a “homo” (244), thus revealing one of the limits of the communal perspective in the novel.

In Chapter I, “She is, I am, You are One of Them: The Multi-Perspective Madhouse in Mary Jane Ward’s *The Snake Pit*,” I argue that Ward’s third-person perspective autobiographical novel is largely defined by a complicated interweaving of “persons” or perspectives that continually reposition and blur the identities of Ward, the novel’s protagonist, Virginia Cunningham, the narrator, and the reader. Ward exploits the dual nature of this genre, in which the writer relates the story of a not entirely distinct “other,” to simultaneously distance herself from and remain the mirror image of the “mad” protagonist. The novel’s multi-perspective enables Ward to tell her story from the perspective of someone who has intimate knowledge of life as a mental patient while distancing herself from the madhouse. Thus, she can evade the skepticism to which readers frequently subject the lives and narratives of (former) “madwomen” and “madmen.” Though Virginia is always the figure around whom the narrative develops, Ward’s choice of genre and narrative strategies reveals a multiform main character that is comprised of the madhouse and everyone who resides within it. This de-centered or de-individualized “hero” is a product of the novel’s ever-mobile multi-perspective, which is

shaped by the institutional, communal, and personal perspectives with which Ward presents the mental institution as it subjects and disciplines patients, staff, and those who reside outside its walls.

In Chapter 2, “‘And Where You Are Is Where You Are Not’: The Communalization of the ‘I’ in Fritz Peters’s *The World Next Door*,” I focus on Peters’s use of the first-person perspective in his autobiographical madhouse novel. Even though Peters claims that his autobiographical novel is merely “based on actual experience” and that “[a]ll of the names and characters ... are fictitious,”<sup>18</sup> very little in this text distinguishes it from a typical asylum autobiography. I focus on the gradual transition of Peters’s protagonist, David Mitchell, from an alienated and alienating first-person perspective to a communal perspective that allows him to plot himself into the action of the mental hospital and participate in the construction of his own story. The novel’s narrow perspective, which is further constricted due to its lack of a narrator, prevents Peters from simultaneously disassociating himself from and remaining the mirror image of his “mad” protagonist and frustrates the reader’s attempts to identify with him. Indeed, David’s perspective distances him from other mental patients, his mother, and himself to such a degree at times that he becomes a mere expression of the madhouse. David overcomes this alienating perspective late in the novel when he learns to rely on and identify with his fellow patients.

In Chapter 3, “‘But Now You’ll See Yourself as I See You’: The Collaborative Composition of Sanity and Marriage in Paul Hackett’s *The Cardboard Giants* and Marie Hackett’s *The Cliff’s Edge*,” I demonstrate that the Hacketts’ auto/biographies contain a range of literal and figurative instances of dual or multiple authorship, which entitles the

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<sup>18</sup> Fritz Peters, *The World Next Door*. Authorized abridgement. (New York: Signet, 1950), n.p.

reader to interpret any part of the text as the product of collaboration. As they shift between the mental institution and the family home, the Hacketts construct a double-voiced narrative that echoes and undermines psychiatric discourse and demonstrates the interdependence of marriage and in/sanity. The metaphor that frames this chapter is the collaborative text as a marriage contract. This figure primarily applies to the marriage of Paul and Marie Hackett, though it also refers to Paul's varying degrees of re/union with his "sane" self, his fellow patients, and others. *The Cardboard Giants* is most conspicuously a collaborative text when it is read in tandem with *The Cliff's Edge*, Marie's autobiographical account of the distress she experiences during and after Paul's institutionalization. Her book also details the collaborative production of *The Cardboard Giants*, a shared authorship that includes Paul, Marie, Paul's psychotherapist, and a nun and priest from the Hacketts' church. Marie's account suggests that the success of this necessarily communal undertaking is essential to the maintenance of her and Paul's marital and mental health. In order to authorize their autobiographies, they constantly undermine the madhouse's version of Paul's story by erasing, obscuring, and containing his madness, often by attributing it to "mad" Paul.

In Chapter 4, "'(Mad as You) – (Sanity a Trick of Agreement)': Allen Ginsberg's and Carl Solomon's Notes Toward Auto/biography," I examine the contours of auto/biographical identity that take shape in and between the auto/biographical texts of Ginsberg and Solomon. Much of their writings form part of a literary dialogue that continued for decades after their initial encounter at New York State Psychiatric Institute in 1949. This encounter was first printed in Ginsberg's poem *Howl*, which contains biographical sketches of his mother, Naomi, and Solomon, the poem's dedicatee,

inspiration, and co-author. The Ginsberg-Solomon exchange continued for decades in interviews, poems, and short prose pieces. Apart from *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), these texts include Solomon's *Mishaps Perhaps* (1966), *More Mishaps* (1968), and *Emergency Messages* (1989), and annotations from both writers in Ginsberg's *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile* (1986). Ginsberg's and Solomon's texts consistently undermine binaries such as in/sane, self/other, writer/subject, and inside/outside the madhouse by refusing to provide coherent, consistent, and comprehensive accounts of madness. For instance, Ginsberg's conflation of his identity with Solomon's, Naomi's, and others' throughout *Howl* frustrates readers' attempts to attribute the experiences he describes to any one person. In the last part of this chapter, I explore the ways in which *Kaddish* (1961), Ginsberg's auto/biographical portrait of his mother and himself, extends *Howl*. In contrast to her haunting presence in the earlier poem, Naomi emerges as Ginsberg's muse, co-author, subject, and double in *Kaddish*.

## Chapter 1

### *She is, I am, You are One of Them*

#### The Multi-Perspective Madhouse in Mary Jane Ward's *The Snake Pit*<sup>1</sup>

##### I. The Four Faces of Virginia Cunningham<sup>2</sup>

Published nearly five years after her release from Rockland State Hospital in Orangeburg, New York, Mary Jane Ward's autobiographical novel *The Snake Pit* (1946) signals the appearance of a new subgenre of madhouse literature in which the "sane" writer can simultaneously disassociate herself from and remain the mirror image of the "mad" protagonist.<sup>3</sup> Ward exploits the dual nature of this genre, in which the writer relates the story of a not entirely distinct "other," by composing a narrative that is largely defined by a complicated interweaving of "persons" or perspectives that continually reposition and blur the identities of Ward, the novel's protagonist, Virginia Cunningham, the narrator, and the reader. This multi-perspective enables Ward to occupy ostensibly discrete positions from which she can speak with the authority of an expert who has intimate knowledge of being confined in a madhouse while maintaining the distance of an observer who can evade the skepticism to which the lives and narratives of (former) "madwomen" and "madmen" are routinely subjected. Ultimately, Ward's choice of genre and narrative strategies makes the mental institution, Juniper Hill, and all those within its

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Jane Ward's *The Snake Pit* was published in a variety of forms and translated into several languages. An instant best seller, it sold more than a million copies. In the novel's first year of publication, it was selected for the Book-of-the-Month Club, condensed in *Reader's Digest*, and partly reprinted in *Harper's Bazaar*. In addition, Anatole Litvak's screen adaptation of *The Snake Pit* was one of the most popular films in 1948.

<sup>2</sup> This subtitle is a play on Corbett L. Thigpen's and Hervey M. Cleckley's *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), a case-study that explores the Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) of Eve White, the pseudonym of a woman named Chris Costner Sizemore. Twenty years later Sizemore added the "fourth face" to Thigpen's and Cleckley's book when she revealed her identity in *I'm Eve* (1977). The identities that constitute the fourfold face of Virginia Stuart Cunningham, the protagonist of *The Snake Pit*, include those of Virginia, Mary Jane Ward, the narrator, and the reader.

<sup>3</sup> Ward spent eight months as a mental patient at Rockland State Hospital in 1941.

walls the “true” main character of *The Snake Pit* even though Virginia is always the figure around whom the narrative develops. The novel’s de-centered or de-individualized “hero” is a product of an ever-mobile multi-perspective which is shaped by institutional, communal, and personal perspectives with which Ward presents the mental institution as it subjects and disciplines patients, staff, and those who reside outside its walls.

Ward’s employment of a constantly shifting perspective enables her to distance herself from Virginia, and thus avoid the dual subjection typical of madhouse literature in which writers simultaneously construct their subjectivity and bring about their own subjection. She profoundly affects the ways in which the narrative “interacts with the experience [of madness] that struggles against being contained and defined by conventions, both literary and medical.”<sup>4</sup> Ward’s evasions of and adherences to these conventions were increasingly necessary “in a period when the writing of mentally ill ‘patients’ was itself becoming an object of analysis for medical professionals.”<sup>5</sup> Her attempts to evade these codifications by refusing to fully illuminate and individualize Virginia’s experience with madness increase the fragmentary nature of the novel as she continually, though never conclusively, maps the developments of Virginia’s story from indirect angles made possible by the novel’s multi-perspective. As a result, Ward’s rendering of Virginia lacks the closure typical of both the asylum autobiography and the case study: revelations of Virginia’s “case” that seem to suggest her status as a coherent and legible subject are almost always accompanied by textual gaps that undermine coherence. Ward’s interweaving of these revelations and gaps suggests “the necessity of reconceiving the

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<sup>4</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 19. Indeed, Ward points out that Elizabeth Packard regarded the “personal narrative is a kind of science” in which “data” is “collected and reported” (39).

theoretical concept of narrative identity under the signs of the momentary and fragmentary” (75).<sup>6</sup>

Though it appears that Ward continually attempts to separate herself from her always incomplete protagonist, the distance between them seems untenable from the opening pages of the book. In fact, in her comments on the dust jacket Ward alludes to an undefined “experience” that “started [her] off on *The Snake Pit*,” which she initially had wanted to be “a factual book about a *certain* type of hospital” (emphasis in original). Though it appears Ward wants to distinguish herself from her mad protagonist with this note to the reader, her use of ambiguous language suggests that the experience to which she refers must have been her own institutionalization in a mental hospital. Indeed, passages such as this one provide evidence for such an interpretation even if the reader had previously thought of Virginia as an entirely fictitious character. Ward’s attempt to distance herself from Virginia also suggests that she is not in control of the narrative: “before I’d gone more than two paragraphs, I realized I was writing about a place that existed only in the mind of my protagonist. The photographic possibilities were immediately ruined by the fact that this character could not be depended on for accuracy. The resulting story, then, is not true.” It is not unusual, of course, for a writer to give credit to a character for an unexpected development in a story or to suggest that the story itself somehow “took over” and transformed the writer into a vessel who dictated and perhaps filtered whatever transmissions s/he received. Such claims are rarely made, however, by a writer attempting “to do a factual book,” unless s/he wishes to distance her/himself from her/his subject matter or point out the impossibility of depicting her/his

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<sup>6</sup> Brendan Stone, “Why Fiction Matters to Madness,” in *Narrative and Fiction. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, David Robinson, ed. (Huddersfield: U of Huddersfield P, 2008), 71-77.

chosen subject with “accuracy.” But Ward does not need to create this distance because the third-person perspective and fictional genre of her text already provide it. The fact that she stresses this distance suggests that this “place which only existed in the mind of her protagonist” can, perhaps should, be examined in terms of its “photographic possibilities.” That is, her assertion that *The Snake Pit* depicts a world of madness through a distorted lens and thus presents a “reality” that she did not shape and cannot authenticate suggests the truth of its fiction.

Nonetheless, the ways in which Ward distinguishes herself from Virginia on the dust jacket indicate the inherent limitations of personal experience and memory, suggesting that the view afforded by an insider’s perspective is always incomplete and unreliable. It is in this light that we should interpret Ward’s claims that the story is pure fantasy and that she lacks expert knowledge. Thus, even though she professes to be unaware of the existence of mental hospitals like Juniper Hill, she repeatedly demonstrates her familiarity with the architecture, bureaucracy, therapeutic devices, and types of patients who “peopled” the halls of similar institutions. She writes, “For all I know there may be dozens of institutions similar to the hospital in this book, but Juniper Hill, from tubs to tunnel, was built and peopled by a mind that was on vacation.” Despite Ward’s claim to ignorance regarding this subject matter, her intimate knowledge of the architecture of mental hospitals is evident in a passage in *The Snake Pit* which describes the aforementioned tunnel in a way that closely corresponds to contemporary accounts:

The tunnel was something for a horror story. There were lights but the pale glow they gave off was swallowed in the midnight pools between the lights. The

walls were cement patterned with cracks. Water seeped slowly from some of the wider cracks and on the uneven floor were puddles of dark water.

The tunnel was divided into two lanes. The dividing was some sort of heavy chicken wire and on the other side of it ladies scurried along like gray-blue rats.  
(212)

Compare Ward's description of Juniper Hill to Morton Hunt's factual account in *Mental Hospital* (1962):

“The over-all design of the buildings, with underground tunnels leading from wards to the central dining rooms, was worked out by a group of hospital superintendents who were thinking in terms of maximum security.” (54)<sup>7</sup>

Later, Hunt adds,

For the most part, in fact, the herdings to the dining rooms were conducted via dismal, ill-lighted underground tunnels to simplify the discipline problem and prevent escapes. Most patients wore shapeless gray and brown wool or cotton clothes, bought from the Department of Correction; though these were wretchedly ugly, they were highly practical, for in the throes of severe illness many psychotics would tear or soil their clothing. (70-71)

Many of Ward's readers would have been aware of the conditions in mental institutions due to an increasing number of texts published on the subject in the first half of the twentieth century. Virginia, however, insinuates that something is lacking in these texts: “I have read twelve books about mental hospitals but Juniper Hill, real or dreamed, never appeared in those works. Juniper Hill, one of the best in the country if not *the* best.

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<sup>7</sup> Morton Hunt, *Mental Hospital: A Vivid Insight into the World of the Mentally Disturbed* (1962). In this passage, Hunt is citing Dr. Brill, the director of Pilgrim State mental hospital in Brentwood, New York.

Preserve me from the worst” (104, emphasis in original). Ultimately, Ward’s effort to undermine Virginia’s credibility in her comments on the dust jacket actually grants her protagonist an agency that approaches her own: “With the exception of this unreliable witness, none of the characters of *The Snake Pit* ever existed in real life; to tell the truth they never quite existed even for Virginia. Nor did she, who might claim intentional resemblance to a living person, quite exist for herself during the period of her association with Juniper Hill.” The twisted parallel that Ward draws between herself and Virginia is like a Moebius strip that simultaneously separates and collapses the difference between her and “this unreliable witness [...] who might claim intentional resemblance” to her, a move that allows Ward to relate the story of a not entirely distinct “other,” and ultimately facilitates her multiplication of Virginia through a complicated interweaving of personal pronouns.

Evidence of the conflation of Ward and Virginia is also apparent in Ward’s description of Virginia’s pre-mental hospital life, which closely, though imprecisely, parallels the depiction of her own life on the novel’s dust jacket and in press releases which advertised its publication.<sup>8</sup> We learn, for instance, that Ward and Virginia are middle-aged women from Evanston, Illinois, who have published two novels and moved to New York City with their husbands.<sup>9</sup> Characteristic of the novel’s multi-perspective and Ward’s denials of accuracy and truth, even the things that distinguish author and character from one another are more similar than they first appear. For example, Ward’s and Virginia’s novels, respectively, *The Tree Has Roots* and *The Wax Apple*, and

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<sup>8</sup> The novel’s 1947 dust jacket suggests that Virginia is the author: “This is the story of Virginia Cunningham who has suffered so complete a nervous breakdown that she is out of her mind. It is the story of her slow and painful return to sanity, *told by herself*” (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> Ward describes Virginia as a writer at various points throughout the novel. See 11-13, 27, 32-33, 60, 69, 119-20, 249, 257, and 273.

*Afternoon of a Faun* and *A Little Night Music*, suggest that these writers would have little in common with one another. On the one hand, Ward's novels depict the everyday struggles of the working class during the Great Depression whereas Virginia's are named after Stéphane Mallarmé's erotic poem and a serenade by Mozart. Yet their choice of subject matter is not necessarily as different as these titles suggest. In fact, the possibility that they might write about similar topics surfaces early in the novel when the narrator initially identifies Virginia's surroundings and the reason she is there: "It was some sort of training school for underprivileged and delinquent girls and she had come to study Conditions" (24-25). A nurse's harsh treatment of the patients as they are herded back inside the hospital, a locked door, and a "cage-like porch" entrance soon convince her that a friend "has roped [her] into doing a prison novel" (27). Though she cannot tell if her fellow inmates are students or criminals, she positions herself as a writer who "will not betray these poor women" by writing about them (32).<sup>10</sup> Thus, at beginning of the novel we learn that, like Ward, Virginia sympathizes with and possibly even writes about the plight of the lower classes even if Ward's dust jacket comments and the third-person perspective distinguish them from one another.

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<sup>10</sup> Virginia's attitude toward the inmates at Juniper Hill, like the novel's multi-perspective, constantly shifts. Throughout the novel she views them from the perspective of an insider, outsider, or "in-between" (221). The first ellipsis in the following passage, which is in the original, marks the switch from the insider's to the outsider's perspective. The second ellipsis, which I inserted to shorten the passage, reverses this switch: "These poor women are stuck here until they get their diplomas or until they have served their time or whatever it is they are here about. It isn't right to spy on them. I cannot believe they are hardened criminals ... Well, that one directly across—she might be a lifer. I wonder if I jotted down the jargon. The wrong language would make the book a phony. Let me see, you say rap for sentence? Or rap for what you did to earn the sentence? [...] I'll tell the person who put me up to this that I will not do it. I will not betray these poor women" (32). The subject matter of Virginia's novels is also suggested in a later passage that implies that she is planning to write about Juniper Hill: "People used to say I had an imagination. Oh, Gin, what an imagination you have. They didn't say this so much after they read my writing. Why write about the sordid, they said. [...] Well, I shall try to remember Juniper Hill for a book and then they will say what an imagination you have, my dear. Don't you know modern mental hospitals aren't at all like your trumped-up Juniper Hill? [...] Everyone knows we don't treat our insane like cattle. They are so much happier with their own kind and they just play around like happy little children all day long" (104-05).

The third-person perspective of the autobiographical novel bestows upon Ward a degree of anonymity that enables her to avoid the stigmatizing label of madness and thus limits the possibility that a critical or medico-juridical body can use her novel as evidence of her insanity. But even if she selected this generic form to avoid being publicly objectified and categorized, the fact that any part of the novel might be about her invites the reader to engage in a probing analysis in order to separate fact from fiction. Indeed, she seems to encourage this scrutiny by repeatedly obscuring, omitting, and conflating her life story with that of her protagonist.<sup>11</sup> But Ward frustrates any such scrutiny as she evades the conventions of madhouse literature by representing Juniper Hill as an ever-emerging form, a continual revelation and extension of the novel's myriad perspectives. Like all writers, however, she is necessarily limited by the ways in which this genre has been codified as a tradition. Its definitions and limitations determine the "logic" or "sense" of each text with respect not only to the tradition of madhouse literature, but also with respect to related popular and scientific discourses. These generic and formal limitations are pre-determined by literary and cultural histories which function like pervasive memories. Roland Barthes suggests that, even as new forms begin to emerge as possibilities, writing

remains full of recollection of previous usage, for language is never innocent.

Writing is precisely this compromise between freedom and remembrance, it is this freedom which remembers and is free only in the gesture of choice, but is no longer so within duration. True, I can today select such and such mode of writing,

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<sup>11</sup> Ward's fear of being labeled as a former madwoman is evident in a line which, in keeping with her constant blurring of herself and Virginia, she uses her own first name: "Mary Someone. Silly Mary, they call her. Harmless graduate of an institution, but they call her Silly Mary. I would rather be Silly Virginia shut up than Silly Virginia at large" (52-53). Also see 241.

and in doing so assert my freedom, aspire to the freshness of novelty or to a tradition; but it is impossible to develop it within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even my own. A stubborn after-image, which comes from all the previous modes of writing and even from the past of my own, drowns the sound of my present words.<sup>12</sup>

While Ward is limited by the linguistic "recollection" or "remembrance" that gradually imprisons all writers, she casts doubt on the memorial aspect of language by stressing the narrator's and protagonist's inability to remember things they have already seen or experienced. Despite this forgetfulness, the narrative does accumulate meaning little by little, and thus Ward's "victory" over linguistic and narrative memory is always temporary. Her novel is not so radical that it rejects "duration" altogether, but her generic and perspectival "gesture[s] of choice" continually impede its progress as she interweaves textual amnesia and oblivion throughout her novel in order to promote narrative freedom and delay its imprisonment by the memory of genre and language.

Ward's portrayal of an always incomplete story and an amnesiac protagonist through multiple viewpoints differentiates *The Snake Pit* from earlier madhouse writings in which memory is used to authenticate both writers and texts. For instance, in *A Mind That Found Itself* (1908), Clifford Beers repeatedly stresses the authenticity of his autobiography by claiming he can remember nearly everything he experiences: "That one's memory may perform its function in the grip of Unreason itself is proved by the fact that my memory retains an impression, and an accurate one, of virtually everything that befell me." In fact, he claims that before he was hospitalized he possessed "an ordinary memory when it was not noticeably poor" (29). With his improved memory, on

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<sup>12</sup> *Writing Degree Zero*, 16-17.

the other hand, “impressions registered during earlier years became clearer,” and this clarity ultimately enabled him to write his book (72-73). He further authenticates his autobiography by including letters he received from William James. In one of them James writes, “[Your narrative] reads like fiction, but it is not fiction; and this I state emphatically, knowing how prone the uninitiated are to doubt the truthfulness of descriptions of abnormal mental processes” (204). Quite unlike Beers’s autobiography, Jane Hillyer’s *Reluctantly Told* (1926) opens with an interlude of amnesia and disorientation. Nonetheless, her memories begin to shape the text almost immediately: “The locked door recalled it all. I was soon the victim of a stinging swarm of inconsequent recollections which I could neither drive from me, nor ignore” (3). Not only is Hillyer’s autobiography inescapably governed by memories over which she has little control, but it is also introduced by a psychiatrist, Joseph Collins, who re-diagnoses her with “manic-depressive insanity,” as opposed to her doctor’s original diagnosis of dementia praecox. Collins argues that manic-depressive “attacks usually end in recovery and the individual as a rule has a keen recollection of *everything* that has transpired during the attack” (vii, emphasis added). In a similar vein, Hillyer writes, “there were periods of *complete* lucidity. I hated these almost as much as times of confusion, because then *I had to remember*” (24, emphasis added). These “short intervals of complete and painful lucidity” are not snuffed out entirely by the “dim twilight” of madness. Instead, “almost always there was a hint of the ‘watcher,’ the ‘censor’ left, just enough to gloat over the show, not enough to control or in any way size up the situation” (41). Despite Hillyer’s and Beers’s claims of total recall, the distinction between memory and artifice, as James’s letter indicates, was not readily apparent to “the uninitiated” reader, who

required a variety of authenticating documents to establish the truth-value of claims made in asylum autobiographies.

Ward's choice of genre makes it impossible to determine the degree to which *The Snake Pit* accurately represents her memories of Rockland State. Indeed, her fictionalization of these memories marks a new phase of madhouse literature that creates (or re-creates) her precursors;<sup>13</sup> that is, she blurs the line between remembrance and artifice in ways that make asylum autobiographers' past and future attempts to authenticate their experiences by distinguishing between the two appear somewhat fictitious. The artifice of asylum autobiographies and other madhouse writings that preceded *The Snake Pit* is particularly evident in the ways these writers employ the first-person perspective. As I have suggested in the Introduction, madhouse writers frequently multiply their "I" in order to authorize their texts. Similar to these earlier writers, Ward uses the multi-perspective to fashion her own anthology of "I's" and employs the third-person perspective to distinguish a "mad" "I" and her "sane" counterpart. In fact, due to Ward's rapid switching of perspective, Virginia has a multi-valence similar to what Geoffrey Hartman terms the "chameleon quality" of "I." He writes, "While 'I' has the semantic consistency of a name, being a pronoun backed by a noun (the name of autobiographer, biographer, or novelist), it is, at the same time, what linguists call a shifter, and allows the identity of the 'I' to vary with the (imagined) context of narration. Call it semantically opaque—like most proper names—but syntactically transparent."<sup>14</sup> Even though "Virginia" is a proper noun that refers to a particular character in the novel,

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<sup>13</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, 365.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *Scars of the Spirit*, 58. Also see Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure*, "Within the linguistic system, *I* does not refer to anyone. Its meaning in the system is the result of the distinctions between *I* and *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we* and *they*" (43, emphasis in original).

this name's meaning is contextual and variable. Virginia's chameleon quality is manifest in the ways that first-, second-, and third-person pronouns often simultaneously refer to her, the writer, the narrator, and the reader. As Susan Hubert points out in her analysis of *The Snake Pit*, "The relative pronouns of the reader, character, and narrator are ambiguous from the beginning of the novel."<sup>15</sup> In fact, Ward rarely maintains the first-, second-, or third-person viewpoint for a single page; the resulting interplay between these perspectives is reflected in Virginia's shifting "geography" and in/sanity, as well as the changing degree to which she is aware of her position and status in Juniper Hill. A crucial example of the novel's shifting perspective appears directly after Virginia speaks with Grace, a patient who had been helping a disoriented Virginia since the start of the novel. Virginia's reliance on Grace is emblematic of the communal perspective that arises in this place where the isolated inmate is often lost:

She and Grace went to a sort of dormitory. Grace got into one of the cots and Virginia got into the one next to Grace's. No one threw her out and so it must have been the right cot. She had put her bag under the bed but now she leaned over and dragged it out. It was getting too dark to read but she did not intend to try. She slipped one of [her husband] Robert's letters from the packet and put it under her pillow and then she felt safer. They are doing their best, but it will take more than formaldehyde.

Outside of the dormitory someone was screaming. The dormitory, like the toilet booths, had no door and so you heard things easily. Drowsily Virginia imagined running down the hall to rescue the screamer. But then there was quiet.

"Grace?"

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<sup>15</sup> *Questions of Power: The Politics of Women's Madness Narratives*, 83.

“Yes.”

“How long have we been here?”

“You mean in Three?”

“No, just here in general.”

“I came in January. You came around the first of February.”

February? I’d thought it was summer. “What month is this?”

“August.”

Just like that. August. February to August. No use trying to fool yourself now about this being a survey in the interests of an Important Novel by a Proletarian Writer.

Was my crime so great? (38-39)

The ambiguity of this passage is enhanced by the narrator’s use of tentative phrases (“a sort of” and “it must have been”), a textual uncertainty that is also evident in apparent misperceptions on the part of the narrator and Virginia which precede this passage. For instance, they refer to the hospital as a zoo, a reform school, and a prison, the nurses as guards, and paraldehyde as formaldehyde.<sup>16</sup> Their confusion can be read as an indication that the narrative unfolds in a continuous present in which the past is perpetually lost, or it can be interpreted as veiled criticism that equates mental hospitals with other types of institutions that cage, re-educate, surveil, discipline, poison, and otherwise dehumanize inmates who are often involuntarily institutionalized. Significantly, at the very moment that Virginia acknowledges she is an inmate, Ward employs the second-person pronouns “you” and “yourself,” which suggest a conflation of Virginia, the narrator, and the reader. Moreover, the penultimate line of this passage indicates that Virginia, the narrator, and

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<sup>16</sup> Paraldehyde is a hypnotic, sedative, and anticonvulsive medication.

perhaps even the reader have always been aware of her position and status at Juniper Hill. But this is not necessarily the case. One possible reading of Ward's use of the second-person "yourself" suggests that Virginia is telling herself that her actual status and position do not correspond to the fiction in which she has been dwelling. Virginia's knowledge of her position and status is also destabilized by the term "now," which can be understood as either "from now on" she cannot "fool [her]self," or she can not fool herself "right now," though she might be able to do so in the future. In other words, this "now" indicates a moment in which a revelation alters her perception in the present moment. Its effect on the future is unpredictable and on the past minimal, for *The Snake Pit* rarely looks backward.

A fundamental aspect of the novel is that what is revealed in the "now" is not automatically incorporated into Virginia's memory. Accordingly, she seems disoriented after being awakened by a nurse the morning after Grace's revelation. In a passage dominated by third-person pronouns, Virginia's exact location and status once again appear to be a mystery to her: "Who had got into the room? Stealthily she groped for Robert. I must put my hand over his mouth so he won't speak out. But the bed was narrow and she was alone. The room was dark but she saw pale shapes rising up. One of the shapes said her name and then she remembered that she was not at home. February to August." This passage suggests another type of perspectival shifting, as nearly every line indicates that Virginia simultaneously does and does not remember where she is. The only reason she would have "[s]tealthily groped for Robert" and tried to cover his mouth while alone on a narrow bed in a room full of people is because her memory is radically uncertain and transitory. This is another instance, like Grace's revelation of Virginia's

lost time, in which a fellow patient's words, in this case her name called out by an anonymous "pale shape," restore Virginia's memory. Both of these awakenings, each of which suggests the importance of a communal perspective, signal turning points in the novel that firmly establish Virginia as one among many mental patients.

Another possible reading of this passage is that the narrator is the "I" who must silence Virginia's husband so that the story can unfold moment by moment. The outside perspective of Robert and others, whose knowledge could potentially disrupt the narrative's fragmented perspective, must remain largely silent. For the most part, when he appears in the novel, Robert either parrots Virginia's doctor or is a loving husband who seems as helpless and frustrated as his wife. Without an outside or omniscient perspective, the text's memory tends to fade with each passing line as the narrative develops in the continuously unfolding present.<sup>17</sup> In fact, this ongoing process occurs in the past tense and thus suggests a "continuous past," a lost time in which events will never reach an endpoint and cannot be normalized. Thus, *Juniper Hill*, which Ward tells us "only existed in the mind of [her] protagonist," surfaces as a text that "can never be grasped as a whole—only as a series of changing viewpoints, each one restricted in itself and so necessitating further perspectives."<sup>18</sup>

Ward's manipulation of the "I-she" dyad is in part a product of her choice of genre, the first-person perspective expressing the autobiographical element and the third-person

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<sup>17</sup> In *Gertrude Stein: the Language that Rises*, Ulla Dydo and William Rice write that for Stein "The continuous present initially concerns narrative but later becomes an aspect of description. In discussing her early work on time, Stein implies that the continuous present in narration is realized by 'using everything' and by 'beginning again and again.' 'Beginning again and again' describes her repetitions, so-called, which create extended, unbroken continuity as well as gradual variety that opens into 'insistence.' 'Using everything' refers to her reliance on minute details, including tiny inflections of language, to develop the evolving continuity of the present" (95). In *The Snake Pit*, as I will discuss below, repetition continually builds toward a revelation of what has come before but has yet to be narrated.

<sup>18</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 68.

perspective distancing the writer from the madness of her protagonist. Ward's blurring of the narrator and Virginia, which is in part a result of the novel's multi-perspective, is evident in the way she transitions from a predominance of the third-person perspective early in the novel to the first-person perspective in the latter half. The interplay between first- and third-person pronouns develops as follows: first "I" echoes "she," then this pattern is reversed, and finally "I" more or less stands alone. This dialectic between "I" and "she" often emerges via a repetition of phrases that slowly accumulate meaning and thus reveal previously undisclosed information. As in the passage cited above, these confluences of the narrator and Virginia often occur at turning points which are characterized by duress and revelation. One such turning point follows a remark Virginia makes after she requests her glasses for the second time. She tells a nurse, "I really think if I'm without them much longer I'll go crazy'" (50). We are told that her last word "bounced from one wall to another," and it soon becomes clear the degree to which the language of madness can alter her perception of reality. The significance of this word becomes clear almost immediately after she utters it:

Slowly Virginia groped her way back to the washroom. She knew now. She really had been knowing it a long time but now she had to admit that she knew it.

All along she had known that the electrocution and crime idea was nonsense. All along she had known where she was. Oh, she did not know the geography of it, but she knew, she knew.

As she started to undress she thought about how carefully she had invented the prison fantasy. All along she had known where she was, but she had invented a setting that was easier to endure. Anything else would have been easier to bear,

anything but what it was. I knew, I knew, but I tried to close the door on my knowing. (50-51)

The continuous present is nowhere more evident in the novel than in this passage. Indeed, the way each line seems to build on the last suggests Ward was influenced by the writing practices of Gertrude Stein. Later in the novel, in fact, when Virginia is forced to write, she quickly types one of Stein's most famous lines, though she writes it in the past tense and adds a telling final word: "a rose was a rose was a rose alas" (120).<sup>19</sup> The passage above indicates that Virginia's position can only be revealed via a gradual accumulation or confession of knowledge. These words, like much of the novel, struggle and stutter their way onto the page in an effort to reveal the traumatic experience of institutionalization and madness. One effect of this hesitant revelation is that the reader has no way to determine if Virginia only knows "now," or if she has known for "a long time," or "[a]ll along," and the ambiguity of these temporal markers is enhanced because many of the phrases in the passage are repeated: "she" occurs ten times, various forms of "to know" eleven times, and "all along she had known" three times. In addition, exactly what she knows is revealed little by little, and only after "it" appears twice without a referent in the first paragraph. Ward's use of repetition as a means of revelation here and throughout the novel ultimately creates a sense of anticipation which is not always fulfilled. In this passage, for instance, the narrator reminds us that Virginia is a novelist who is capable of "fooling" herself and her readers with a "prison fantasy." The narrator also tells us that after uttering the word "crazy" Virginia could no longer dwell in this

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<sup>19</sup> This "rose" line, which first appeared in the poem "Sacred Emily," would appear more than a dozen times in Stein's writings. The word "alas" appears repeatedly in one of the most famous lines in Stein's and Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934), "Pigeons on the grass alas." See Harriet Chessman's *The Public is Invited to Dance*, on Stein's attempts to "caress" nouns like rose so as to give them back their identity which memory had taken away (80-87).

imaginary setting because this word reflected her true position and, as Virginia states, “You could say anything [in Juniper Hill] as long as you didn’t say the truth” (51).

Ward’s shift from third to first person at the end of this long passage signals Virginia’s acceptance of her position as opposed to the narrator’s assertion of it. There may be very little (semantic) difference between “she knew, she knew” in the middle of the passage and “I knew, I knew,” which replaces it at the end, but Ward’s decision not to use quotation marks to identify different voices in the text implies that the narrator and Virginia are not wholly distinct, particularly regarding their knowledge of where she is and why she is there, or alternatively, their un/willingness to divulge such information.

The next few pages imply Virginia’s previous lack of knowledge of her status and position as she articulates the hopelessness of her and her fellow patients’ plight, the possible hereditary causes of mental illness, the pointlessness of remaining married, the stigma that former mental patients must face, and the inaccurate way in which mental hospitals were portrayed in an article she had previously read (51-53). In this article the writer contends that, apart from receiving proper care, mental patients “dwell in dreams.” Virginia’s response to this claim reflects the way the narrative reveals through repetition even more powerfully than the “she/I knew” passage. It also marks another turning point in the novel: “‘There are also nightmares,’ said Virginia. She had spoken aloud. I spoke aloud and not to anyone within hearing. I am one of them. Here in this narrow dormitory that had no door, here on the narrow cot, clothed in a numbered nightgown, she lay with women who were insane and she was one of them” (54). Similar to the “she/I knew” passage, the first time a phrase is repeated (“She had spoken aloud”/“I spoke aloud”) the pronouns suggest that Virginia is echoing the narrator’s words. The second instance,

however, reverses this pattern: “I am one of them” becomes “she was one of them.” In both cases, additional information is revealed the second time the phrase appears. On the one hand, Virginia states that she spoke aloud to herself or to the writer of the article, and then the narrator locates Virginia within a particular setting and group which is deemed “insane.” The significance of these pronoun shifts can be demonstrated in part by asking whether or not this passage would still conform to the way the novel reveals information regarding Virginia’s status and position if the terms “I” and “she” were reversed. In the case of “she had spoken/ I spoke,” this reversal corresponds to the “she/I knew” pattern established earlier, not in terms of which pronoun appears first but rather which “person” reveals information about Virginia’s status. In the later example, however, the first person provides vague details that must be clarified in the subsequent lines if they are to be understood. It is this clarification—that Virginia is clothed like, sleeps among, and is indeed “one” of these “women who were insane”—that cannot be expressed in the first person. At this point in the novel, Virginia’s status as “one of them” must be expressed indirectly and ambiguously. Even the narrator refuses to label Virginia definitively: “she lay with women who were insane and she was one of them” might have been written “she was one of the insane women who lay in the dormitory.” But an unambiguous definition of Virginia as “insane” would not only mark her as a madwoman whose warped perspective can only produce an unreliable story, but it would also isolate her. On the other hand, the phrase “one of them” locates Virginia in a communal setting without directly commenting on her in/sanity.

Though Ward continues to conflate Virginia and the narrator throughout *The Snake Pit*, the first few chapters contain not only the majority of such occurrences but also the

most notable ones. A comparison of the “I-she” examples above with two passages later in the narrative suggests that there is a direct relationship between the ways in which Ward uses these pronouns to represent coupled or discrete “persons” and Virginia’s ability to position herself as a relatively in/sane woman. Depictions of Virginia’s in/sanity occur in the first-person perspective more frequently as Virginia moves closer to her release from the mental institution, revealing a degree of agency that is lacking earlier in the novel. The shift from the third to the first person is one indication of how Ward employs the novel’s multi-perspective to suggest that the limits of Virginia’s restrictive status as a mental patient are partly linguistic in nature; Virginia can speak on her own behalf only after she has achieved a certain distance from madness:

One romantic book she read while doing research into mental ailments stated that the stench of paraldehyde has vanished from our mental institutions. I remember I wondered what paraldehyde was and I looked it up and it said hypnotic, a hypnotic.

So it is paraldehyde and not formaldehyde. Grace knew a lot but she did not know that. I worked that out for myself from the sound and from the stench and also from the memory. I am therefore not so sick as Grace was when she left us. I am therefore ready to be transferred, more than that, I am ready to go home. (87)

Virginia went back to her work and the next time she saw Treva eating fire she just let her eat it. After all, I am a patient in this place, not a nurse. But I am nearing non-patient status. The softness is leaving. The sympathy. Yes, and the generosity ... I no longer distribute cigarettes the way I used to. It is a queer way

to judge your sanity. I shall feel better about this return of selfishness if I consider it a return of antlike wisdom. I am able now to take heed of the day to come. I have three cigarettes and if I look ahead I'll see that I cannot order more until the day after tomorrow. Therefore I shall not share my supply but I shall hoard it so that each day I can be sure of having one smoke. That, dear lady, is sanity. An insane woman would give all three cigarettes away and then wonder why she hadn't any for herself. And sit off in a corner with a roll of newspaper ... (248-49)

These passages are unlike those cited earlier in which the third-person perspective occurs more frequently and elaborates on previous statements while the first person merely echoes the third person or offers comparatively vague statements. Here the third person is simply a referent for the name "Virginia" which appears in the preceding line, and there is no echoing of the words of "she" by "I" or vice versa that reveal previously undisclosed information. Instead, Ward abandons the conflation of "I-she" and employs a dominant "I" more typical of the asylum autobiography. Indeed, Virginia's paraldehyde-not-formaldehyde deduction positions her as a more credible expert than the author of the "romantic book." She can give a first-hand account of the mental hospital that directly contradicts this author's claims. More important, perhaps, Virginia's deductive reasoning enables her to connect paraldehyde's "sound," "stench," and "memory," to compare her sanity to Grace's, and thus to recognize these signs as proof that she "is ready to go home." It is not surprising that the appearance of this private "I" coincides with the first time Virginia asserts her sanity, or that she asserts it by distinguishing herself from her friend and fellow inmate. Ultimately, many of the ostensibly reasonable conclusions to which Virginia's limited personal perspective leads her are based on assumptions that are

negated later in the narrative. We learn, for instance, that Grace has not been released and Virginia is to be transferred rather than sent home, a move that will send her to the second of eight wards described in the novel.

In the second passage, as in the previous one, Ward employs third-person pronouns to refer to Virginia and another “she,” but at this later stage of the novel Virginia is quite certain that she is “not so sick” as Treva. Though Virginia uses hospital phraseology to compare herself to Grace, both of them are depicted in a positive light: neither is sick enough to be a mental patient. She describes Treva, on the other hand, as her opposite, an “other” whose status as an insane woman allows Virginia to define herself as nearly sane. Her certain knowledge of her own sanity occasions a “return of selfishness” that distances her from her fellow patients. This distance, as I have indicated, is usually expressed in the first person, a perspective that Virginia uses to separate herself from other patients. Thus, the “she” with which the narrator has referred to Virginia throughout the novel gives way to a dominant private “I” that comes full circle when she describes another inmate as “she.”

While the emergence of this private “I” suggests that Virginia’s separation from the communal perspective is absolute, there are at least three ways to interpret the second-person pronoun in the phrase “judge your sanity.”<sup>20</sup> It can be read as a referent to the isolated first-person perspective from which Virginia claims her sanity; as a comment by the narrator on the curious way in which Virginia determines her sanity; and as an adaptable “you” that signifies the multi-perspective conflation of Virginia, her fellow patients, the narrator, and the reader. But Ward’s rapid switching of pronouns in *The*

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<sup>20</sup> In *Questions of Power* Hubert suggests that “[t]he point of view, although always focused on the experiences of the protagonist, Virginia Cunningham, shifts constantly; the reader can never be confident of the ‘correct’ perspective” (82).

*Snake Pit* makes all three interpretations “correct” simultaneously. In fact, second-person pronouns seem to facilitate the emergence of this private “I” through which Virginia is able to assert her sanity, ultimately suggesting the reciprocity and interdependence of first- and second- person pronouns. Similarly, James Olney argues that, in her autobiographical novel *Childhood* (1983), Nathalie Sarraute

demonstrates the validity of Benveniste’s observation that use of *you* always implies an *I*—or more than implies it, creates it—just as deployment of *I* always implies a *you* (which, I imagine, is why we so often address ourselves mentally, if not aloud, as *you*: “You’ve done it again, haven’t you?” and the like). To accept a *you/I* split and proceed from there is one of many ways [...] of seeking the unified *I* that seems to have become—to put in the most optimistic terms—so elusive in our time.<sup>21</sup>

Second-person pronouns, which Ward often employs more frequently at critical moments in the narrative, tend to blur the first- and second-person perspectives. In fact, the conflation of “I” and “you” is an important part of the genre: “Repeatedly the asylum narratives respond to coercive medical, social, and political practices in terms not of a ‘private self’ but of a more collective protest: the ‘I’ turns into a ‘we.’”<sup>22</sup> The union of “I” and “you” as “we” in *The Snake Pit* is brought about by Ward’s constant switching between first- and second-person perspectives. This ambiguous, collective “we” often makes it impossible to determine if second-person pronouns, which frequently appear as

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<sup>21</sup> James Olney, *Memory & Narrative*, 247-48, emphasis in original.

<sup>22</sup> Caminero-Santangelo, *The Madwoman Can’t Speak: or Why Insanity is Not Subversive*, 23. In a similar vein, Hubert writes about Istina Mavet, the protagonist of Janet Frame’s autobiographical novel *Faces in the Water* (1961): “Although cut off from others, Istina’s narrative often uses collective pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘us’ as well as ‘they’ and ‘them.’ In this way she subtly draws readers onto the ice and into the danger, just as the narrative techniques of *The Snake Pit* encourage readers to identify with Virginia Cunningham” (114).

the general “you,” refer to Virginia, the reader, the narrator, or someone else outside of the narrative who is never named.<sup>23</sup> Hubert suggests that Ward’s

use of the second-person point of view functions to draw the reader into Virginia’s experiences of psychiatric hospitalization. On the one hand, the use of personal pronouns represents an informal speech style and could be said to maintain the first-person point of view. However, the frequent interpolation of second-person pronouns can have a cumulative effect in which the reader moves from the position of spectator into the role of institutionalized mental patient.<sup>24</sup>

Ward’s use of second-person pronouns helps to generalize Virginia’s experience as one others can comprehend, and it often problematizes, even obliterates, the distance that separates her “mad” protagonist and the reader. The second-person perspective is an in-between position that reveals the reversible nature of “I” and “you.” As Émile Benveniste writes, “I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in turn designates himself as *I*.”<sup>25</sup>

Ward uses second-person pronouns to map a step-by-step process of discovery similar to the way in which the “I-she” dyad gradually reveals knowledge relative to Virginia’s position and status.<sup>26</sup> The reader identifies with the second-person perspective in part because each new revelation only clarifies a fraction of that which is unknown. In addition, Ward’s use of “you” regularly puts the reader in a position where she or he can

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<sup>23</sup> Ward employs “you” to refer to a wide range of persons, including the “romantic” writer mentioned above, women readers who might doubt her (“dear lady”), staff members in mental institutions, Virginia’s husband (135), Don Jackson (Virginia’s institutionalized friend) and his mother (52-53, 61, 71, 89, and 122), Virginia (211 and throughout), Dr. Kik (3, 264), and a “general you” (25, 32, 77, 93, and 114).

<sup>24</sup> Hubert, *Questions of Power*, 82-83.

<sup>25</sup> Benveniste, “Subjectivity in Language,” in *Problems in General Linguistics*, 224-25, emphasis in original.

<sup>26</sup> For early examples of this gradual revelation, see 18, 19, 21, and 27.

experience the suffering of Virginia's body and witness the turning points of her struggle with insanity, suggesting that any confession of Virginia's distress must be inscribed on a communal body. A good example of the reader experiencing Virginia's physical pain via the second-person perspective occurs after a nurse tells her that she is going to "go for shock."<sup>27</sup> Virginia's response to the nurse's words foreshadows the scene in which she compares her surroundings to "a snake pit": "It was quaint of the guard to think you had to go elsewhere for a shock" (40). Immediately upon entering a small room, however, "she knew she had been shocked previously and did not care for another helping" (42).<sup>28</sup> After her doctor arrives and she is prepared for the treatment, the perspective switches from the third- to the second-person:

They put a wedge under her back. It was most uncomfortable. It forced her back into an unnatural position. She looked at the dull glass eye that was set into the wall and she knew that soon it would glow and that she would not see it glow. They were going to electrocute her, not operate upon her. Even now the woman was applying a sort of foul-smelling cold paste to your temples. What had you done? You wouldn't have killed anyone and what other crime is there which exacts so severe a penalty? Could they electrocute you for having voted for Norman Thomas? Many people said the country was going to come to that sort of dictatorship but you hadn't believed it would ever reach this extreme. (43)

In the first half of this passage Ward uses the third person to describe Virginia's situation from a distance. We view her, as if through this "dull glass eye," until she returns its lifeless gaze, a reversal that signals a perceptual and perspectival turning point similar to

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<sup>27</sup> Electroshock therapy (EST) is also referred to as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

<sup>28</sup> Ward's use of "helping" here suggests both what the treatment was supposed to accomplish (that is, help Virginia get better) and the food given to patients after shock (199).

when she utters the word “crazy,” speaks aloud to herself, identifies paraldehyde, and analyzes her capacity to ignore Treva’s plight. The pattern established in the “she/I knew” and “she had spoken aloud/I spoke aloud” passages, where “she” reveals and elaborates and “I” echoes, is evident in the transition from “she” to “you” above. After this “you” echoes the passivity of the “she” at the beginning of the passage (“They put a wedge in her back,” “the woman was applying a [...] cold paste to your temples”), the second-person offers a series of questions without answers. In the remainder of the paragraph, Ward replaces second-person with first-person pronouns as her interior monologue continues to consider anxiously what she regards as her looming execution. Virginia twice “demands to see a lawyer,” the second time adding that, if she makes such a demand, “they have to do something” (43). But she realizes that the power of her words is nullified by the “smooth talk” of staff members who treat her as an anonymous subject. Thus, even though she understands that her right to see a lawyer “has something to do with habeas corpus, something in the Constitution,” their ability to prevent her from obtaining this writ allows them to “make a corpus of [her].”<sup>29</sup>

In the next paragraph, when this “corpus” is subjected to electroshock treatments, Ward exclusively employs the second-person perspective: “Now the woman was putting clamps on your head, on the paste-smearred temples and here came another one, another nurse-garbed woman and she leaned on your feet as if in a minute you might rise up from the table and strike the ceiling. Your hands tied down, your legs held down. Three against

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<sup>29</sup> The ability of staff members to deny Virginia this legal right (writ) is a demonstration of her subjection, as is the degree to which they are able to wipe out and rewrite her memory with therapeutic measures such as EST. Virginia’s “corpus” represents both a legal subject and a physical body that is killed on a daily basis (198).

one and the one entangled in machinery” (44).<sup>30</sup> Apart from keeping the reader in the continuous present (“Now”), this passage situates her/him as a body whose “head,” “feet,” “hands,” and “legs” are forcibly restrained. The reader experiences this imprisonment as a participant-witness to an event that seems to unfold before her/his eyes. Yet the reader’s role is extremely limited, and it becomes clear that this is because “you,” like “she,” is described from without. The second-person perspective, in other words, at least early in the narrative, describes the reader as an isolated figure who, like Virginia, is helpless to “[dis]entangle” her/himself from the “machinery” of the mental institution which seems too complex to comprehend and too powerful to resist.

This lack of agency, which casts the reader as a passive body, disappears when the second-person perspective merges with the first-person perspective later in the novel. Like the third person, the second person occurs less frequently at critical moments in the narrative when Virginia is able to reestablish her sanity. For instance, after she believes a short respite in a staff bathroom has convinced the nurses to produce her husband, Virginia thinks, “I knew that eventually I would find a way to get out of Juniper Hill. I knew it. I knew it” (165). Naturally, her “escape” and negotiations with the nurses do not go as she “knows” they would:

They caught her, of course. Someone tripped her and she fell. Instantly her head was encased in a sack and someone was sitting on her legs. The sack was bound tightly around her chest and she could not breathe.

There was no time for suitable thoughts. You would think smothering to death would feel very different. You felt as if you were being blown up with a tire pump

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<sup>30</sup> For other passages in which physical discomfort is tied to the second-person perspective, see 172, 175, and 183.

and yet what was being forced into your chest was vacuum. I am going to burst I  
am going to burst I am ... (168)

In order to understand how “you” functions in this passage, it is necessary to consider the way in which Ward frames it with “I” and “she.” The last line is one of the very few in the novel that eschews standard punctuation, and thus it suggests a racing mind whose thoughts constantly return to the desperate situation in which it is trapped. Indeed, the ellipsis with which this paragraph and the chapter conclude suggests an infinite repetition of “I am going to burst.” This repetition of “I am” echoes passages I discussed earlier (“I am one of them,” “I am ready to go home,” “I am nearing non-patient status,” etc.); in all of these examples Virginia’s knowledge is expressed with a degree of certainty that increases as the narrative progresses. Not only is her knowledge certain in the passage above, but it is also a predictive knowledge (“I am going to”), which is similar to the later “I am nearing non-patient status,” rather than simply a description of the present moment (“I am one,” “I am ready”). Ward’s switching of perspectives is also accompanied by subtle shifts in tense. The past tense associated with the third person (“caught,” “tripped,” etc.) is combined with a second person that is expressed uncertainly (“You felt as if”) or in the subjunctive or conditional mood (“You would,” “would feel”), a mood similar to the “continuous past” that is not fully indicative of either the past or the present.

Eventually this perspective, through which Ward initially represents the reader as a passive figure who slowly discovers her or his own position and status, is able to give voice to aspirations. For instance, immediately after Virginia has been transferred from “pack”<sup>31</sup> to a less restrictive ward, we read, “You wanted to get well. You never had a conscious moment in which you were not aware of being sick. You could no more, while

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<sup>31</sup> Wet sheet pack therapy, a procedure in which patients bodies are wrapped tightly in wet sheets.

conscious, forget your sickness than you could forget to breathe. Asked your greatest wish in life and you would have replied at once – sanity” (188).<sup>32</sup> Though Ward’s use of the second person in this passage signals a constant “aware[ness]” of madness, even an acceptance or naturalization of its terms, it also signals a recognition of its temporary nature.

When Virginia is transferred for the final time, it is to a ward for patients who have already been or are expected to stay at Juniper Hill more than a year. After talking to her fellow inmates as they lie in their beds, a passage which parallels the one in which Grace informs her that she had been at Juniper Hill for seven months, Virginia is aware that the permanent status suggested by her “newest transfer” should frighten and depress her,

yet the hopelessness that had been hounding her had lessened and for the first time she dared to believe that she might get well. Perhaps her foundation for this beginning of optimism was childish or, terrifying thought, perhaps it was the start of delusions. However, when you realize you aren’t the sickest in your ward, it does something for you. I’m not so ill as the old woman; I don’t think Robert’s here. I know where I am and I know I am sick – yes, still foggy, still stupid, still a woman who is not sane. (216)

In this passage Ward uses third-person pronouns to express an optimistic but tentative viewpoint regarding Virginia’s sanity, which is also undermined by uncertain terms (“[p]erhaps,” “perhaps,” “[h]owever”), second-person pronouns to indicate the ability to realize “you” are relatively less “sick” than other patients, and first-person pronouns to

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<sup>32</sup> As I will elaborate below, madhouse writers often cite their ability to recognize and memorize moments of madness. For instance, in a rare passage, because it is dominated by second-person pronouns, Hillyer writes, “Either your parts are properly assembled or they aren’t; and you know it; that is to say you know when you are normal, though it be for the duration of one tick of the clock” (78).

give specific reasons that demonstrate the knowledge on which her optimism is based. In other words, Ward's switch from "she" to "you" to "I" indicates Virginia's movement from least to most certain knowledge. Her expression of relative sanity is not, however, a declaration of sanity. Instead, it is a recognition that her status can "still" change because it is a function of time ("still foggy," "still stupid," "still a woman who is not sane").

Notably, Virginia defines herself in the above passage as "sick" and "not sane" rather than "insane" or "crazy." Throughout *The Snake Pit* Ward rarely uses the latter terms to define her protagonist. In fact, when referring to the in/sanity of Virginia, her fellow patients, and staff, Ward almost always employs uncertain terms: "not so sick" (68), "not as well as you think" (135), "hardly sick" (149), "nearest well" (136), "no more sick than I am" (155), "appeared to be hysterical" (202), not "especially crazy" (220), "almost well" (131, 221, 266), "in-between" (221), "nearing non-patient status" (248), "not so sick" (257), not "entirely well," and "nearer well than you think" (273).<sup>33</sup> In addition, Virginia's diagnosis remains uncertain throughout the novel. She remembers telling her husband before going to the hospital, "Robert, I think there is something the matter with my head," a problem that she thinks is more than insomnia (61). But this "something" is never defined. Instead, she finds the language of madness inadequate when she searches for a term to describe her condition:

Progressive myopia was what you had wrong with your eyes. Was your head trouble progressive? Head trouble. She tried to think of scientific words. There was dementia praecox, but that sounded too young. Precocious. There was maniac something but you were pretty sure you were not a maniac. There was

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<sup>33</sup> Ward also uses wordplay to indicate the instability of the language of the institution. See 68, 71, 72, 87, 91, 114, and 276.

schizophrenia. That was a beautiful word, as a photograph slightly out of focus sometimes is very lovely. It means split personality. [...]

But that can't be my trouble. I am just me, Virginia Stuart Cunningham. There is only one of me and it is having a hard enough time thinking for one, let alone splitting into two. (71-72)

Ward's use of the language of madness often parallels her switching of pronouns to create the novel's multi-perspective and Virginia's shifting back and forth as to whether she will "betray" her fellow inmates. For example, after doubting Grace's sanity (15), Virginia "take[s] back what [she] thought about Grace not being quite all there" (19); later, she thinks, "Grace definitely needed a psychiatrist" (27); then, she believes her friend is well enough to go home (87); and finally, she meets a straight-jacket clad Grace in the tunnel and is "grateful for the jacket and the fence" (235). Ward only applies the language of madness unambiguously to the "truly" insane like Treva (248-49) and Tamara, who "had no conception of her surroundings" (192) after having "five operations on her head" (193). We learn that the attitude of most inmates regarding "hopeless insanity was very like the attitude outside. They hated Tamara for being insane" (193). This suggests that the "truly" insane must not be accepted as part of the communal perspective because they represent the ultimate expression of living death that pervades the mental institution. Apart from these "toxic neighbors," unambiguous terms of the language of madness rarely appear in the novel, and when they do they refer to staff and patients alike, which blurs the in/sanity binary: "they were crazy" (76), "quite sick" (127), "she isn't ever going to get well" (147), "he's nuts" (161), "too sick to be socially possible" (206), "very sick" (209, 221, 246), and "insane" (248). Though Ward

usually employs the language of madness ambiguously, it leaves an imprint of truth and judgment on the bodies and minds of the condemned. Even the conflation of patients and staff suggests the importance of the divisions brought about by these terms, particularly as one senses that the narrator and Virginia are constantly using them to define patients and staff: “Sometimes it was difficult at Juniper Hill to remember who were the sick ones” (65-66).

## II. Juniper Hill Constitutes

“Is this the same building I was in before?” asked Virginia.  
 “Where were you before?” asked Ruth.  
 A very sick woman. “I think they called it Receiving.”  
 “Reception,” said Ruth. “No, this is different. I used to be in Reception.”  
 “What do they call this building?”  
 “Five.”  
 “Just Five?”  
 “Well, Building Five.”  
 “Why did they change me?” (209)

Similar to when Virginia disavows the “prison fantasy” after uttering the word “crazy,” the unspoken part of her response to Ruth’s question equates her “geography” and her status as a mental patient.<sup>34</sup> This conflation of place and status is partly the result of the disorientation she experiences when she is transferred from ward to ward. In fact, due to this movement Virginia at times does not know if it is the ward or her fellow patients that have changed. Thus, her question about being “changed” after she learns that she has been moved to a new building has a double meaning. It suggests that her residence has changed from one place to another without her being told why, and it

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<sup>34</sup> Also see Virginia’s visit to Staff during which her inability to remember her new address is interpreted as a sign of her insanity (139). As opposed to the lower-cased “staff,” which refers to mental hospital employees, Staff is a meeting during which doctors determine if a mental patient should be released. Ward writes, “What you heard about Staff was not reassuring. All of the ladies were scared of Staff; quite a few of them had been there once or twice and they shuddered when they spoke of their experiences” (136-37).

implies that one's location determines one's status as a person, as her unspoken response to Ruth implies ("A very sick woman"). Virginia's disorientation leads her to ask Ruth, whom she met only moments before, if she is in "the *same* building." Though she has just arrived at Building Five, Virginia does not know if Ruth or the ward is the same as "before," or if she has known Ruth and been in the ward for several months, as was the case with Grace and Ward Three at the beginning of the novel. Moreover, Virginia's misnaming of "Reception" as "Receiving,"<sup>35</sup> which recalls her evocative misnaming of Juniper Hill as a zoo, a reform school, and a prison, once again indicates the meaningfulness of Virginia's apparent mistakes. While both "reception" and "receiving" signify the action of receiving inmates into the institution, "receiving" also denotes an institution that is intended or used for the reception of inmates. In other words, the first describes an activity and the latter a location that is defined by this activity. Also, as a gerund "receiving" suggests that the institution continually admits new patients and therefore must perpetually transfer them between wards and to different buildings, whereas "reception" alludes to a place where the reception of patients takes place but may or may not be occurring at any given time. The causal relationship between place and status suggested by Virginia's question about being "change[d]" and her definition of Reception as a place that perpetually receives and dispatches mental patients is consonant with Shoshana Felman's assertion that "[i]n the play of forces underlying the relationship between philosophy and fiction, literature and madness, the crucial problem is that of the subject's place, of his position with respect to that delusion. And the possibility of the

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<sup>35</sup> Receiving hospitals are triage centers that are designed for short-term care. In mental institutions the "purpose of such a building is to afford a suitable place for the detention and observation of new patients in order that the probability of cure may be determined" (36). It is a place "where all forms of insanity are cared for" (136). See State of Washington. *Eighth Biennial Report of the State Board of Control*. Olympia, WA: Frank M. Lamborn, 1917.

subject is not defined by what he says, nor by what he talks about, but by the place—unknown to him—from which he speaks.”<sup>36</sup> As Virginia’s disorientation lessens and she is able to identify and navigate the ward in which she dwells, it becomes clear that gaps in her memory and the narrative make the place from which she speaks impossible to recognize. This last point is crucial because her position not only determines the ways in which she comes into being, but it also indicates the limits within which the narrative must develop.

Mental institutions position their subjects through various training techniques (schedules, rules, work), therapies (pack, hydrotherapy, electroshock therapy), and sometimes via the application or threat of brute force (sexual assault, physical violence). Erving Goffman argues that these and other “total institutions” are “forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self.”<sup>37</sup> He adds,

Each moral career,<sup>38</sup> and behind this, each self, occurs within the confines of an institutional system, whether a social establishment such as a mental hospital or a complex of personal and professional relationships. The self, then, can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in

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<sup>36</sup> Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Goffman writes, “The moral career of a person of a given social category involves a standard sequence of changes in his way of conceiving of selves, including, importantly, his own” (168).

connection with the person by himself and those around him. This special kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self as constitute it.<sup>39</sup>

Though the constitution of the self effected by mental institutions is not limited to those inside their walls, these institutions represent a system of knowledge that subjects inmates through the classification, organization, and normalization of their bodies and minds. This subjection simultaneously isolates and de-individuates mental patients in ways that profoundly affect how they interact with and regard one another, staff, the “outside world,” and the institution itself. These processes of subjection, which both undermine and encourage the personal and communal perspectives, are a function of an institutional perspective.<sup>40</sup> Similar to the multi-perspective discussed above, no individual or group can fully represent the institutional perspective because of the diverse angles from which it originates. This movement between perspectives simultaneously allows the institutional or de-individualized “hero” to emerge, facilitates Ward’s evasion of the closure and cure typical of madhouse literature, imposes strict limitations on narrative form, and subjects Virginia and others to myriad disciplinary techniques. Thus, de-individuation is a multiform process, as evidenced by the novel’s personal, communal, and institutional perspectives, which makes individual identity nearly impossible to define and a close scrutiny of the constitutive capacity of the institution essential.<sup>41</sup>

Before exploring the ways in which the institutional perspective constitutes the narrative, it is important to consider the role of the personal perspective in madhouse

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> The institutional perspective, which is expressed through institutional policy, discipline, diagnosis, therapy, architecture, and psychiatric discourse, shapes and is shaped by the personal and communal perspectives of patients and staff. In *The Snake Pit* the institutional perspective often appears as a referentless “they,” an anonymous term that suggests this perspective is an indeterminate, subjectless, and collective force.

<sup>41</sup> Paradoxically, as I demonstrate below, a de-individuated person’s status as “one” of a group or category frequently isolates her or him as an individual.

texts. It is my contention that, as Wood argues, “the asylum worlds” depicted in madhouse “texts are not isolated, romanticized spaces. They are institutions whose practices feed and are fed by ideologies and practices in the ‘outside world.’”<sup>42</sup> That is, the walls whose function it is to separate these worlds are “permeable,” a permeability that allows a flow of ideas to travel in both directions.<sup>43</sup> This interchange of ideologies and practices blurs the distinction between individual and societal perspectives. Thus, when Caminero-Santangelo faults “critics of [Sylvia Plath’s] *The Bell Jar* who have often assumed that a personal perspective on madness is not valuable because it is not trustworthy in terms of facts,”<sup>44</sup> we should keep in mind the limitations of the personal perspective rather than regard it as inherently accurate or authentic. While there is no doubt that one should listen to Virginia Cunningham and Esther Greenwood, Plath’s protagonist, it is important to recognize that what they say is largely determined by the position from which they speak. Nonetheless, Caminero-Santangelo argues,

The passage describing Esther’s reaction to electroshock suggests recovery—at least of a sort—according to this internal (as opposed to social or medical) assessment of madness.

There is nevertheless something about electroshock that remains troubling. The terms in which Plath describes the actual experience of EST, even the second time around, are unsettling: ‘Darkness wiped me out like chalk on a blackboard’ (175). Chalk here recalls snow, as in Esther’s portrait of Valerie, a lobotomized fellow patient with a ‘calm, snow-maiden face behind which so little, bad or good,

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<sup>42</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 21-22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>44</sup> In *The Madwoman Can’t Speak*, Caminero-Santangelo offers a critique of Linda Wagner-Martin’s suggestion that “the reader does not need to accept Esther’s view of her experience” (26).

could happen' (196). Remembering unhappy moments from her own history, Esther thinks to herself: 'Maybe forgetfulness, like a kind of snow, should numb and cover them. But they were part of me. They were my landscape' (194). Perhaps electroshock can lift the bell jar only by 'wiping out' a part of Esther herself, her memories; perhaps electroshock provides peace in exchange for 'forgetfulness.' These connections are tenuous at best in *The Bell Jar*, however, and the tension they produce is never overtly resolved. Esther seems to have reached the point, by the end of the novel, at which she can lay claim to the uglier aspects of her landscape while holding off the bell jar's descent. She never renounces the second set of electroshock treatments, and their position in the text strongly suggests a contribution to her ultimate recovery. (30-31).<sup>45</sup>

This passage raises a number of questions concerning the (re)constitution of a mental patient's identity. For instance, is there such a thing as a perspective that falls outside of or is "opposed to social or medical" perspectives, especially after one experiences shock therapy? And even if one were able to isolate such a perspective in *The Bell Jar*, why should we take the post-shock therapy Esther's personal perspective or "internal [...] assessment of madness" at face value rather than an earlier perspective offered by the Esther who, after her initial shock treatments, tells Dr. Nolan, "'If anyone does that to me again I'll kill myself.'" <sup>46</sup> We could value them both equally, but then they would essentially negate one another. Furthermore, Caminero-Santangelo's use of the phrase "a

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<sup>45</sup> Citing Peter Breggin's *Electroshock: Its Brain-Disabling Effects*, Elaine Showalter writes in *The Female Malady* that "[m]uch psychiatric literature on ECT, he maintains, recommends it for the less-skilled persons whose livelihoods are not dependent on the use of memory and intellect; housewives can be seen as excellent candidates on these terms. The 'improvement' seen in their behavior after the treatment may simply reflect their greater tractability" (207).

<sup>46</sup> Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, 155.

part of” minimizes the degree to which Esther’s former self has been negated or “wiped out.” Of course, usually all of the chalk, rather than “a part of” it, is “wiped out” when one erases a blackboard, a metaphor that calls into question any possibility of “recovery.” It is fitting that the chapter ends immediately after Esther is shocked and the next chapter begins with an introduction to an Esther who accepts shock treatment.

Caminero-Santangelo also downplays the terror of EST by editing the sentence: “And [Miss Huey] set something on my tongue and in panic I bit down, and darkness wiped me out like chalk on a blackboard.” Esther’s panic and feeling of being wiped out evoke the only shock therapy session depicted in *The Snake Pit*, an episode during which Ward’s substitution of “I” for “you” suggests a transition between two versions of Virginia. As one might expect, the newly reconstituted Virginia who emerges after this and other traumatic events is disoriented and suffering from memory loss. Thus, even though prior to her commitment “she had longed to make her mind blank” to escape from social and economic pressures, in Juniper Hill she quickly “learn[s] that having a blank mind while awake is a terrifying experience” (63). She must attempt to recover her memories and reestablish relationships with those with whom she was once familiar. Even the third-person pronouns in this last sentence (“she,” “her,” and “she”) refer to two Virginias, the first two to the post-traumatic Virginia and the latter to her former self. Ultimately, the time and memory which is lost in these transitions between different versions of Virginia surface as irrevocable temporal and memorial gaps in the narrative. After a session of shock therapy which is itself wiped out of Virginia’s memory, she thinks that Dr. Kik “is under the impression that he is the only one who is permitted to kill me. Jeannie is my special interest, my major project, he says. Each day I kill her once, each week day once

and twice on Sundays. Do not weep, he says when he finishes, it is finished and you are no more hurt” (198). This perpetual sacrifice and reincarnation of Virginia suggests that “the madman is not, strictly speaking, a person: he is *no one*, a blank, an empty speech receptacle. And it is insofar as he is ‘no one,’ a nul (sic) set or an empty square, that he makes the system function.”<sup>47</sup>

Caminero-Santangelo also claims that the “curative” effects of psychiatric treatments are “supported by women’s testimony” in other madhouse texts, including one who describes “the cold-sheet pack” as a “form of torture” before requesting this treatment, and another who writes that while the straight jacket “looks like an implement of torture [...] there are times when it looks like God’s arm protecting you.”<sup>48</sup> But instead of providing the reader with any resolution, these contradictory statements suggest that writers who attempt to reestablish their sanity in madhouse texts necessarily present multiple viewpoints of their formerly “mad” and currently “sane” selves, viewpoints whose contradictions suggest the role the institution plays in shaping personal perspectives.<sup>49</sup> Though Caminero-Santangelo usually privileges the personal perspective expressed by women who have been “cured” or “recovered” and thus wipes out the earlier, contradictory one, she reverses this stance in her interpretation of Kate Millet’s *The Loony-Bin Trip*, a text she describes as “perhaps the most remarkable literary testament to the tension between experience and theory, between the urge to bear witness and the temptation not to listen. Unlike the other authors I have discussed so far, Millet

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<sup>47</sup> Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 110, emphasis in original.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 31-32.

<sup>49</sup> Unlike nineteenth-century asylum autobiographies, which more often critically engage and challenge institutional norms, personal journey narratives such as Beers’s and Hillyer’s present a multiplied “I” that consists of a “sane” narrator and a former “mad” self. Ward resists this type of multiplication, paradoxically perhaps, by distancing herself from Virginia and developing a multi-perspective narrative.

persistently asserts that she was not mad at any time leading up to or during her institutionalization” (43).<sup>50</sup> Millett’s text includes a denial of her madness prior to her institutionalization; her refusal to take psychiatric drugs; her “forced institutionalization” by people Caminero-Santangelo refers to as “well-meaning family and friends”; and her belief that a person’s sanity (or insanity) should be based on one’s “internal standards” (44). Yet Caminero-Santangelo, to borrow her words, seems to “relegate [Millett’s] recovery of self-expression to a status of secondary importance” by splitting her into a person who experiences and then bears witness *and* another person who theorizes and does not want to listen to her other self. Thus, when Millett writes, “Now, when I reread [my initial reflections on my drug therapy], I find something in it rings false,” Caminero-Santangelo argues that Millett “herself is ultimately unwilling to listen to *the authority of her own behavior*” (44, emphasis added). Ultimately, Caminero-Santangelo’s analysis of Millett’s text is similar to that which she criticizes feminists for in that she “treat[s] madness as a theoretical construct without regard to how it is experienced from the inside” (43). She not only privileges the authority of Millett’s behavior, that which is equally apparent to “outsider” and “insider,” but she also determines what qualifies as “the inside” as well as *how* one, including “(former) madwomen,” should interpret the experiences of those who can and cannot speak.

In *The Snake Pit*, Ward destabilizes binaries such as in/sanity, inside/outside, past/present, and fact/fiction immediately after Virginia announces she is “nearing non-patient status”: “For some weeks now she had been unable to think of herself as a part of Juniper Hill. The Observer had come back and a novel was being formed” (249). The

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<sup>50</sup> Tellingly, Caminero-Santangelo also writes that Millett is “both a ‘woman of the asylum’ and a recognized theorist of gender relations, and she brings both roles to bear on her writing about her experience. They do not seem to coexist easily, and they produce striking gaps in the text” (43).

return of the Observer, an identity that positions Virginia as an outsider and a writer for the first time since she thought she was there to “study Conditions,” suggests the degree to which this madhouse text is determined by the institution (“a novel was being formed”).<sup>51</sup> In fact, in the next line the narrator refers to Virginia as “the Observer,” thus indicating that she has been profoundly shaped by the institutional and communal perspectives of Juniper Hill. Though the appearance of the Observer represents a major turning point in the narrative, it does not signal the final version of Virginia, an end point after which she fully internalizes the institutional perspective and therefore disappears. Instead, the final chapters suggest that long after the last page of the novel Virginia’s processual development will defy any attempt to define her or equate her with Ward, signs of which are manifest, respectively, in the story’s lack of an unambiguous diagnosis or cure, and the curious way in which Ward distances herself from Virginia on the book’s dust jacket.

As myriad versions of Virginia move toward the novel’s open-ended conclusion, the ways in which she is positioned by and positions herself with respect to her fellow inmates, staff, and others are almost always misleading due to the inherent limitations of her personal perspective. She often knows the geography of her position, but she does not know the place from which she speaks. As I noted earlier, when Virginia first acknowledges where she is and why she is there she immediately allies herself with her fellow inmates: “I am one of them.” Later, when she is able to identify paraldehyde, a

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<sup>51</sup> Virginia’s metamorphoses suggest a fluid process rather than a steady progression. For instance, as her status becomes more “certain” (253), she refers to other inmates as insane (68), and sees their behavior as a product of their environment (88, 220). Though she remains in large part an outsider after the Observer appears, studying and diagnosing fellow patients with the privileged Cafeteria Ladies (243-66), her status is by no means stable. For instance, when she goes to Staff for the second time we read, “She had no memory at all today” (261).

feat Grace could not perform, she thinks, “I am ready to be transferred, more than that, I am ready to go home.” She soon learns, however, that there is a long distance between her membership in a group of patients who are collectively defined and treated differently and her status as an individual patient who is “ready” to be singled out for release. As one might expect, it is much easier for an inmate like Virginia to situate herself within the mental institution (as “one of them”) than it is for her to position herself prospectively outside its walls (“ready to go home”). Shortly after this last statement (“ready to be transferred [...] ready to go home”), however, Virginia is transferred for the first time in the novel, moving from Ward Three to Ward One, the ward from which patients are most often discharged. If one were reading *The Snake Pit* in weekly installments, one would have reason to believe that Virginia’s days at Juniper Hill were numbered, and that she had somehow foreseen this fortunate turn of events after correctly identifying paraldehyde. But this projected happy ending would not be consistent with the majority of madhouse texts and it belies the fact that two hundred pages of the novel remain.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the fact that “Virginia began to tremble” (107) when she heard she was going to be transferred to Ward One suggests that her situation is getting worse. Miss Hart tells her,

“We don’t often have anyone skip [Ward] Two, but Dr. Kik gave the order. [...] He’s really made quite a special case of you, you know.” [...]

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<sup>52</sup> Madhouse texts often include either a temporary recovery (e.g. Beers) and/or a home visitation (e.g. Jane Hillyer in *Reluctantly Told* and Fritz Peters in *The World Next Door* [1949]) after which the patient returns to the institution whereupon his/her condition and status worsen prior to his/her ultimate recovery. This temporary recovery seems to enable the writer to establish a sane identity from which s/he can speak, which is particularly important if the book begins with a “mad” character who is either already in or on her/his way to the institution. It also suggests that madness is an unpredictable condition which can only be fully understood by doctors and other experts (including writers) and dealt with in mental institutions.

Miss Hart looked at her. She seemed about to say something out of character. But then she put on her R.N. look and said they must get ready. "There is no cut-and-dried rule about patients having to go to One before they are released ... uh, I mean, before they go home. I mean, you can go from any of the wards. But they usually go from One. It's like a convalescent home."

"I'm not ready for it," Virginia heard herself say. [...] "I could go home, but I am not well enough for One."

[...] "Nonsense," [Miss Hart] said. "I suppose you've heard some of the ladies talking. ..."

"Yes." I can't remember what they said but there is something terrible about Ward One.

"You know better than to pay any attention to them. They're sick. Only one or two of them have ever been inside of Ward One."

"You mean some of them go there and then come back?"

"Practically everyone goes home from Ward One," said Miss Hart as if reading from a book. [...] She was using the loud firm voice you always use when you are not sure of what you are saying. [...]

"I tell you what," said Miss Hart when they were crossing the dayroom.

"You do everything Miss Davis says. Don't think about it, just do it. [...]"

As soon as she heard the name Virginia knew what was terrible about Ward One. Miss Davis. (107-08)

This passage is characterized by Virginia's and Miss Hart's conditioned responses.<sup>53</sup> Both of them seem to be "reading from a book" they have committed to memory even though they feel ambivalent about its contents. Like a Nike spokeswoman, Miss Hart encourages Virginia to "just do it."<sup>54</sup> She not only suggests that there is no reason to think and no profit in resistance, but she also enacts this phrase in her dutiful fulfillment of her role as "she put[s] on her R.N. look" and carefully employs the language of the institution. She has been trained to say "go home" not "released," and while she repeats Virginia's hopeful phrase, "ready to go home," she does so with the ambiguity ("practically") required of someone who abides by, rather than makes, the rules. In addition, "go home" immediately becomes the more ambiguous "go," a word that evokes Virginia's movement from ward to ward which commences with this move to One. In fact, Miss Hart does not simply repeat "go"; instead, her repetition suggests that "you [i.e., Virginia] can [a possibility which always implies its opposite] go from any of the wards. But they [i.e., patients other than Virginia] usually [a much more certain term than "can"] go from One." Miss Hart's mechanical, albeit uncertain, expression of her role is preceded by Virginia's compulsive "tremble," an involuntary recoil that signals the communal memory of patients and thus her membership as "one of them."<sup>55</sup> As if

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<sup>53</sup> Echoing Virginia's and the narrator's comments on the relative sanity of Juniper Hill staff, after watching a male staff member "working furiously at a gigantic dish-washing machine," Virginia and/or the narrator thinks, "Imagine taking a job in a place where you caught the institution disease. Times must be hard outside ..." (240).

<sup>54</sup> Nike's "Just Do It" advertisements first aired in August 1988. According to Steve Suo, Dan Wieden wrote "the phrase 'Do It' in 1987 as a sort of 'connective device' that described an athlete's transformation to a great competitor. Later, he added ['Just'] for emphasis," and thus softened the command's tone. See Steve Suo, "Company's Image Tied to Old Slogan," *Oregonian*, 4 Jan. 1998, A15.

<sup>55</sup> An excellent example of communal and/or institutional memory is Hillyer's use of quotation marks. Hillyer writes, "I was marked by the hospital phraseology. Certainly I would not have written 'on duty' just there, had it not been for the constant use of those words by the nurses" (146). She writes the following terms in quotation marks on a single page: "big building," "parlors," "like a house," "them," "where you go home from," and "better" (109). For an interesting example of a madhouse text that combines quotations of hospital phraseology, Biblical passages, and second-person pronouns, see Doris Simpson's *The Plague of*

speaking the words of others (“Virginia heard herself say”), she knows she is “not well enough for One” because “there *is* something terrible about Ward One.” But even though she is certain of this communal knowledge, she is unwilling to critique openly the mental institution. Virginia’s “terrible” knowledge comes in the form of an unspoken response, as does her question to Miss Hart, “Do they have a rule for doctors, as for husbands?” (107), which indicates the infrequency with which she sees Dr. Kik and Robert.

Ultimately, this passage suggests the degree to which the institution determines the actions and words of inmates and staff, and dictates which words they can and cannot verbalize.

Like Virginia and Miss Hart, Miss Davis is constituted by her position in the institution. As the head of what Miss Hart refers to as Juniper Hill’s “finishing school” (107), Miss Davis’s interpretation of a patient’s words and behavior as in/sane determines whether she will be released or not more frequently than anyone else in the institution. Ward One is the “school” to which patients go to be “finished” in one of two ways: either they are resocialized sufficiently so they can make a smooth transition back into “normal” society, or, as Miss Hart’s malicious sounding laugh implies, their hopes of being released will be destroyed and they will be recertified as madwomen.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, rather than her “terrible” personal attributes, which cannot be isolated from her role as head nurse of Ward One, it is the role that Miss Davis occupies that casts such a frightful shadow over the women of Juniper Hill. In fact, Miss Davis rules One with such

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*Psychiatry*: “I complain and quit. They fire me saying I am ‘ill.’ They ensnare me in the ‘snake pit.’ ‘The floods of the ungodly made me afraid.’ It is as if the enemy conquered the country and the dreaded communists take you prisoner, torment you, and physically destroy your body—aiming at sex, of course, as do all enemies” (10).

<sup>56</sup> “Finishing school” recalls Virginia’s description of Kik’s daily killing of her with shock therapy: “Do not weep, he says when he finishes, it is finished and you are no more hurt” (198). Also, after she is transferred to Ward Two, a patient tells Virginia, “When one of us is sent to One it’s like a funeral” (131).

mechanical precision that she evokes her literary descendant, the archetypal psychiatric nurse of American literature, Nurse Ratched, “the watchful robot” who exerts control over every aspect of her ward in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.<sup>57</sup> Leslie Fiedler describes Kesey’s novel as “brutally misogynous,”<sup>58</sup> arguing that it depicts life on a psychiatric ward “presided over by a monster in female form known as Nurse Ratched, or more familiarly, ‘Big Nurse.’” She is a “super-professional” nurse who “is organized and the organizer of everyone around her.” Most importantly, she “has become the police; and can therefore only be subdued through an act of outlawry, like the rapist’s murderous assault, vain but gallant, made on her by the book’s major male character, R.P. McMurphy.”<sup>59</sup> Apart from McMurphy’s act of violence, Fiedler’s scathing critique of Kesey’s depiction of Nurse Ratched equally applies to Ward’s portrayal of Miss Davis. Indeed, apart from these similarities, both novels demean single nurses, and repeatedly stress the machine-like proficiency with which these “Big Nurses” carry out their duties.<sup>60</sup> More than anyone in *The Snake Pit*, Miss Davis is an embodiment of the hypersurveillance of the Law.<sup>61</sup> She is Ward One’s chief of police, subjecting deviant patients and nurses to constant surveillance in order to maintain absolute obedience and cooperation. She is such a rigid, exacting, and humorless woman that it seems her sole purpose is to torment Virginia. But this reading of Miss Davis decontextualizes her, the

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<sup>57</sup> Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Fiedler, *Tyranny of the Normal: Essays on Bioethics, Theology & Myth*, 132.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 132-33.

<sup>60</sup> Robert and Virginia refer to the unmarried status of female staff (124, 177-78). In *Cuckoo’s Nest* a nurse on another ward tells McMurphy, “I sometimes think all single nurses should be fired after they reach thirty-five.” McMurphy replies, “‘At least all single *Army* nurses’” like Nurse Ratched (266, emphasis in original).

<sup>61</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202-3). Virginia is trying to avoid this subjection, but she cannot and thus her behavior, thoughts, and memory are deeply affected by Miss Davis’s gaze. Fulfilling Miss Davis’s wish, she ultimately becomes someone who belongs on a “worse” ward.

nurses, and the inmates of Ward One by privileging the narrator's, Virginia's, nurses', and other patients' personal perspectives, and failing to acknowledge the degree to which Miss Davis is a product of the position she occupies in the institution.

While Miss Davis's personification of the "institutionalized" staff member is rivaled by only one other nurse in *The Snake Pit*,<sup>62</sup> all the nurses of Juniper Hill are constituted to a degree by the institution and thus reflect some aspect of it. This is evident in their body types, insistence on arbitrary rules, patronizing manner, confusion, treatment of patients, and "mad" behavior.<sup>63</sup> The various ways in which the nurses reflect the institution is partly the product of their isolation from one another. For instance, while transferring Virginia from Ward One to Ward Two, Miss Gold tells her, "And I know you'll like Mrs. Fledderson. I took my training under her. She's so, well, not easy, I guess, but she makes it seem easy. [...] I don't get to see Mrs. Fledderson often. Funny, with her right down the hall" (128). When they reach Ward Two Mrs. Fledderson makes a facetious remark about the segregation of nurses: "Goldie [...] How'd you get away? You been fired?" (129). While this lack of movement of nurses is a reversal of the constant movement of patients from ward to ward, it has the same effect in that it limits their ability to communicate with one another. Any community of nurses or patients, or a combination of the two groups, is radically circumscribed, though not utterly wiped out, by the isolation that defines the ward system. The nurses' lack of movement also suggests that they are inescapably attached to their positions in the institution. Near the end of the

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<sup>62</sup> Miss Sommerville, about whom I will elaborate below.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, larger and smaller nurses (226), and Ward Twelve's rule of no stepping on the rug (201). Also see Albert Deutsch, *The Shame of the States*, "The state hospital system [...] tends to attract largely the security-minded doctor, the failure in private medicine, along with those forced into the system because they can't afford to open private offices or because of some personality difficulty that seeks shelter in a protective institutional setting" (140).

novel, Miss Vance tells Virginia, ““Once you get here it’s sort of hard to get away,” to which Virginia replies, ““That’s been my experience.”” Miss Vance tells her, ““Don’t worry. It won’t be long now. But I’m telling you it’s even worse for a nurse. There’s not a darn thing to stop you from leaving, except for what made you take up nursing in the first place. [...] it’s hard when you know there isn’t anyone to take your place here. Of course if you died. ... But you couldn’t help that” (259-60). In other words, Juniper Hill also functions as a “finishing school” for nurses: their desire to care for others entangles them in the institution’s machinery for life, but whatever values or ideas they bring to the institution, e.g., if their notion of caretaking is to be rigid, lenient, or reform-oriented, must ultimately conform to the institutional perspective. And while there is a diverse range of nurses in *The Snake Pit*, it is clear that they must replace their personal preferences with the expectations of the institution or they will be re-placed within it.

While the line that separates the staff and inmates often seems tenuous,<sup>64</sup> Miss Sommerville, a compassionate nurse who represents the antithesis of the mechanical Miss Davis, has been re-placed on the “other” side of it. Miss Sommerville was unable to perform her role mechanically, “as if reading from a book,” like Miss Davis and Miss Hart. When Miss Sommerville first appears in the novel she asks Virginia a question that indicates her impulse to reform: ““Have you had a bowel movement today, Mrs. Cunningham?”” (214).<sup>65</sup> This is the only time in the novel that a nurse (or former nurse) asks a question regarding a patient’s physical health. Indeed, the uniqueness of this question suggests her limitations as a Juniper Hill nurse. Immediately after Miss Vance

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<sup>64</sup> See 108, 111, 122, 151, 156, 202, 214, 260, and 266.

<sup>65</sup> Naming is significant in the passage in which Miss Sommerville first appears. She is referred to as “the relic” after being described as wearing old-fashioned clothing. Also, she addresses Virginia as “Mrs. Cunningham,” and herself as “Miss Sommerville,” indicating their relative positions as married patient and single nurse (214). Later, we read, “Miss Sommerville—no one called this one by first name” (233).

reveals that Virginia's fellow patient was once her fellow nurse, she analyzes Miss Sommerville's inability to conform:

She was a good nurse. But she felt things too much. She tried to get some changes made. It was like beating her head against a stone wall. Worse. The damage was more permanent. But maybe she wasn't such a good nurse. Look at it another way. A good nurse can't be any reformer and that's what Sommerville was. A good nurse has got to take orders and get along with what she has at hand. You aren't supposed to get any ideas. ... Well, I guess that will do. (260)

Miss Vance's discussion of Miss Sommerville's thin-skinned nature is punctuated in interesting ways by her ironing of Virginia's dress. After "plug[ing] in the iron," she recalls Miss Sommerville's words regarding the potential "bolster[ing]" effect of patients' clothes (258). Next, she "wet a finger and *touched* the iron," explaining that Miss Sommerville "*felt* things too much. In this business you got to have a hide like a rhinoceros" (259, emphasis added). Virginia then watches her press the skirt in silence before asking if Miss Sommerville is "going to get well?" after which "Miss Vance slapped the iron down on the skirt" (260). Their discussion ends with the final line of the passage quoted above, "Well, I guess that will do," which signals that the skirt is pressed, their discussion of Miss Sommerville is over, and that it is unwise for anyone to "get any ideas" about reforming Juniper Hill. As the ellipsis suggests, it is safer if "you," which refers to staff and inmates alike, omit ideas like this altogether.

The re-placement of Miss Sommerville within Juniper Hill suggests that the individual perspective is as untenable for staff as it is for inmates, that all those who dwell in mental institutions are de-individuated either because they accept or are forced to accept a role

defined by the institution. Almost immediately upon arriving in Ward One Virginia is surprised by the “terrified” response of a student nurse when she hears Miss Davis say that Virginia is “Dr. Kik’s patient.” Virginia cannot understand “why she should be scared. I’m the one” (109). The reason the student nurse is frightened, however, is because Virginia is Dr. Kik’s “special case” and this elite status threatens the order of things on One. Unlike Miss Sommerville, Miss Davis and other staff must conceive of patients as non-persons, de-individualized subjects whose words and actions are to be read as symptomatic of their mental state. Thus, Virginia is exactly the type of “one” that cannot be allowed in this in-between ward. Her “special status” cannot be recognized because “[t]here are no individuals within the regime of imprisonment, only subcategories of punishment and classification that evaporate the individual into her or his condition of existence.”<sup>66</sup> The Law will not bend to suit an individual’s needs and this rigidity is reflected throughout the ward, including in the cement of Virginia’s floor, the “arithmetical exactness” with which her bed is made, and, most important, the rules which Miss Davis quickly informs her, “are quite different from the other wards.”<sup>67</sup> These rules mandate acquiescence by requiring patients to be “very serious and cooperative” (110). In fact, she repeats this last word four times within the space of a page (three times as “co-operative” and once as “co-operate”) to stress the importance of conformity in One.

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<sup>66</sup> Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*, 36. Here I apply Rodriguez’s argument concerning the writings of Viet Mike Ngo, who is imprisoned in California, to the status of mental patients like Virginia Cunningham. Rodriguez argues that “Ngo’s principled refusal to individualize his condition (and thus, his ‘liberation’) invokes the radically de-individualizing gestures of both [Leonard] Peltier and [Mumia] Abu-Jamal.” Ngo, Peltier, Abu-Jamal and others position themselves as non-individuals, as “deindividuated” non-persons: “*imprisoned people have no right to exist as political beings or social subjects*” (36, emphasis in original).

<sup>67</sup> Paradoxically, though Miss Davis stresses the importance of conformity on Ward One, its rules and the inmates’ clothes, among other things, make it different than all other wards in Juniper Hill (106).

The level of discipline required on Ward One suggests that even though, or perhaps because, these inmates are ostensibly on the verge of being released, they must not stand out as someone's "special case" or regard themselves as individuals; thus, Virginia is not and cannot be "the one." She must recognize that she is still "one of them," a part of a group that is defined by the institution. Those who continue to stand out as uncategorized or uncategorizable cases are far less likely to be released from One than those who have been categorized. Similarly, Nurse Ratched classifies mental patients as Acutes and Chronics,<sup>68</sup> labels that correspond to a patient's chances of being released from the institution. In the words of the narrator of *Cuckoo's Nest*, Chief Bromden, who is deaf and mute by choice until late in the novel:

The Big Nurse recognizes this fear [of Acutes that they could become Chronics someday] and knows how to put it to use; she'll point out to an Acute, whenever he goes into a sulk, that you boys be good boys and cooperate with the staff policy which is engineered for your *cure*, or you'll end up over on *that* side. (Everybody on the ward is proud of the way the patients cooperate. We got a little brass tablet tacked to a piece of maple wood that has printed on it:

CONGRATULATIONS FOR GETTING ALONG WITH THE SMALLEST  
NUMBER OF PERSONNEL OF ANY WARD IN THE HOSPITAL. It's a prize  
for cooperation. It's hung on the wall right above the log book, right square in the  
middle between the Chronics and Acutes.)<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The Chronics, as their name suggests, are long-term patients whose mental status is worse than the Acutes. Apart from Chief Bromden, the Chronics are uniformly uncommunicative (205). While he tells the story of Acutes like McMurphy who become Chronics, he does not relate one instance of a Chronic becoming an Acute.

<sup>69</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 17, emphasis in original.

Like Miss Davis, Nurse Ratched stresses “cooperation” on her ward, as is evident by Bromden’s use of it three times in this passage. Bromden, as a Chronic, himself represents “*that side,*” and parenthetically admits, as if momentarily reclaiming his feigned muteness, that “[e]verybody,” including him, takes pride in this cooperation. In fact, the “little brass tablet” suggests that they are collaborators in their own disappearance: like the Chronics, the Acutes require a minimal amount of attention or discipline from staff. In fact, patients eagerly record one another’s ill-advised confessions in the “log book” over which the tablet hangs, a text that links one’s cooperation with institutional policy and the constant surveillance of oneself and others. Similarly, in *The Snake Pit*, the only way to leave Ward One is to internalize Miss Davis’s rules and categories. Accordingly, after Ward lists a number of freedoms patients have on One, we learn that “[y]ou could do anything as long as you did it in your room and broke no rules” (116). These rules, which function to normalize and de-individuate inmates, depend on constant surveillance and, as in Nurse Ratched’s ward, in most cases on Ward One discipline is effected through self-surveillance and self-regulation, thus making staff less necessary than it is on other wards.

If one were to manufacture a little brass tablet to describe One, it would likely combine Ivan Karamazov’s famous assertion that everything would be permitted if God did not exist and Jacques Lacan’s reversal of it, that everything would be prohibited in such a world.<sup>70</sup> For those who have internalized the disciplinary techniques of One

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<sup>70</sup> See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 82, 263, 589, 593, 632, 649, and 696-97; *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 128; and Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 9-10 and *The Invisible Remainder*, 118.

anything is permitted.<sup>71</sup> Those who cannot adapt, who have yet to become their own Observer, on the other hand, are subjected to the piercing gaze of Juniper Hill's quintessential expert in normality. Miss Davis indefatigably punishes Virginia for her unwillingness to co-operate with her often arbitrary and/or unspecified rules. Virginia's uncooperative behavior signals both her inability to understand that which is expected of her and her refusal to adapt to the ways of the ward. To understand she would have to become like the women of One whom she describes but does not name: "Virginia studied them as they entered the dayroom. *Taken as a group* they appeared to be normal women" (114, emphasis added). Patients on Ward One wear their own clothes, eat meals "somewhat reminiscent of food," do not have to take medication, and spend the day working away from the ward. Apart from a few degrading reminders of where (and thus who) they are—toilet paper is rationed out a few squares at a time and patients are not allowed to have matches—Ward One mimics life outside the hospital.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, Virginia's inability or unwillingness to understand these rules allies her with the only women in Ward One whom she studies individually, Mrs. Grier and Lola, both of whom she names and identifies as somewhat mad: "She knew that Mrs. Grier shouldn't be allowed to have matches, but surely the others could be trusted" (116). Also, Virginia "had been beginning to realize that Lola was still quite sick" (127). Though Virginia originally thinks that "Lola isn't sick," after finding out she has been on One for nine

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<sup>71</sup> Writers and/or characters in nearly all madhouse texts take part in their own subjection by confessing their story in the language of the mental institution and internalizing the institution's disciplinary techniques.

<sup>72</sup> Hillyer's "Cottage B," is similar to One: "everybody seemed busy; some were sewing; some playing cards [...] Cottage B was a place for those who were 'better,' yet one might well remain there for a very long period." At first, like Virginia, Hillyer takes "no part in activities," but weeks later she starts to do so, even "assum[ing] a slight proprietary attitude toward the cottage" (109-10, 117). Hillyer suggests why she and her fellow inmates have internalized their own "little brass tablet": "Fear of the 'big house' hung over the cottage in a rather wholesome fashion; any disturbance and back went the offender. We saw this happen frequently" (114).

months and in the hospital nearly three years (117), her last thought before leaving One expresses her judgment of Lola's mental health less ambivalently: "Yes, still quite sick" (127). Though Mrs. Grier and Lola seem out of place, they are like *Cuckoo's* Chronicles in that their presence keeps the anonymous Acutes of Juniper Hill in line. These living exceptions to One's rule of anonymity are in part a product of the constant movement of patients which I will discuss below, and they necessitate the application of these rules and foster this movement.

After Virginia sees very little of Miss Davis on her first day on the ward, on subsequent days "she scarcely did not see Miss Davis. It developed that Ward One had harder and faster rules than any you had ever encountered. And the presiding officer had no intention of relaxing" (117). The rules Virginia is required to obey on One are not particularly demanding. Her main duties, for instance, are to mop the floors and write for an hour each day (118). What makes them unbearable is that under Miss Davis's constant surveillance everything becomes a violation of ward rules and thus proof of her insanity. For instance, she insists that Virginia does not distinguish herself from the other patients or the nurses by making mistakes, demonstrating her talent as a writer, or flaunting her status as a married woman. Though Virginia does not try to distinguish herself as a married woman on One, her husband Robert does, after which Virginia "was sure that Miss Davis was harder on her from then on," including "shaking" her for confusing the wet and dry mops (124). And even though Virginia expresses her desire not to write, she must obey Dr. Kik's special rule, and therefore transgress One's requirement of anonymity. Indeed, Miss Davis requires her to commit this "sin" of differentiation by

changing Kik's suggestion that she "may write for an hour each day" to "'Dr. Kik says you are to write [...] There will be no argument'" (119).<sup>73</sup>

Ultimately Virginia decides she will "destroy the plagiarized and absurd writing" (120) she was compelled to write and instead dictate the terms of her own story. In fact, when she realizes it is unlikely that she will "graduate" from this "finishing school," she begins a "plot of [her] own" to counteract Miss Davis's plan to "speed [her] through the back door" (124). She feigns a medical condition in order to ask Dr. Kik that she be transferred out of the in-between ward in which she is "always thinking about going home" (126). Her request to be transferred, which is at first an admission that she doesn't "fit in," ultimately becomes a confession, which she repeats three times, as if signing a re-commitment form in triplicate, that she is "not well enough" to be on One (126). As a result, Virginia's "plot" recommences the movement from ward to ward which disorients, defines, and divides her from her fellow inmates, initiating a series of transfers that demonstrate the degree to which her agency and knowledge are circumscribed by her position in the institution. As Goffman notes,

In the main, state mental hospitals do not function on the basis of psychiatric doctrine, but in terms of a 'ward system.' Drastically reduced living conditions are allocated through punishments and rewards, expressed more or less in the language of penal institutions. This framework of actions and words is the one employed almost entirely by attendants and to a considerable degree by higher

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<sup>73</sup> At one point, Miss Davis's demand for cooperation and anonymity directly connects Virginia's writing to her sanity. Miss Davis attempts to dissuade Virginia from writing fiction, telling her that "'From my own experience I can assure you that you will get well sooner if you face reality.'" She then learns that Virginia does not know the "'touch system'" on the typewriter (121). Virginia tells her she likes to type "'even though I'm not efficient,'" to which Miss Davis replies, "'I say this only for your own good, but when you get a more co-operative attitude you'll be better off. I think if you would forget that you had a little something published. ... After all, it's nothing to be so excited about, is it? It doesn't put you above the other ladies'" (121-22).

staff, especially in connection with the day-to-day problems of running the hospital. The disciplinary frame of reference lays out a relatively full set of means and ends that patients legitimately obtain, and against the background of this authoritative but not quite official system, a great number of patient activities *effectively* become illicit or not permissible. So emptied is the effectively authorized life given some patients on some wards that almost any move they make is likely to add an unplanned-for satisfaction.<sup>74</sup>

Virginia's re-insertion into the ward system initiates a series of arbitrary transfers<sup>75</sup> which suggest an inmate's "assignment to a given ward is presented not as a reward or punishment, but as an expression of his general level of social functioning, his status as a person."<sup>76</sup> Due to the constant movement of the mental patient and/or her/his fellow inmates, s/he often experiences what Goffman calls the "mirroring effects of the hospital," an indication that the ward system "is an extreme instance of how the physical facts of an establishment can be employed to frame the conception a person takes of himself."<sup>77</sup> These physical facts provide mental patients with the perceptual framework through which they define themselves, the institution, and all those within it. Like

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<sup>74</sup> Goffman, *Asylums*, 206-07, emphasis in original.

<sup>75</sup> Even though *The Snake Pit* is defined by the movement of patients, Virginia spends the first third of the book in Ward Three (3-108), and the last seventy pages in Ward Thirty Three, Building Five (207-78). She is transferred to One (108-29), because she is favored by Dr. Kik, and leaves this ward for Ward Two because she finds it unbearable. The reason she is transferred the last five times, however, seem much more arbitrary: she is transferred from Two to Five (143), because she bites a doctor's finger; Five to Twelve (169), for locking herself in a staff bathroom; Twelve to Eight (188), because she asks for something to read, which might have been taken as a sign of her improving condition; Eight to Fourteen (198), after she collapses in fear; and finally from Fourteen to Building Five (207), because Robert asks for her to leave Reception. These transfers are interwoven with various intraward movements, including trips to the cafeteria, electroshock therapy, occupational therapy, the movies, physical training, and her first visit to Staff. Except for this visit to Staff, none of her experiences within Juniper Hill equal the level of surveillance and judgment of One. This is not surprising, though, as Staff (136-42, 258-63), functions as Juniper Hill's court of law. Staff's judgment of an inmate's in/sanity determines if s/he can leave the institution.

<sup>76</sup> Goffman, *Asylums*, 149.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 149, 150.

marionettes, patients are manipulated and clothed in ways that constitute them as “gray-blue rats” (212) whose bodies and minds are experimented on. The disorientation that results from this manipulation, as I have suggested above, also divides those who might reform the institution, thus lessening the possibility that the communal perspective of patients or nurses can effect change, or that bonds between these two groups will form. Accordingly, inmates and staff alike often become one with their status as their limited environment domesticates their expectations of reality. As one might expect, the first two wards in which Virginia dwells shape her in very different ways. She is forced to undergo shock therapy, drink paraldehyde, and share a dormitory with numerous patients on Ward Three; in contrast, on Ward One there is no EST, no medicine, and no forced co-habitation. Yet on Three Virginia is able to construct a strong enough sense of herself that she believes she is ready to be released. Ward One, on the other hand, makes her doubt herself—ultimately, she tells Dr. Kik that she is “not well enough” for One, which necessarily indicates her inability to go home.

Though this constant ward-to-ward movement is undoubtedly an expression of the institution’s power to disorient, define, and divide mental patients, Ward uses these transfers to structure her narrative. As Wood writes,

movement among the various wards is one of the primary structuring devices of [asylum] autobiographies. Indeed, physical movement from place to place was important to the narratives because where a patient was largely determined the treatment she received. Such involuntary movement represented her powerlessness within the asylum world, given that, according to the autobiographers, she rarely knew when she would be moved, why, or where (until

she actually arrived). Her position in the asylum also represented how close she was perceived as being to sanity and thus to release.<sup>78</sup>

Here Wood unites several key elements of the relationship between institutional forms and narrative content. As inmates are involuntarily transferred from ward to ward, they encounter treatment, rules, privileges, and staff that provide them with a new, though likely very familiar, set of “physical facts” with which to constitute their identity. Indeed, in order for madhouse texts to be regarded as credible, writers must be able to demonstrate a degree of accuracy to persuade readers who are likely familiar with newspaper and magazine accounts of mental institutions as well as other madhouse texts. Due to the canonization of this genre, which provides readers with standardized narratives of the experience of madness and mental institutions, experiences of madness in these texts are represented by and representations of a codified knowledge.

Ward’s decision to write a fictional account that refuses closure and cure was especially important during an age when psychiatric professionals and other “experts” closely scrutinized and even introduced madhouse texts. As I have suggested above, rather than the closure and cure typical of the asylum autobiography and the case study, revelations about Virginia’s status and position are almost always accompanied by textual gaps. Still, even though *The Snake Pit* was conceived of and marketed as a work of fiction, Virginia’s movement from ward to ward must follow patterns established in earlier madhouse texts and in hospitals like Rockland State where Ward was institutionalized. Similar to Ward’s constant switching of pronouns, particularly her

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<sup>78</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 9-10. Hubert also discusses inter- and intraward movement in *The Snake Pit*: “one of Virginia’s frustrations is that the wards are identical in layout. They can only be distinguished by number, personnel, and perhaps by the behavior of patients. The transfers from ward to ward are disorienting to Virginia, and even when she remains on a ward for a period of time she is often confused by the way she is moved around without knowing where she is going or why she must go there” (86).

repeated use of second-person pronouns, Virginia's frequent movement from ward to ward collapses the distance between her and the reader: "The control over her life lost in the asylum is regained in the telling of the narrative, as the narrative voice directs the reader and story from place to place, often with little warning or explanation. To read these narratives can thus be a disorienting experience. It is through this disorientation that writers can undermine the reader's skepticism."<sup>79</sup> Ward disorients the reader by conflating her/him with Virginia, who is always moving (even when she is not) within an institution whose architecture appears to change regularly. For instance, Virginia regards the movement and creation of doors and rooms as one way the anonymous "they" of the institution exerts its control over patients: "Entirely new doors were created in order to insure perpetual confusion. You fancied them saying, Look, the ladies are getting on to the Ward; last night Virginia found the washroom without half trying; time for change, gentlemen" (94).<sup>80</sup>

For the most part Ward suggests that it is not possible for inmates or staff to organize because the institution is dedicated to disorienting and dividing them, that the communal perspective, like the personal perspective, is always circumscribed by the institution. After being transferred to Ward Five, Virginia is uncertain if the ward or the patients have been changed, a confusion which she attributes to the nameless institutional perspective: "They were always changing things at Juniper but now they seemed to have changed the ladies" (143).<sup>81</sup> Caminero-Santangelo contends that "[t]he reason why such

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<sup>79</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Earlier in the novel, Ward describes a similar change of the washroom's location (40).

<sup>81</sup> Since almost all patients are transferred frequently, the place and status of those who remain in one ward, like Lola and Mrs. Grier in One, and Virginia in Three, is also defined by movement and change. The disorientation brought about by the ever-changing institution is reflected in Virginia's belief that her husband is an impostor (98-101, 178). For other instances of imposture and replication, see 107, 123, 131, 133, 136, 158, and 164.

passages [of organizing among madwomen] in *The Snake Pit* and *The Loony-Bin Trip* are after all comical is that the ‘mad’ cannot organize.” She continues, “While all the asylum narratives describe alliances, friendships, and sacrifices for others among inmates, they also all ultimately point toward the impossibility of political solidarity among the mad.”<sup>82</sup>

Virginia suggests that it is the constant movement of patients that prevents them from organizing. While asking Dr. Kik to be transferred out of Ward One, she says, “‘But it’s so hard to become friends, really friends, here. I’m always thinking about going home, you know. It’s like making friends in a depot’” (126). Ironically, the dual meaning of depot, as a station at which one waits to leave and a building in which things are stored, more accurately describes the wards to which Virginia will be transferred than Ward One. But the constant movement and stasis that is pervasive on all wards engenders an uncertainty of place, and therefore of status, which undermines the possibility of inmates organizing, causing them instead to define one another in the language of psychiatry and to distrust one another; for example, at one point Virginia wonders if a fellow patient is a spy (151).

But even if inmates are never able to organize in Juniper Hill, there are several moments in the narrative that suggest ways in which a certain union might be realized. Shortly after the shock therapy session discussed above, Virginia prepares a speech: “Ladies! Now is our chance to organize. Unless we organize we are lost. Are we going to continue to accept this oppression. United we have great strength. Let us organize” (48). Though she is silenced before she can speak, later in the novel she devises “Thinking Therapy,” a “one pupil class” in which she will teach herself how to think again. She then considers its potential benefits for her fellow inmates who dwell in a “hospital [that] had

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<sup>82</sup> Caminero-Santangelo, *The Madwoman Can’t Speak*, 24.

no interest in teaching its patients how to think. Juniper Hill's goal was to Keep Them Quiet. Perhaps a group of thinking patients would have disturbed the peace. Let people think and at once they are drawing up petitions and demanding Rights. There simply were not enough nurses to handle thinkers" (238-39).<sup>83</sup> The institution's lack of staff necessitates the silencing of its inmates, and what might be called the memory of the institution constantly reminds inmates of their status and position, seemingly destroying these unions in advance by shutting up inmates within themselves just as it shuts them up within the walls of the institution. Late in the novel we read, "You'd like to have a crack at organizing Juniper Hill. But remember you are a patient; remember you are utsnay, dear" (243). Significantly, the narrator's use of pig Latin echoes an earlier passage in which a hydrotherapy attendant warns her colleague about Virginia: "'Had a little oubletray this morning. It ickskay and itesbay'" (174). Then, after Virginia's reasoned complaint about the temperature of the tub water, the narrator concludes that "the one who said this was not utsnay" (175-76). The reversal of "not utsnay" to "utsnay" suggests that it is always dangerous to employ the terms of the institution, even if one alters or negates them while doing so.

Even though the communal perspective is often sundered by the institution's mandate to remember, the way in which Ward interweaves temporal, memorial, and linguistic gaps throughout the novel suggests that it might be possible to organize in the silence of that which is not named, that is, it might be possible to take advantage of not speaking rather than be limited by one's inability to do so. *The Snake Pit* is different from nearly every other madhouse text in that it is an incomplete story which, similar to Hillyer's autobiography, begins *in medias res*. Unlike Ward, however, Hillyer almost immediately

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<sup>83</sup> Also see 186, 240.

begins to provide the reader with information to fill in these gaps: we learn, for instance, about various details of her childhood; her sexual desire for a female teacher; her guilt over her father's suicide; and an uncertain cure which she achieves with the help of a psychoanalyst after her release from the asylum. Ward, on the other hand, provides very little information regarding Virginia's past. Early in the novel, in fact, she links Virginia's lack of childhood memories to shock therapy. Virginia asks a nurse, "Where am I going?' 'For shock. You remember.' Do I? I remember it no more than I remember the house where I was born and the little window" (41). Ward offers so few details about Virginia's childhood that one had to be written into the screenplay of the film version of the novel in order to produce a case study of her life. At the beginning of the film Dr. Kik tells Robert, "We've seldom had a case history that told so little." Then, a series of flashbacks, brought about by extensive psychoanalysis, reveals that Virginia's inability to love and be loved is caused by a childhood trauma which involved her jealousy of her pregnant mother and her guilt about the death of her father. Ultimately, she comes to realize that "husbands and fathers can't be the same thing."<sup>84</sup> In the novel, on the other hand, psychoanalysis is discredited from the opening pages (3-4), and Virginia ultimately mocks Dr. Kik's diagnosis that she had "a subconscious feeling of guilt on account of marrying" her dead fiancé's friend and this caused her to have a nervous breakdown: "It's embarrassing,' she said. 'I mean, for Dr. Kik. I always think of him in connection with that little room with electricity, always the man of science. This changes the picture. I'll have to think of him as a man of romance as well'" (256-57).

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<sup>84</sup> The beginning of Virginia and Robert's relationship is also fleshed out in some detail in the film. Virginia emerges as an unreasonable, impulsive young woman whom Robert thinks is "like a child looking for protection."

Not only does Ward begin *The Snake Pit in medias res* and refuse to provide a clear and detailed symptomatology of Virginia prior to her hospitalization, but she also does not account for the more than seven months that Virginia spent in the hospital prior to Grace's revelation of her lost time. Indeed, this seven-month gap only widens as the narrative develops because the details Ward provides tend to increase the reader's disorientation as time continues to slip away from Virginia, who is aware that "[t]ime was different here; sometimes it was long and sometimes it was short and sometimes—this was disconcerting—it was not at all. [...] here in the world of Juniper Hill, a day might consist of weeks, of hours, of a minute, or, frighteningly, of not even a second" (93-94).<sup>85</sup> Even more than Hillyer, for Virginia, in Wood's words, "memory is not a reservoir of incidents that enables the conscious mind to construct a coherent narrative; on the contrary, memory calls into question the very nature of the activity of narration."<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, "[n]o matter how often [Virginia] went back she was unable to get beyond that time which had not been time but past. It was impossible to imagine what had happened; you had nothing to go on" (61). Ward weaves these temporal and memorial gaps throughout the narrative, thus indicating that neither the narrator, Virginia, nor the reader can conclusively fill them. At one point Virginia comments on the permanence of her memory loss to a nurse in a line whose pronouns imply a divided self: "When your memory is all tied up and separated from the rest of you, you don't forget. In order to forget you have to remember, don't you, even though briefly?" (93). Thus, even though we learn that Virginia was in "Mendelin," a mental hospital in New York City, before

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<sup>85</sup> Virginia says that all days in Juniper Hill are the same and many of them are "lost" (101).

<sup>86</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 146. While Wood's argument is accurate in pointing out that Hillyer cannot control memories that come rushing at her, as if from the outside of her, Ward's memories are absent, and thus there is no possibility for one to analyze them.

coming to Juniper Hill, we do not learn anything about it or how long she was there (159).<sup>87</sup> If we assume that Mendelin is a Receiving hospital which processes patients and keeps them for a month or less, then Virginia's lost time is equal to the eight months Ward spent at Rockland. Any reader who attempts to separate fact from fiction will have "nothing to go on" because, as Ward announces on the dust jacket, even Virginia, who "existed in real life" and "might claim intentional resemblance to a living person," did not "quite exist *for herself*" while at Juniper Hill. Instead, she existed for all the inmates whose stories are told in *The Snake Pit*, and in doing so she embodies the communal perspective. Ultimately, Ward's decision to write an autobiographical novel instead of an asylum autobiography enables her "to twist the limits of narrative" so it can "point beyond itself to that which cannot be easily said—the silence behind the story."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Also, she breaks rules *again* for the first time (201); fellow patients assure her that one receives electroshock therapy only after spending time in hydrotherapy and pack, but Virginia only remembers the former (148-49); and upon leaving pack for what seems like the first time, a nurse tells her that this will likely be her last time because Virginia is "so much better than [she was] the other times [she] left [them]" (187).

<sup>88</sup> Brendan Stone, "Towards a Writing Without Power," 26.

## Chapter 2

“*And Where You Are Is Where You Are Not*”<sup>1</sup>

The Communalization of the “I” in Fritz Peters’s *The World Next Door*

### I. You Are Not Here: The Unattended Discourse

But who is it that is addressing you? Since it is not an “author,” a “narrator,” or a “deus ex machina,” it is an “I” that is both part of the spectacle and part of the audience; an “I” that, a bit like “you,” attends (undergoes) its own incessant, violent reinscription within the arithmetical machinery; an “I” that, functioning as a pure passageway for operations of substitution, is not some singular and irreplaceable existence, some subject or “life,” but only, moving between life and death, between reality and fiction, etc., a mere function or phantom. A term and a germ, a term that disseminates itself, a germ that carries its own term within it. Strengthening its breath with its death. The seed is sealed; the sperm, firm. (325)

–Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen, Mary Jane Ward’s development of the multi-perspective in *The Snake Pit* demonstrates that the autobiographical madhouse novel can enable former mental patients to reclaim their agency while evading the skepticism to which their writings are often subjected. This reclamation is most evident in Ward’s development of the first-person pronoun “I” from a mere echo of the narrative’s dominant third-person perspective to an “I” that is integral to the communal perspective, and, finally but never completely, to a private “I” through which Virginia is able to distance herself from her fellow inmates. The emergence of Virginia’s private “I” anticipates a variation on this new subgenre of madhouse literature that would appear shortly after the publication of *The Snake Pit*, namely, Fritz Peters’s *The World Next Door* (1949), a narrator-less first-person perspective autobiographical madhouse novel in which the “I” of a fictional

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<sup>1</sup> Peters’s original title for *The World Next Door*, *Where You Are Not*, divides the line quoted here from the “East Coker” section of T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (314). Peters cites lines 134-46 of this poem (314) and alludes to the line quoted above on the final page of the novel as David, upon being released, refers to the mental hospital as “where I am not” (362).

<sup>2</sup> This passage from Derrida’s *Dissemination* is from the chapter entitled “The Attending Discourse [*Le discours d’assistance*].”

character also represents, to an always indefinable degree, the writer on whose experiences the novel is presumably based. Peters's novel's viewpoint, which I refer to as the private "I/eye" because metaphors of sight govern the novel, often alienates the protagonist, David Mitchell, from himself, those around him, and the reader. In fact, throughout much of the novel he is so removed from himself and others that he is, paradoxically, absent from the place from which he speaks, a non-participant who is unable to position himself in relation to others except as a reflective surface—"a reflexive" or "autocentric perceptive subject"—who has been warped by his violent and incessant introspection.<sup>3</sup> Though the "I" in Peters's first-person novel necessarily charts a different course than it does in Ward's third-person novel, Peters also effects a communalization of his protagonist's "I" by gradually transitioning from the alienated and alienating insider's perspective, which is essentially a nonperspective, that dominates the narrative to a communal perspective that enables David to plot himself into the action of the mental hospital and thus participate in his own story.

In contrast to the temporal, memorial, and linguistic gaps that Ward weaves throughout *The Snake Pit*, gaps which suggest a "silence behind [her] story,"<sup>4</sup> the inward-turned "I/eye" of the first-person perspective in *The World Next Door* purports to "tell all," even though there is always evidence that something remains hidden, suppressed, or

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (15, 76). Also notable is Butler's assertion that Adorno "cautions against the error to be found [...] when the 'I' becomes understood apart from its social conditions, when it is espoused as a pure immediacy, arbitrary or accidental, detached from its social and historical conditions—which, after all, constitute the general conditions of its own emergence. He is clear that there is no morality without an 'I,' but pressing questions remain: In what does that 'I' consist? And in what terms can it appropriate morality or, indeed, give an account of itself?" (7). Later Butler adds, "the 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or set of relations—to a set of norms" (8).

<sup>4</sup> Brendan Stone, "Towards a Writing Without Power," 26.

not accounted for.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the paucity of reference to David's life before he was institutionalized on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1947 (24, 165, 174), *The World Next Door*, as Mary Jane Ward argues in her review of the novel, appears to be "Fritz Peters's meticulous record of what passed through the distorted mind of his protagonist during [his] brief hospitalization."<sup>6</sup> Ward then refers to the novel as a "study," arguing that its "distorted" insider's perspective "will undoubtedly limit" its "audience to persons willing to pass up sustained narrative interest for the sake of detailed case-history," adding that "there are considerable amounts of tedious writing, but never, psychiatrically speaking, a dull moment." Though Peters never provides a clear-cut diagnosis of David Mitchell, Ward refers to the novel as

a complete refresher course in schizophrenia. If the trimmings at times seem to startle the hospital staff, it may be because few mental patients, real or fictitious, run so comprehensive a psychotic gamut in so short a time. Mr. Peters hasn't missed anything and he has had the courage to demonstrate that the exploration of the limbo beyond the borderline of sanity is, above all, monotonous.

Though Ward points to the absence of gaps in *The World Next Door* by referring to it as a "meticulous" and "detailed" text in which "Peters hasn't missed anything," she repeatedly undermines the merit, even the possibility, of a novel that provides the reader with "a complete refresher course in schizophrenia." This "course," Ward suggests, offers nothing new: it reads like a "record," a "case-history," or a "study" rather than a novel, and because of this it is "tedious" and "monotonous." David Mitchell seems so concerned

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<sup>5</sup> *The World Next Door* was marketed as "[t]he first novel—based on actual fact—to reveal the total, day-to-day experiences of a man who journeyed far into delusion" (23). See "Display Ad 21 -- No Title," *New York Times*, 23 Sept. 1949: 21.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Jane Ward, "Nightmare Revisited," *New York Times*, 18 Sept. 1949: BR6.

with recording every minute detail of his “case”—of grasping it from his own perspective—that the narrative often seems to disappear.<sup>7</sup>

Peters’s “tell all” narrative strategy is also apparent late in the novel in David’s “*Record of the Personnel of this Institution*” in which he writes “brief note[s]” on staff members’ treatment of himself and other patients. Next to each staff member’s name he writes “a code mark. A circle for *good*, an ‘x’ for *bad*. In shorthand, I then made a brief note about each one of them” (268, emphasis in original). After deciding to write about staff, David becomes “increasingly aware of the separate life of my own mind,” an awareness that leads him to type “a long and detailed self-history, beginning with my earliest memories. I wrote it in a kind of typewritten shorthand, not for any purpose of disguise, but simply to save time and get down *everything* as rapidly as possible” (268-69, emphasis added).<sup>8</sup> Everything, or so it seems, “passe[s] through [his] distorted mind” and is distorted in the process, but very little remains long enough to shape his “I/eye.” It is ultimately David’s refusal to reflect on and incorporate other perspectives that causes the novel to lack “sustained narrative interest.” His isolated perspective produces a form of “madness” similar to that which Shoshana Felman contends is rooted in “an excess of remembrance.”<sup>9</sup> This “excess” signifies “the madness of memories, or of memory itself: a memory without a referent, a memory not of what is external, some event or fact, but of what is internal, a desire, a reminiscence—a memory not so much of the object of desire

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<sup>7</sup> For much of the novel, the narrative’s continuous past seems to offer a series of distinct, unanchored moments that appear not to be rooted in the past, moments which often seem to exist only while they are being described.

<sup>8</sup> Immediately before writing a suicide note (299-303), David “look[s] over the ‘notebook,’” calling it “my record of the performance of the attendants and nurses and doctors, and laugh[s]. It seemed a petty sort of thing to have done” (299).

<sup>9</sup> *Writing and Madness* (81). Felman writes about “the excess of remembrance” in her analysis of Gustave Flaubert’s *Memoirs of a Madman*.

as of the desiring subject himself.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the monotony and narcissism expressed by David’s inward-turned first-person perspective produce a remembrance of moments past that is so personal that the reader is often alienated.

In contrast to Ward’s decision to interweave textual amnesia and oblivion throughout her novel, Peters attempts to capture time via his incessant documentation: he tries to make certain that the text’s private “I/eye” “hasn’t missed anything.” His “meticulous record” suggests that he is able to remember everything he sees and experiences, an ability that allies his novel to the case-study<sup>11</sup> and the asylum autobiography. As a result, his novel is inextricably bound by the memory of these genres and the language of madness; unlike Ward, he is always “a prisoner of someone else’s words and even [his] own.”<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Foucault contends that the asylum journal, the precursor to the above-mentioned genres, works to imprison the mad subject and wipe out her/his experience of madness. He argues that, subsequent to Pierre Cabanis’s “curious idea [...] of an ‘asylum journal,’”

confinement was the space within which madness formulated its own truth; it was to mark its measure moment by moment. Within it madness would come to completion up to the point of decision:

A journal shall be kept where a picture of each form of madness, the effects of remedies, and autopsies, are to be recorded with scrupulous exactitude. The names of all individuals in the section are to be recorded, enabling the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> See *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Online. 1989, which defines “case-study” as “the attempt to understand a particular person, institution, society, etc., by assembling information about his or its development; the record of such an attempt.” Their entries include the following: “**1940** WOODWORTH *Psychol.* (ed. 12) v. 162 Those who are professionally concerned in judging personality..depend largely on the interview and the inclusive procedure known as the case study.”

<sup>12</sup> Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 17.

administration to draw up a nominative report on their condition week by week, or even day by day, if that is what is judged necessary.

Madness therefore came to regions of truth that unreason had never attained: it was inserted into time, escaping the random, the purely accidental that had previously been used to mark its various episodes, and it took on an autonomous form in history. Its past and evolution became part of its truth, and what revealed madness was no longer the always-instantaneous rupture with truth that had previously been the hallmark of unreason.<sup>13</sup>

While *The World Next Door* fulfills Cabanis's prescription of "scrupulous exactitude," Peters or, better yet, David Mitchell, simultaneously occupies the roles of the "administration" and the mad subject. The second point is crucial to my understanding of the novel. Not only is everything that David experiences and describes distorted by the first-person perspective, but for much of the novel his permanently open "I/eye" is constantly engaged in a surveillance of itself. Like the asylum journal, David's scrutiny of his "case" "insert[s] [him] into time" and makes his search for the "truth" a reflection of the confinement within which it is formulated: he imprisons his "mad" self in an airtight container of his own words. After internalizing the categories from which he strives to escape, David becomes the principle collaborator in his disappearance and the author of his erasure by providing more than enough evidence to prove he is a madman. Even though the diligence of David's self-surveillance ostensibly ensures the reader that he "hasn't missed anything," the "tell all" narrative's apparent lack of gaps and alternative perspectives that might point outside itself ultimately reveal the blindness of his all-

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, 441. In this quote Foucault cites P.J.G. Cabanis, *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, 2 volumes, Paris, 1956.

seeing “I/eye.”<sup>14</sup> As evidenced by the seven months Virginia cannot remember in *The Snake Pit*, gaps often are signs of unaccounted for spaces in madhouse texts, spaces that expose the fundamental and necessary disorientation of the protagonist, reader, and, if applicable, narrator. Peters’s unwillingness to include these gaps for much of the novel indicates the degree to which the narrator-less first person is a non-perspective: David records that which he sees and experiences with such exactitude that his *story*, which the unaccounted for space makes possible, virtually disappears.

Apart from the temporal, memorial, and linguistic gaps with which one can compose this unaccounted for space, the narrator can also incorporate perspectival gaps in the text. If the perspectives of the narrator and protagonist are in accord, then that which is described will appear to be corroborated. If they are in conflict, however, the reader must generate her or his own perspective because choosing one perspective instead of another is tantamount to rewriting the text.<sup>15</sup> The absence of a narrator in *The World Next Door* distinguishes it from the tradition established by the asylum journal, the asylum autobiography, the case study, and Ward’s autobiographical madhouse novel, genres in which writers typically distinguish between themselves and their mad subject even if the text’s author and protagonist have the same name. In her review, Ward writes, “Peters never inserts auctorial guideposts to separate the misery based on real mistreatment from that caused by fancied grievances. The author consistently maintains the viewpoint of the patient.” While these “auctorial guideposts” are also absent from *The Snake Pit*, Ward’s complicated interweaving of different perspectives suggests that the events depicted in

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<sup>14</sup> In *On Certainty* Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, “Is my understanding only blindness to my own lack of understanding? It often seems so to me” (54e).

<sup>15</sup> The existence of two perspectives forces the reader to choose between them or to accept them both, no matter how contradictory they may be. Either way s/he occupies a third perspective that is not available in *The World Next Door* due to the inherent limitations of the narrator-less first person perspective.

the narrative are neither “real” nor “fancied.” Instead, the multi-perspective blurs the line between truth and fiction in such a way that these events appear to be simultaneously factual and fictitious while also appearing to be neither. Due to the lack of a narrator who might insert these “guideposts” in *The World Next Door*, on the other hand, the revelations provided by David’s “I/eye” emerge as irrefutable facts; because these facts appear in a work of fiction, they can only be interpreted as false.

Despite the contrast in the perspectives of their novels, the following passage of Ward’s review of *The World Next Door*, in which she distinguishes between fact and fiction, echoes her comments on the dust jacket of *The Snake Pit*:

Inasmuch as earlier writers, dealing in this same manner with similar material, have encountered a peculiar determination on the part of their readers to regard them as actual or would-be reporters, it is necessary to point out that factual information about the Veterans Administration is to be found elsewhere, and to repeat that Mitchell’s opinions are colored, blurred, and obscured by the nature of his affliction.<sup>16</sup>

The similarities between Ward’s choice of words in this passage and on her dust jacket are striking: the “newspaper people” or “reporters” whom she “envi[ed]” but could not emulate resurface as writers who are “regard[ed]” by readers “as actual or would-be reporters”; her failed attempt “to do a factual book” is paralleled by what she refers to as a lack of “factual information” in Peters’s novel; and echoing her claim that Juniper Hill

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<sup>16</sup> In her second madhouse novel, *Clockwise* (1969), Ward tells the story of Susan Wood, a former mental patient turned writer who has gained notoriety due to her exposé of the conditions of a state mental hospital in a novel entitled *The Hideaway*, which, like *The Snake Pit*, was the basis for a popular movie. Early in the novel, Ward describes the “peculiar determination” of readers “to regard [fiction writers] as actual or would-be reporters.” She also suggests that the line between former and current mental patients is always tenuous. This point is driven home when Wood is hospitalized for a second time while visiting a mental hospital in an official capacity.

“existed only in the mind” of Virginia Cunningham, an utterly “unreliable witness” who “built and peopled” the mental institution while her mind was “on vacation,” she claims that David Mitchell’s account of the Veterans Administration mental hospital is “colored, blurred, and obscured by the nature of his affliction.”

Though these remarks parallel one another, they have very different meanings when they are applied to Ward’s and Peters’s novels. As I mentioned earlier, Ward’s use of the third-person perspective creates a distance between herself and Virginia which allows her to relate the “truth” of the story of a not entirely distinct “other.” This distance prevents Ward from being mistaken for Virginia or a reporter who is writing a “factual book” that relies on a “mad” protagonist for the “truth.” Peters, on the other hand, is unable to write a “credible fabrication”<sup>17</sup> because he relies on a narrator-less first-person perspective which cannot produce a similarly flexible distance between himself and David Mitchell. Instead, the perspective that Peters employs creates a distance between author and protagonist which is the product of the unambiguous and exclusive relation of the “I/eye” and David. Unlike Ward’s interweaving of persons, this distance does not frustrate the reader’s attempt to define both author and character as the referent of the novel’s “I.” Instead of the fluidity of relation that exists between author, character, and reader in *The Snake Pit*, “persons” and perspectives in *The World Next Door* are largely unambiguous: Peters and David are either one and the same person or absolutely distinct; either way, Peters disappears *from*—one might also say *into*—the narrative. Hence, Peters’s assertion in the introduction to the abridged version of his novel that “the only persons, unfortunately, who are in a position to report on institutional practice (as opposed to

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<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 35.

regulations) are the patients,”<sup>18</sup> has the opposite meaning of Ward’s claim that Juniper Hill “only existed in the mind of her protagonist.” In other words, while Ward’s contention that *The Snake Pit* depicts a world of madness through a distorted lens and thus presents a “reality” that she did not shape and cannot authenticate suggests the truth of her fiction, Peters’s assertion of David’s ability to articulate the “truth” undermines his novel’s status as both a true and fictional account; thus, his story seems decidedly unreal.<sup>19</sup>

Peters’s disappearance from the narrative, which is most evident in the absence of a narrator who can describe David from an outside point of view, yields a character who must constantly name himself. Like David’s use of an unambiguous and anonymous “I,”<sup>20</sup> his continual self-reference makes his name function more like a pronoun than a proper name. The anonymity of “David Mitchell” is also the result of Peters’s attempt to disassociate himself from and link himself to David by calling attention to the fictional nature of the names and nouns which define his main character. At one point, for instance, Peters calls attention to himself as the novel’s author and alludes to the arbitrariness of his protagonist’s name: “For me, *myself*, an individual named, by some accident of preference or choice, David Mitchell” (294, emphasis in original).<sup>21</sup> Despite

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<sup>18</sup> The authorized abridgment of *The World Next Door* was published in 1950 as a Signet paperback. On the cover the novel is described as “[t]he gripping story of a man’s triumph over dark powers which threaten to destroy him.” Interestingly, much of what I write about in the Coda of this chapter, which might be called the narrative’s “secret” or “suppressed truth,” was removed from the abridged version of the novel.

<sup>19</sup> At several points in *The World Next Door* David links his in/sanity and his in/ability to distinguish between “reality” and delusion as well as consciousness and unconsciousness. He often contemplates the blurring of imagination and reality (91-92, 103, 150-51, and 329). In fact, he implies that his in/sanity can be measured in terms of his “power to distinguish between what was real and what was not real” (151). At the end of the novel, he is finally able to “roam through two worlds simultaneously” (336), an ability that allows him to see fact as fiction and vice versa.

<sup>20</sup> As Roland Barthes suggests in *Writing Degree Zero*, “The ‘I’ is still the form which expresses anonymity most faithfully” (36).

<sup>21</sup> For other instances in which Peters undermines David’s identity, see 14, 129, 188, 217, 230, 266, 291, and 294. I explore this trend in detail in the second half of this chapter.

the anonymity of the “I,” David’s solipsistic perspective prevents the inclusion of other “persons” and engenders the irreality and alienation that characterize much of the novel. This lack of ambiguity, as I explain later in the chapter, invites the institutional perspective to occupy the “I” in such a way that it becomes an “I” that is not “I.” As Roland Barthes suggests,

The ambiguous function disclosed in the preterite is found in [...] the third person in the Novel. The reader will perhaps recall a novel by Agatha Christie in which all the invention consisted in concealing the murderer beneath the use of the first person of the narrative.<sup>22</sup> The reader looked for him behind every ‘he’ in the plot: he was all the time hidden under the ‘I’. Agatha Christie knew perfectly well that, in the novel, the ‘I’ is usually a spectator, and that it is the ‘he’ who is the actor. Why? The ‘he’ is a typical novelistic convention; like the narrative tense, it signifies and carries through the action of the novel; if the third person is absent, the novel is powerless to come into being, and even wills its own

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<sup>22</sup> The Agatha Christie novel to which Barthes refers is *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) in which the narrator-protagonist, Dr. James Sheppard, employs the first-person perspective to conceal his identity as the murderer. Like Dr. Sheppard, I conceal the “secret” of *The World Next Door* as long as possible, keeping it from the reader in order to reveal it all at once in the chapter’s Coda. Even though I am concealing the “crime” of the novel’s “I/eye,” I ask the reader to assume the role of Hercule Poirot, albeit a Poirot who is always in possession of Sheppard’s confession. My withholding of textual “evidence” requires me to mention briefly passages whose significance becomes clear toward the end of the chapter. Christie, of course, also reveals clues throughout her novel. For instance, after speaking to his sister Caroline, Dr. Sheppard thinks, “In the surprise of the moment I departed from my valuable rule of *never* parting with information” (21, emphasis added). Dr. Sheppard’s unwillingness to divulge information is also evident in his description of his initial discussion of the murder with Poirot: “I plunged into a *careful* narrative, embodying all the facts I have previously set down” (96, emphasis added). Poirot sees Dr. Sheppard’s role as indispensable from the beginning. Indeed, his comments reflect the necessity of the mutual relation of “I/you” that I trace in my reading of *The World Next Door*: “‘You and I, M. le docteur, we investigate this affair side by side. Without you I should be lost’” (140). After reading “M. le docteur[’s]” “manuscript” (318), which describes the details of the murder investigation, Poirot remarks on the disappearance of Sheppard in his own composition: “‘Not so did [Captain Arthur] Hastings [Poirot’s sidekick in and the narrator of several of Christie’s Poirot novels] write [...] On every page, many, many times was the word ‘I.’ What *he* thought—what *he* did. But you—you have kept your personality in the background; only once or twice does it obtrude—in scenes of home life, shall we say’ [...] ‘A very meticulous and accurate account,’ he said kindly. ‘You have recorded all the facts faithfully and exactly—though you have shown yourself becomingly reticent as to your own share in them’” (319, emphasis in original).

destruction. The ‘he’ is a formal manifestation of the myth, and we have just seen that, in the West at least, there is no art which does not point to its own mask. The third person, like the preterite, therefore performs this service for the art of the novel, and supplies its consumers with the security born of a credible fabrication which is yet constantly held up as false.<sup>23</sup>

For most of the novel David’s inward-turned personal perspective limits his role to that of “a spectator at the movie reel of [his] own mind, at a preview of what [is] to come” (242). This “preview” of his future suggests that he dwells in a lost time that is not fully indicative of either the past or the present. The events of David’s life have always already taken place because he is forever absent in the present moment. He turns away from himself and others by refusing to point to the mask that is his “I/eye;” it is this refusal that threatens to destroy the narrative as his unwillingness to point to his mask makes him a spectator rather than an actor in his life story.

Though Peters attempts to assert control over his narrative by claiming the authority and authenticity of an autobiographer, his endeavor to “tell all” prevents him from creating the distance between himself and David with which most asylum autobiographers establish the credibility of their “sane” narrators and former “mad” selves. One reason this distance is lacking in the novel is because the unambiguous, anonymous “I” resists being multiplied. In the opening lines of *A Mind That Found Itself*, Clifford Beers explicitly points to the distance afforded him by the multiplication of his “I”:

This story is derived from as human a document as ever existed; and, because of its uncommon nature, perhaps no one thing contributes so much to its value as its

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<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 34-35.

authenticity. It is an autobiography, and more: in part it is biography; for, in telling the story of my life, I must relate the history of another self. (1)

As discussed in Chapter One, to authenticate his autobiography Beers relies on “a memory rendered somewhat *microscopic*” (169) and a “sane part” of himself that “subject[s] its temporarily unruly part to a sort of *scientific scrutiny* and *surveillance*” (188, emphasis added). Beers’s multiplication of his “I,” which is evident in his employment of terms that suggest a systematic analysis of his former “mad” self, enables him to distinguish both Beers the writer *and* the always sane part of himself from his former “mad” self. This auto/biographical division is possible because the always sane part of Beers is able to observe the “mad” Beers, and thus maintain a reasonable distance—the distance of reason—from his “mad” self. Beers’s past self, like his past, is “a thing apart,” a “case” that he can view “much as a physician might view that of a patient” (169). Divisions such as these are indispensable to asylum autobiographers because they grant them access to seemingly undistorted memories of madness and enable them to distinguish themselves as reliable sources of information whose sanity has never been in doubt. Asylum autobiographers who do not maintain an always sane part of their selves usually establish the dual perspective of the sane narrator and former mad self, a doubling which provides their narrative with perspectival ambiguity.

Instead of stepping outside of himself in order to regard his former “mad” self as an other, David perceives others as a mere reflection of his limited perspective.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the private “I/eye” cannot authenticate David’s or Peters’s story because it represents an anonymous, unambiguous, and isolated “other” who is “not endowed with the

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<sup>24</sup> This corresponds to Melanie Klein’s concept of “projective identification.” David constantly projects his desires and emotional states onto others in such a way that he alters their behavior and thus justifies his perspective. See Melanie Klein, “On Identification,” (1955).

subjectivity and personhood that accompany the articulation of *I*.”<sup>25</sup> For most of the novel David’s limited perspective prevents him from seeing others as “you” or “I,” and thus prevents others, including the reader, from regarding him as “I” or “you.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the blindness of the private “I/eye” shapes the narrative to such a degree that other perspectives and persons,<sup>27</sup> “you,” “s/he,” “we” and “they,” virtually disappear. Their disappearance is suggested in Peters’s original title for *The World Next Door, Where You Are Not*, a title that alludes to the isolation and erasure of both the first- and second-person perspectives. In other words, the absence of “you” in Peters’s novel, as I have suggested in Chapter One, implies the absence of “I”: the “use of *you* always implies an *I*—or more than implies it, creates it—just as deployment of *I* always implies a *you*.”<sup>28</sup>

Late in the novel, David begins to step outside of himself in the moment of remembrance. In one instance he imagines that he is being asked to choose between “the world of [his] own delusions” (296) and “the [outside] world—which now seemed only an enormous extension of the grounds and eventually the fences of the institution” (295). Though these worlds are still reflections of his limited perspective, it is worth noting that he directs the question of whether one would want to “share the [outside] world with” those who inhabit it to people other than himself: “would anyone? You, he, she, not only me?” (296). Then, after suggesting that the only alternatives to living in the outside world are madness and suicide, David reflects on the day he was institutionalized:

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<sup>25</sup> James Olney, *Memory & Narrative*, (244).

<sup>26</sup> In her discussion of Adriana Cavarero’s *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler writes, “If I have lost the conditions of address, if I have no ‘you’ to address, then I have lost ‘myself.’ In her view, one can tell an autobiography only to an other, and one can reference an ‘I’ only in relation to a ‘you’: without the ‘you,’ my own story becomes impossible” (32). The second-person pronoun “you” is relatively rare in *The World Next Door*. Excluding its reference to a specific person in dialogue, it appears on the following pages (1, 8-9, 56, 62, 93, 134-35, 184-85, 228, 246, 257-60, 265-66, and 296-97).

<sup>27</sup> This disappearance of “persons” refers to both people and grammatical categories.

<sup>28</sup> Olney, *Memory & Narrative*, 247.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May I had been so separated from the world (I remembered the happiness of that day so well, longing to feel it again) that for once I had not needed it, had not wanted anything from it, had not desired anything in relation to it, had not (in the ordinary sense) loved, feared, hated it. And from that place, in that happiness, I had loved everybody, because I had for the first time, then, nothing against them. No reason not to love them. Everything, everyone, including myself was forgotten and consequently forgiven ... which is simply another way of saying “forgotten.” (297)

Like Beers’s multiplication of the “I,” David is able to establish a temporal distance between two distinct selves through his use of the past perfect (“had been so separated”) and the simple past (“remembered”). The separation of these tenses is graphically represented in the text as the latter tense, which is characteristic of the novel’s continuous past, is isolated within a parenthetical aside. This temporal distance also corresponds to the handful of times that David reflects on his past in order to acknowledge his status as a *former* madman, an acknowledgement that simultaneously allows him to dis/associate himself from his “mad” self.

Not surprisingly, David’s reflection suggests that the “happiness” he “long[s] to feel again” represents a kind of rebirth into a private world that “separate[s] [him] from the [outside] world,” a happiness that makes “everything and everyone” in it, “including [him]self,” disappear. This rebirth enables him simultaneously not to love, fear, or hate the world *and* to love everybody in it, because his love is always directed at an anonymous other. He is able to love because there is no reason to do otherwise: he has “nothing against them” and “[n]o reason not to love them,” which also suggests that he

has nothing *for* them and no specific reason *to* love them. His detachment enables him to say that “[e]verything, everyone, including [him]self was forgotten and consequently forgiven.” Understanding how and why David forgives that which he has already forgotten is central to my exploration of Peters’s use of the first-person perspective throughout much of the novel. The anonymous, all-seeing “I/eye” first alienates itself by turning away from the words, feelings and affections of everyone, an aversion which puts it in a place where all can be “forgotten.” The forgiveness that follows, therefore, is merely a reflection of the alienating turn away, a forgiveness which is defined by an act of erasure, a wiping out of everyone and everything, including David and the “I/eye” itself. While this erasure does not indicate that the “I/eye” will always cast its already forgotten subject in a negative light, it does suggest why so much is not represented in this “tell all” narrative, including most of David’s life before the 11<sup>th</sup> of May.

David’s past appears to have been wiped out by his forgetting to such a degree that he often seems incapable of understanding language except in an entirely literal way. In this sense he is like an amnesiac or aphasiac whose words conceal and, at times, reveal his past. With his limited, anonymous first-person perspective David attempts to relate all the experiences, thoughts, and intentions of himself and others inside and outside the mental hospital; but he is like a Narcissus who stares at his own image and believes that his reflection accurately represents reality. Instead, his words, thoughts, delusions and dreams necessarily reflect the position from which he speaks, a position which remains unknown to him for most of the novel. His words are not simply the product of his limited perspective: he is both echoer and echoed in this memory-less void. The reverberations of his “own” perspective imprison him by limiting his perception and

reifying that which he perceives. It is within this void that the majority of the narrative takes shape, where the violence, judgment, isolation, and alienation that David expresses and experiences are reflected in the words and actions of those whom he simultaneously describes and forgets.

## II. The Self and the (M)other

From the beginning of *The World Next Door* David's forgetting of himself and others indicates a crisis of self-definition. His inability to remember the identity of his dead father, for example, demonstrates the ways in which the distorted perspective of his private "I/eye" shapes his subjectivity as well as his understanding of those he has forgotten, whether they are in his presence or not. The identity of his father seems uncertain directly after David tells his mother that he "can look right into the sun," to which she replies, "I only knew one other person who could do that. Your uncle Oliver" (4). David immediately assumes that his dead uncle is his real father and that his mother had been hiding this fact from him. Though he continues to reject and identify potential fathers before and after he is institutionalized,<sup>29</sup> this paternal void is mainly relevant due to the negative light in which it casts his mother.<sup>30</sup> After he believes he has exposed her fabrication of his origins, he sees "fear in her face, feel[s] it as strongly as water rolling in

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<sup>29</sup> These potential father figures, which David either accepts or rejects, include his stepfather John (4-5, 205-18), the chief of police (13-14, 215-18), and a fellow patient in the hospital (35-36).

<sup>30</sup> David's comments about his mother's multiple marriages and sexual activity also suggest the uncertainty of his paternity. When he is first interviewed at the hospital he tells Nurse Neider that his mom's "name was Clara Allen and then she married my father and became Mrs. Mitchell, and then she married my sister's father and became Mrs. Barnes, and then she married my stepfather, that is my present stepfather, and became Mrs. Lasky. I know it's complicated but I can't help that. Also, Mr. Mitchell, my father, is dead. Mr. Barnes [...] well, he's an alcoholic, I think; and Mr. Lasky, John that is, has disappeared. At least he was here, but he isn't any longer" (15). While arguing with his mother during his visit home, David implies that she has been promiscuous: "After all you've been around, you've led a pretty active life, you must have heard it before, along with all the ..." (213), though his mom cuts him off before he can finish the insult.

and lapping against [him]” (4). It should be noted that his fear of and hostility toward his mother precede her appearance in the novel. In fact, his feelings toward her are often inseparable from his aversion to women in general. This aversion is evident, for instance, in his fear of the moon:<sup>31</sup>

I watched and watched and watched. How it crawls and creeps around the room, staring into corners and crevices, leaving no escape from its path. Moon. Luna. Luna-tic. Moon—mona—mene—mens—menstrual—women. I could not close my eyes and yet to watch this was to absorb it. Women and madmen linked to the moon. (3)

David’s hyper-vigilance recalls the anonymous woman in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*, particularly her claim that she alone notices “that [the wallpaper] changes as the light changes. [...] it changes so quickly that I can never quite believe it. That is why I watch it always.”<sup>32</sup> Like David, who despises artificial sources of light such as electricity, and refers to “the light of the moon” as “the false and treacherous substitute of nature” (2), she says, “[a]t night in any kind of light, in twilight, candle light, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, [the outside pattern of the wallpaper] becomes bars.”<sup>33</sup> Though the “outside pattern[s]” that imprison these anonymous figures are distinct, both are constituted by personal perspectives which reflect and project their isolation and alienation. As a result, it is difficult not to interpret the “it” in David’s “how

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<sup>31</sup> David’s fear of the moon precedes his mother’s appearance in the novel. An exploration of his fear of that which is concealed, particularly the exposure of things he tries to conceal from others, including the reader, is necessary to reveal the “secret” of *The World Next Door*. This exploration, as I stated earlier, appears in the Coda.

<sup>32</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 12-13. At one point the anonymous woman’s husband, who is also her doctor, refers to her as “she” rather than by her name: “she shall be as sick as she pleases!” (12). Also, like David, the anonymous woman claims that her knowledge about the secrets of the wallpaper is exclusive. For instance, she says, “nobody knows but me, or ever will” (11), and “I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!” (14).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

it crawls” as a manifestation of the fear and vigilance of the “I/eye” as it “stare[s] into [the] corners and crevices” of David’s bedroom, searching in vain for hidden dangers in the darkness.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the multivalent “it” of *The World Next Door* reflects the movement of the actions, perceptions, and thoughts of the private “I/eye,” as well as the ways in which this movement shapes what the “I/eye” perceives; the line that separates this perspective from that which it “watches” is increasingly difficult to discern: the “I/eye” “absorb[s]” and often becomes what it fears.

The narrowness of the “I/eye’s” perspective “leav[es] [it] no escape from its [own] path.” This path is largely composed of David’s words, as is evident in the seemingly arbitrary and revelatory multi-lingual word association that centers on “moon.” Indeed, Peters repeatedly employs wordplay passages and interior monologues in which David appears to be searching for meaning behind words *and* hinting that they might reveal what he has left out of or concealed in the narrative. Not only do these passages, as I discuss later, touch upon the source of David’s trauma at times, but they also reflect and affect his alienated and alienating perspective. Thus, the morning after he concludes that “[w]omen and madmen [are] linked to the moon,” a line that suggests that David, as much as anyone else, is the one who links these terms, his word association impinges on how he regards his mother, who asks him,

“What are you doing up so early?”

Who was that?

Without moving, I said: “I couldn’t sleep.”

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<sup>34</sup> Later in the chapter I discuss the multivalent “it” as a sign of the institutional perspective.

Was that my mother? Mother—mère—mare—*nightmare*.<sup>35</sup>

“I had a nightmare.”

But I didn’t have a nightmare, did I? It was just the moon. Same thing? I turned and looked at my mother. Her face was mottled, yellow, ugly. Reflection of the sun? I looked again. It was yellow! (4)

David’s linking of “mother,” “nightmare,” and, eventually, “moon” echoes and elaborates on his previous union of “women,” “madmen,” and “moon.” Significantly, he inserts a series of questions in the unspoken part of this dialogue which cast doubt on the connections he makes (“Who was that?” “Was that my mother?” “did I?” “Same thing?”). But this ambivalence disappears soon after he concludes that his uncle is his father, a conclusion that marks a turning point after which the private “I/eye” begins to formulate unequivocal answers. When David goes outside and leaves his mother and stepfather in the “manufactur[ed] light and warmth” of the house, he thinks,

she was afraid and he was not. Conflict, conflict, conflict. I was glad I was out of the house. Nothing but conflict all the time. Men and women, good and evil, positive and negative. Electricity, fire, explosions. Fighting all the time, and living in houses. If they would come out here and forget ... forget in the sunlight. (5)

While his mother and John simply express concern that David will be cold outside—they do not fear him, they fear *for* him: his mother offers to make a fire and John brings him a blanket—his reliance on binary opposites such as men/women, good/evil, and

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<sup>35</sup> See *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Online. Mère: woman (French). Mare: “broad, dark areas of the moon,” 1765, from L. mare “sea.” Mare: A woman. Also (quot. c1387-95): an effeminate man. *derogatory*. Now chiefly *regional*. Nightmare: late 13c., “an evil female spirit afflicting sleepers with a feeling of suffocation.”

positive/negative clearly determines his perspective.<sup>36</sup> He provides no evidence of the “conflict” that he perceives between his mother and stepfather, though he begins to categorize everyone as belonging to an enemy or allied company. Rather than explaining the possible origins of his fear and alienation (“Electricity, fire, explosions. Fighting all the time”),<sup>37</sup> David wants people to “forget in the sunlight.” This is the same day, of course, about which he later reflects on his forgetting (and forgiving) of everything and everyone, including himself. As I have suggested earlier, this forgetfulness is a product of the turning away of the blind “I/eye”:

I looked intently at the sun. “Thank God,” I said. “Now I know. Everything is all right.”

It felt so *good*. Good. God. Sun. Son of God. Created in the image of God.

Was woman created in the image of God? What was there about that word? Wo—  
man. Woe to man. I sat up. Of course. Jesus Christ was a man. Buddha was a  
man. Mahomet was a man. They were all men. Joan of Arc. Had to burn her.

Jesus. *Je sus*. I knew. He knew, and I know! (5-6, emphasis in original)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In Peters’s next novel, *Finistère* (1950), which depicts a love affair between a teenage boy named Matthew and his teacher Michel, Matthew employs binary opposites to question their relationship in ways that ultimately lead to its dissolution: “Male and female, positive and negative ... is the very emotion which two positives, two males, create, something that produces inadequate emotions? Is the projection of such a relationship bound to be sterile? In the same way that such a union cannot produce children – the natural result, as Matthew had told himself and Michel, of sex – is it also impossible for them to produce a solidarity of feeling which is, in its own way, creative?” (275). In contrast, earlier in the novel the narrator writes, “There was no question of good or bad, right or wrong, normal or abnormal. It was as useless for [Matthew] to pretend that he could make any moral judgment of himself as it would have been to pretend that a volcano had no right to erupt” (158).

<sup>37</sup> The explosions and fights to which David refers remind us that he is a veteran of WWII in a VA mental hospital in 1947. Peters continues to weave war and war-related mental health issues throughout the narrative. Early in the novel Mitchell thinks of both patients and staff as “divided, mutually hostile camp[s]” (43). Also see 33-52 and 96-99.

<sup>38</sup> References to Christ (9, 24, 62, 109, and 238) and Joan of Arc (12, 16, 185, and 350) appear multiple times in the novel.

While the sun is a source of knowledge and power with which David hopes to expose the hidden truths of words and the world, his decision to stare at it is a sign of his inability to see anything except images in his mind's eye. Considering the persecution he feels, it is not surprising that the word "good" initiates another wordplay passage which, more than the previous two, seems driven by the aural and visual similarities of words (Good/God, Sun/Son). His question about the origin of "woman" is followed by another question which suggests that the answer can be found "about that word." As we have seen, when David looks about or around "woman" he finds, among other things, the moon, madmen, nightmares, and evil, and this pejorative trend continues in his dissection of "woman" ("Wo-man. Woe to man"). His reading of "woman" leads him to conclude that Joan of Arc was killed because she was not a man ("Had to burn *her*"). On one level, David's reading of "woman" simply reinforces the binary opposites on which he has been relying in that it points out the "good" or "evil" sex of each member of this prophetic foursome. But this wordplay passage also suggests another reading. David's less than surprising revelation that the first three prophets were men ("They were all men") excludes Joan of Arc because she is inherently other. This difference leads to her immediate execution, and implies that the life of anyone linked to "woman," such as madmen, is equally in danger.<sup>39</sup> But David's abrupt return to "Jesus" suggests the uncertainty of his knowledge: the reappearance of Jesus' name can be read as an interjection, a correlation of the deaths of Joan of Arc and Jesus Christ, or an echo of the beginning of this passage where David thanks God and the sun. "Now I know. Everything is all right" (5) from the earlier

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<sup>39</sup> The danger that David senses in his association of "women and madmen" who are "linked to the moon" also seems apparent in his repetition of "men" in the word association that follows it: "Moon—mona—mene—mens—menstrual—women" (3, emphasis added).

passage becomes the emphatic “*Je sus*. I knew. He knew and I know!” (6).<sup>40</sup> In spite of David’s emphasis on his past and present knowledge, the parallels between the deaths of Jesus Christ and Joan of Arc, and David’s splitting of Jesus’ name (“Je sus”), a division that echoes his dissection of “woman” (“Wo—man. Woe to man”), suggests that “everything is [not] all right.”

While David’s mother offers him nothing but kindness in the opening pages, he interprets her behavior as that of a duplicitous enemy. When she offers to build a fire he “watche[s] her obliquely,” identifying “the look in her eye” as “[m]ore than anxious” and “more than scared” (6). The emotions that he detects in his mother’s eyes are undoubtedly a reflection of his own fear, a fear that is palpable throughout the passage in which he describes her making the fire. Otherwise mundane lines such as “[s]he stopped shaking the iron thing and put some paper and wood in the stove,” are interrupted by “fire,” a word that appears as its own sentence three times. Each time that “fire” appears its punctuation changes (“Fire.” “Fire?” “Fire!), the last of which expresses the panic that surfaces after David perceives “[f]ear, anger ... [and] cunning” (6) in his mother’s smile. The period, question mark, and exclamation point that punctuate “fire” respectively bring to mind the mechanical, anxious, and sadistic orders of a commanding officer of a firing squad. These shifts in punctuation reflect the increased intensity of a scene in which David surveils his mother’s every gesture before convincing himself—upon “Fire!”—that her motivation for making a fire is “to burn the house down with me in it” (6). Her seemingly homicidal intentions lead him to question her sanity directly, though not out loud, for the first time: “Was she mad? Had she lost her mind?” (6).

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<sup>40</sup> “Je sus” (I knew) is the first-person French simple past tense of the verb “savoir” (to know).

Throughout *The World Next Door*, particularly in wordplay and internal monologue passages, there are indications that David fears his mother because she is a former madwoman. But he can refer to and regard his mother as “she” (“woman,” “madwoman,” “evil,” “other,” etc.) only after he has achieved a certain distance from her. This distance, which is manifest in David’s increasing silence and self-imposed exile, enables him to regard her as an anonymous madwoman. His fear of his “mad” mother is intensified by his identification with her as his only living parent. David’s repeated association of “sun” and “son” (5, 61, 258) throughout the novel suggests that he is looking for his own reflection in his mother’s face when he wonders if he sees the “[r]eflection of the sun” there (4). When she becomes an “other” to him, however, David is able to forget that she is in his presence. Instead of asking questions or seeking an exchange of ideas, their communication deteriorates to the point that he internalizes most of his responses to her. His inability or unwillingness to communicate is often interpreted by others as evidence of his madness. Indeed, the relationship between mis/communication and in/sanity that Caminero-Santangelo describes in her analysis of *The Snake Pit* is even more applicable to *The World Next Door*: “it is precisely in terms of linguistic failure that [David] experiences [his] madness; what is ‘wrong’ is defined by the inability to speak or to understand the speech of others.”<sup>41</sup> In response to David’s unwillingness to communicate, his mother begins to echo his perspective. She demonstrates the capacity to regard her only son as a madman: ““Oh David. What’s the matter with you?”” (7).

At the conclusion of his argument with his mother about her intentions to burn down the house with him in it, David steps outside into the sun and begins to undress himself.

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<sup>41</sup> *The Madwoman Can’t Speak*, 41. As in *The Snake Pit*, the lack of communication in *The World Next Door* is reciprocal: the attendants, doctors, David, and his mother often refuse to listen to one other.

After a series of ostensibly self-directed questions, answers, and directives regarding shame and clothing, he thinks, “The *only* thing they wanted to hide was sex. Why? *All* the men were the same, *all* the women were the same” (7, emphasis added). A sign of his inability or unwillingness to communicate, David continues to generalize (“only,” “all”) until he is taken to the mental hospital by the police. While he often generalizes before he decides to strip, his generalizations tend to express a degree of uncertainty. In the interior monologue that follows this second turning away, however, the repetition of general terms suggests that everyone has been “forgotten”: the indefinite pronouns “everybody,” “everyone,” and “nobody,” which are both general and singular, occur ten, two, and two times, respectively. In addition, “all” occurs four times, “everything” three times, “nothing” twice, “no” (meaning “not any”) ten times, “simple” nine times, “and “nature” or “natural” five times. On occasion it appears that David sees himself as a part of the general group (“everybody,” etc.) to which he refers. However, after his mom tells him, “Put your pants on,” and then asks, “What will people think?” David’s reply reveals the contradictory nature of his position: “Who cares what people will think? What will they think? What *can* they think? Who hasn’t seen a naked man? I’m no different than anyone else. Look. What have I got to hide?” (8, emphasis in original).<sup>42</sup> After David calls attention to his lack of physical difference from others, he demonstrates an unwillingness to acknowledge any perspective that is different than his own or to recognize the significance, or even the existence, of social norms.

Immediately after asserting his ambivalent relationship to others, the second-person pronoun “you” appears. David initially employs it to reference himself in a statement of

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<sup>42</sup> Though David situates himself along with the previously mentioned male prophets, as I discuss later in the chapter, categories of sex/uality are not quite as “simple” and “natural” as he suggests.

fact (“You wanted to be warm”), after which it refers to “everybody,” perhaps including David, in declarations and directives (“Nobody can see you,” “Say what you mean, be what you are”) (8). Though this “you” largely disappears from the narrative after this interior monologue—in fact, it occurs only twice on the last page of this passage—its appearance is significant because it suggests that a more inclusive perspective is always possible in *The World Next Door*. The disappearance of “you” from the narrative, which signals both David’s forgetting of himself and the ascendancy of the private “I/eye,” is also evident in subject-less phrases that appear as directives (“Live in the open. Walk in the sun”) (8), which resume an earlier pattern (“Had to burn her”). The greater frequency at which these subject-less phrases appear in this passage suggests the increasing isolation of the “I/eye.” At the end of David’s monologue about what people are ashamed of, know, and fear, he once again links himself to Jesus in order to explain why he is isolated: “Christ died to save you. Got killed, did not die. No good. Mistake. Tried to tell people. Can’t tell them in words. Resistance to words in all people. Have to understand with eyes, hearts. Inside. It is all inside everybody” (9). David’s notion that Christ’s failure was linguistic in nature—that it was caused by his inability to communicate—reveals his motivation for adopting an increasingly isolated perspective and employing wordplay to reveal and conceal the truth “about” words. It also suggests that his inward turn (“It is all inside everybody”) is a step that he must take in order to understand himself and to participate in dialogue. Of course, this wordless communication between people’s “eyes” and “hearts” cannot take place in isolation. Meanwhile, as we have seen, David’s double bind is that the words he does employ to protect himself from others often anticipate, reflect, and reinforce the ways in which others define him.

Soon after David is defined as “mad” and “other,” terms he uses to define his mother, he is arrested and taken to the mental institution. Though he spends most of the first few weeks in the hospital alienated from his fellow patients and staff, he occasionally engages in conversations and describes others in ways that suggest a broadening of his perspective. There are moments in which he almost views other patients and staff as individuals, but even when he sees them in a positive light he tends to regard them as types—“father,” “black,”<sup>43</sup> “Jew,” “Ally,” “Nazi,” etc.<sup>44</sup> While it is unclear exactly how, or even if, this broadened perspective causes Dr. Bowles and his colleagues to consider David less “temporarily imbalanced” (80), they decide “to take a chance on [him] and give [him] a week’s trial visit with [his] family” (202). The framework of this “*trial* visit,” however, guarantees a guilty verdict in advance: David’s participation serves as an unspoken admission that he recognizes the institution’s power to judge his in/sanity. The question is not whether one is guilty but instead how long one will be institutionalized and how one will be categorized after one’s sentence has been served—the punishment itself never ends. The trial visit ultimately demonstrates the degree to which the walls of the mental institution are permeable. The success of David’s temporary release, Dr.

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<sup>43</sup> See Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*: “In this shadow world the association of the concepts of blackness and madness occurs on the level of mythic abstraction. Once this merger is accomplished, once visible blackness is identified with the medical model of melancholy, the two become indelibly linked” (145-46). To this Gilman adds, “the ill, as well as the black, have a fascination for Western culture. In observing the former, as in the absolute dichotomy perceived between black and white, observers create an abyss between themselves and the sufferer. They project their own frailty onto the one observed. The frailty thus seen makes the ill at one and the same time the servants and the masters of the observer. [...] The merging of the concepts of blackness and madness, even though it arose from a historically understandable confusion of abstractions, reflects the protean nature of the Other” (148-49).

<sup>44</sup> At one point David refers to an attendant (he calls him a “guard”) as “an in-between” because he did not appear to be an “Ally” or a “Nazi.” Instead, “[t]he actual physical face seemed to fit the description ‘Aryan’ and perhaps I could only have been sure had he been a Negro or obviously Jewish. I remembered then that President Truman’s butler [another attendant (33-34)] had been a Negro. Of course: it was only the oppressed minorities who revealed automatically their sympathies in any struggle between Titans” (38).

Bowles tells him, is both “up to [him],” and dependent upon the doctor “get[ting] a good report on [him] after [his] visit” (203).

David’s mother’s status as his next of kin automatically qualifies her to interpret his words and behavior as signs of his in/sanity. During the trial visit the mental hospital makes her role quasi-official: they “deputize” her as a domestic agent or private “I/eye” whose duty it is to search for signs of her son’s madness and “mark its measure moment by moment.”<sup>45</sup> Like Miss Davis in *The Snake Pit*, David’s mother is constituted by the position that the institution assigns to her. Not surprisingly, David perceives her as a threat the moment that he returns home. Referring to May 11<sup>th</sup>, he thinks, “She looked frightened, the way she had that morning” (204). He once again sees his own fear in his mother’s every gesture, which sets in motion a sustained interior monologue that seems to wipe out the dialogues he had with his mother, staff, and his fellow patients in the days preceding his visit home. This monologue expresses his fear of speaking or moving in ways that diverge from social norms. As he commands himself to remain “normal,”<sup>46</sup> he translates everything into unspoken words, including the thoughts, gestures, sounds, and even the intentions of his mother, his stepfather, and himself.

In *Reluctantly Told* Jane Hillyer writes that “[e]veryone had to go through the ordeal of a series of ‘trial visits’; sometimes these continued for months before the individual was finally released. I knew that everything depended on that day” (161-62). The significance of her visit home makes Hillyer’s surveillance of herself surpass that which she experiences in the mental hospital. She writes, “I did not make a move, say a word, *breathe* without watching myself to the minutest degree” (162, emphasis in original). Her

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<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, 441.

<sup>46</sup> David tells himself to be “[n]ormal, normal, normal, normal!” (204), and to “[r]elax, relax” (205).

desire to avoid “the slightest hesitation, the least unusualness,” casts everything in such an artificial light that she is “not sorry to get back to the hospital, back where I did not have to watch myself, or be watched. [...] *now* I could make a slip without its counting against me” (165, emphasis in original). David’s trial visit corresponds to Hillyer’s in that the surveillance he experiences in the mental hospital is much less intense and conspicuous than it is at home. Their interpretations of this surveillance, however, are poles apart. Hillyer describes her motivation to watch herself in terms of what any sign of abnormal behavior would mean to her family, “particularly to [her] brother.” In fact, she sees the difficulty of this reunion originating in part in her loved ones’ “gracious unconcern” (162). David, on the other hand, cannot see his state of affairs from anyone’s perspective but his own: “I hated the house and the memory of the moon from [my] bed” (205). Unlike Hillyer, who watches herself while she is watched by others, David watches others “to the minutest degree.” In other words, his surveillance of the world and those in it—particularly his mother—makes everyone and everything a potential site for diagnosis. David tries to distinguish signs of danger in gestures (“smile, smile,” “[n]od, nod, nod”) and sounds (“[c]runch, crunch) because he believes that his constant surveillance (“[w]atch them, watch them”) enables him to “hear everything, see everything, [and] feel everything” (205, 206).

David’s surveillance during his trial visit suddenly comes to a halt following an interior monologue that commences, “How many days of looks and voices and meals was it?”<sup>47</sup> This is the first interior monologue in which David reveals gaps in the narrative and incorporates the words of others, both quoted (“I hate Dvorak!” “Really?”) and

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<sup>47</sup> David’s unanswerable question, for instance, points to the silence behind his story, and thus imbues the novel with an ambiguity and multiplicity of perspective that it generally lacks. For similar gaps in *The World Next Door*, see 91-92, 103, 150-51, 201-3, 297, and 329.

unquoted (“And how are you? Of course, I’m fine!”) (207). While David includes his mother’s or John’s words in what appear to be strangely contentious exchanges, the source of his anger surfaces immediately after this passage when he asks John if he “could be signed out [of the mental hospital] now” (207). The dialogue that follows is so fraught with moments of silence, including ellipses and the single-word sentence “Silence,” that ultimately his mother and stepfather seem to disappear: “What had happened? Everything changed in the room. They’ve gone away” (209).<sup>48</sup> Their “disappearance” is, of course, a reflection of the nonperspective of the blind “I/eye” that “[l]ooks and looks. I’m ‘him’ in their minds now ... I can see the words running around ... keep him calm, say their eyes, humor him ... ” (209). But David’s endeavor to “look at them both, [and] bring them back” (209) only further entangles him in a conversation whose terms—whether he should remain in the hospital because of his potentially “service-connected illness” (210) in order to receive disability compensation (209-13)—define him in advance.<sup>49</sup>

The conflict between David and his mother is rooted in a type of blindness: neither can see the other’s point of view, an inability they express in their nearly identical claims that their counterpart lacks the capacity “to know.”<sup>50</sup> Unlike the greater part of May 11<sup>th</sup>, during the trial visit, David’s and his mother’s perspectives appear to be equally shaped

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<sup>48</sup> Apart from being blind or nearly blind at several points in the novel (12-13, 15, 219-21, etc.), David thinks, “I looked around for the guards again. Whenever I took my eyes off them, they disappeared. In fact, everything at which I did not direct my entire attention seemed not to exist. There was some curious inconsistency in the working of my eyes. Instead of being able to focus on one object and retain a visual awareness of being in a room, a visual consciousness of the number of objects and people in that room, all that existed was what was directly in my line of vision. My other senses were similarly affected” (47).

<sup>49</sup> David’s mother applies for him to receive permanent disability compensation without telling him (167-70). Late in the novel David nullifies her application by filing for “limited disability,” which is valid only when he is in the hospital (321-23).

<sup>50</sup> In a foreshadowing of his visit home, David fails to convince his mother during her first visit to the mental hospital that she cannot “know” what it is like to be trapped in a mental hospital with his fellow patients, whom he refers to as “all those men” (194).

by categories and binary opposites. She tells him, ““Well you’ve been sick. You can’t know yourself how...’ ‘What do you mean *I* can’t know? Of course, I know how sick I *was*”” (210, emphasis in original). After telling David that he cannot accurately diagnose himself, his mother informs him that he isn’t ““completely well”” (210). He then reverses her claim that his sickness prevents him from knowing anything about it by contending that she doesn’t “know, [she’ll] never know what it was like there [in the mental hospital], what it *is* like” (211, emphasis in original). His emphasis on “is” indicates the position of those who are still institutionalized, whom he will soon be forced to rejoin, and it suggests that the context of his trial visit and the terms that dictate his conversation with his mother transform his own home into an extension of the mental hospital. His mother then reminds David and the reader that she was also institutionalized in a mental hospital: ““But you forget, David. I do know,”” to which he says and thinks, ““Then all the more reason!’ Thank God she had *remembered herself*” (211, emphasis added).<sup>51</sup>

Even though David tells his mother that he visited her in the mental hospital and witnessed ““[h]ow terrible it was for [her],”” finally reminding her that ““[she] wanted to die,”” she replies, ““it always seems bad at the moment”” (211). To a large extent, this perspectival impasse is temporal in nature. David can only see the significance of the present moment, a moment that he tries to capture in words as he erases the past and the future, thus making wherever he stands seem like a prison (“what it *is* like”). His mother, on the other hand, seems concerned only with the future. She will not sign her son out of the mental hospital, a place which “seems bad at the moment,” even though this moment

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<sup>51</sup> During an interview that I explore in depth later, David asks Mr. Newton, ““Did [my mother] by any chance tell you that she’d spend a good deal of time in the nut house herself?”” (179). Also, during her first visit to the hospital David’s mother mentions that she also had been institutionalized: ““Believe me, darling, I know how it is here”” (195). Below I discuss a similar passage in which both David and his mother claim their knowledge of life in the mental hospital is not shared by the other (216).

may never end, because she does not want to risk his compensation claim being turned down. Indeed, mother and son echo one another (“you can’t know”/“you’ll never know”; “I do know”/“I know”) in ways that suggest their position relative to the institution: his “can’t” indicates the past and present, and “will never” implies the future as well as its absence; her “do” suggests the position of authority she occupies. Ultimately, her complaint to David, ““You only see your point of view. You haven’t looked at it from my point of view at all” (212), applies to her as well. The predictable conclusion of their disagreement is that the one who will present the “report” to the mental hospital interprets the words of her subject as proof of his insanity. Thus, when David tells his mother that he will not “have sentence pronounced on [him],” she responds by saying that his “melodramatic” and “*unreasonable*” choice of words “proves [he] is still sick” (214, emphasis in original). His mother’s diagnosis causes David to call the hospital in order to expedite his return; he then leaves the house to walk there. Ultimately, he returns home only to be arrested for a second time, upon which he threatens to kill his mother and everyone else in the house, thus providing them with a reason to regard him as a dangerous madman.

### III. The Eyeless Observer

While the distance between David and his mother is analogous to that which divides him from patients and staff for much of the novel, his relationship with patients and staff is distinct from the one he shares with his mother. Though she institutionalizes him and later represents the mental hospital as the author of the report on his trial visit, it is precisely the moments at which he stresses his difference from his mother that they

resemble each other the most. Not only does David distance himself from other patients during the first half of the novel, but he also refuses to engage them in extended conversations like those he has with his mother. This distance is created by the ubiquitous, indomitable, and blind “dull glass eye”<sup>52</sup> of the institutional perspective, a perspective against which David must constantly struggle in order to see himself as an “other,” in others, and as a part of a “special company” (336) of patients from whom he distances himself for most of the novel. David’s repositioning in relation to others does not, of course, prevent the personal and communal perspectives from being circumscribed and shaped by the institutional perspective nor can it (or should it) cause the disappearance of the private “I/eye.” Instead, this repositioning enables David to appreciate the fallibility of the private “I/eye,” the necessity of the communal perspective, and the unknowns that limit and engender the self. In order to do so, David must engage in a “struggle with the unchosen conditions of [his] life, a struggle—an agency—[that] is also made possible, paradoxically, by the persistence of this primary condition of unfreedom.”<sup>53</sup>

The institution confines David’s body and mind in ways that reflect and redouble the surveillance, isolation, and violence of the private “I/eye.”<sup>54</sup> At several turning points in the narrative the institutional perspective is personified as a bench of “judges.” These turning points always occur when David is experiencing in-between states of consciousness, including dreams, comas, and anesthetic stupors. One such incident

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<sup>52</sup> Ward, *The Snake Pit*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> Examples of violence in *The World Next Door* include David burning his hands with a cigarette (22) and attendants knocking him unconscious (30, 36). Also, David desires to kill staff members, at times with a “radar beam” which he often refers to as “atomic” (70, 72-74, 80, 135-36, and 248-51). At one point he directs this radar beam at a patient (143-47), suggesting that it can both kill and heal him. Interestingly, a patient nicknamed “Joe College” tells David that the hospital is building its own “radar beam” with which it will treat patients (136-38).

occurs shortly after David is handcuffed (19), strapped down to a bed (29), and finally knocked out for being unwilling or unable to communicate with attendants during his first day at the institution (30). David awakens to find that he is strapped to one among “a great number of beds” in the center of a room he does not recognize (31). He then regards the physical limitations of pack therapy<sup>55</sup> as a sign of the deaths of himself and those around him, comparing the sheets that confine them to “mummy case[s]” (32). Yet these limitations also provide David with what I refer to as a “double vision” that merges his physical reality in pack and the memories of his arrival to the hospital earlier that day and allows him to see himself from an outside perspective. Though he is bound and disoriented in pack, David explains that it is “only the recurring awareness of physical restraint which gave [his] bed and [his] room an occasional startling awareness” (32).

David’s double vision also affords him an uninterrupted consciousness that enables him to transition “without any lapse from consciousness to unconsciousness or vice versa” (32). In addition, he “recogni[zes]” that “only on this day had [he] come to this place,” though he concedes that “the recognition was neither actual nor real; it was a belief” (32).<sup>56</sup> This “belief” is “immediately replaced by the knowledge that [he] was actually participating in a parade of coffins” (32). He is able “to see the entire parade, [himself] included, as from a height. The coffins passed around a flagpole in a ceremony connected with the flag” (32). The distance generated by David’s double vision suggests that he is “witnessing” something more meaningful than a parade or a ceremony, and that he is more than a mere witness. Though he attributes this outside perspective to a “board

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<sup>55</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, pack therapy is a procedure in which patients’ bodies are wrapped tightly in wet sheets.

<sup>56</sup> David’s distinction between “actual,” “real,” and “belief” recalls the ways in which he links in/sanity and the in/ability to distinguish between “reality” and delusion *and* consciousness and unconsciousness that I noted above.

of judges”<sup>57</sup> instead of to himself and these representatives of the institution, it is at this moment in the novel that David first seems to recognize some of the limitations of the private “I/eye” with which he has alienated his mother, his fellow patients, and hospital staff:

But no, I was participating in an examination, still in a coffin. The board of judges, looming indistinctly above me, were determined to have me talk incessantly. In fact, the entire purpose of the examination was to prevent me from ever ceasing to speak. Time, and with it sequence, order, purpose, and logic, had completely ceased to exist, leaving no limited or defined reality by which to judge anything. For the most part my mind seemed to have escaped my body and like a freed spirit roamed at will in its own sphere, observing the identity of my physical self with as much—but no more—interest than it did anything else. (33)

David’s double vision appears to give him access to psychic freedom while he remains in the bondage of pack, thus allowing him to participate in an indifferent examination of his confined (or coffined) body. The opposing points of view engendered by David’s double vision are a product of his prone position in pack: the former reflects his point of view as he stares up at the ceiling and the latter represents the perspective that he imagines stares back at him. The fact that he is in a coffin and regards his body from above as one of many suggests that one purpose of David’s examination is to position himself in relation to his fellow patients; in fact, his incessant talking functions as an abbreviated verbal

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<sup>57</sup> The “board of judges” in *The World Next Door* corresponds to the “absolute Observation” to which Foucault refers in a passage quoted by Mary Wood in *The Writing on the Wall*: “In discussing the power of the ‘medical personage’ outside the asylum, Foucault writes that Freud ‘focused upon this single presence—concealed behind the patient and above him, in an absence that is also a total presence—all the powers that had been distributed in the collective existence of the asylum; he transformed this into an absolute Observation, a pure and circumspect Silence, a Judge who punishes and rewards in a judgment that does not even condescend to language; he made it the Mirror in which madness, in an almost motionless movement, clings to and casts off itself’ (pp. 277-78)” (169).

version of *The World Next Door*, a “tell all” account that positions David as “one of them.”<sup>58</sup> Also, one can assume that if the judges appear to be “indistinct” from his viewpoint in the coffin, then his own body and those of others are equally indistinguishable from the outside perspective that he shares with the judges.

The next time the judges appear in the novel they cut short David’s reflection that he had just found “an ally,” “a friend, a protector,” in an attendant who demonstrates “unexpected kindness, affection, love, [and] brotherhood” (60). The judges are even less distinct than during their first appearance in the novel. David describes them as unidentifiable and, perhaps, unable to identify: “there were no features on any of the faces ... hardly any faces at all, just blank oval spaces poised on shoulders” (61). Though he clearly suggests that the judges are eyeless, David says that “[t]hey were seated behind a raised wooden platform, peering at me” (61). Then, as if to anticipate the reader’s doubts concerning their eyeless gaze, David asks, “How could they peer without eyes? Perhaps they had eyes but I could not see them?” His answer casts further doubt on his claim that he can see these eyeless judges who peer at him: “Of course, I didn’t have my glasses. In any case, they were definitely peering” (61). Instead of providing unequivocal answers to the questions he poses, David once again suggests that the appearance of the judges is a byproduct of his internalization of the institutional perspective; that is, David’s blind, blurred, and double vision is the effect of the private “I/eye” further subjecting itself to the institutional perspective by simultaneously playing the role of the observer and the observed as it focuses its eyeless gaze on itself.

David’s blindness regarding the place from which he speaks and perceives, as Shoshana Felman suggests, indicates that he is a “madman” who

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<sup>58</sup> Ward, *The Snake Pit*, 54.

is engulfed by his own fiction. As opposed to the subject of logos, the subject of pathos is a subject whose position with respect to fiction (even when he is the author) is not one of mastery, of control, of sovereign affirmation of meaning, but of *vertige*, of *loss of meaning*. It could then be said that madness (as well as pathos and, perhaps, literature itself) is *the non-mastery of its own fiction*; it is a blindness to meaning. (49, emphasis in original)

Similar to David's dubious claim that he can be seen by and see eyeless judges whom he cannot see clearly, he demonstrates the degree to which he is engulfed in his own fiction and thus identical to or a reflection of the judges he describes when he implies that he can hear what he cannot possibly hear after a judge points "directly toward [David's] face" and says, "'Sun' [...] in a loud and commanding voice" (61). Not only does David's claim that he can distinguish between the homonyms "sun" and "son" point to his equivalence with the judges, but this word also echoes earlier passages in the novel, including one that I discussed earlier: "Good. God. Sun. Son of God" (5). Indeed, the passage that follows the judge saying "sun" echoes and elaborates on this earlier wordplay passage, a fact that David refers to immediately after hearing the word "sun":

Was this going to begin again? Dully I repeated after him: "Sun."

He jerked his arm at me. "Go on," he ordered.

I was tired but there was no resisting his command.

"Sun," I intoned. "From Sun to Son to Son of God." (61)

The wordplay that "sun" instigates in the passage continues to reveal the degree to which David's thoughts are shaped by his confinement in pack and the isolated perspective which at least in part caused him to be institutionalized. Like "son," other words from

early in the novel reappear in the word association passage that follows “sun.” Eventually “sun,” which appears several more times in the passage, leads to “light. Light to fire. Fire to burn. Burn to stake” (61). The last phrase recalls David’s remark about Joan of Arc (“Had to burn her” [6]), and his fear that his mother intended to do the same to him (6-7). Further on, he thinks, “None to no one. No one to one. One to won. Won to war” (61), and eventually returns to “Sun to Son” before arriving at “Christ on the Cross. Cross to double cross. Double cross to the Cross of Lorraine” (62). These last two phrases suggest the profound, though mostly hidden effects of WWII on David’s “madness” and language. Though the phrase “Cross to double cross” might be nothing more than the product of David’s whimsical engagement with the sounds of and relationships between words, his reference to the double cross of Lorraine suggests otherwise. In a passage dominated by terms of religion and, to a lesser extent, war and death, David’s first reference to the double cross calls to mind Bishop Fulton J. Sheen’s April 6, 1941, Palm Sunday speech, “The Cross and the Double Cross,” which begins, “There is no such thing as living without a cross. We are free only to choose between crosses. Will it be the Cross of Christ which redeems us from our sins, or will it be the double cross, the swastika, the hammer and sickle, the fasces?”<sup>59</sup> The double cross of Lorraine is the symbol of Joan of Arc and it was adopted as the symbol of the French Free Forces of WWII in July of 1940. Thus, both of these double crosses point to David’s service in WWII and to the double vision that causes him to see himself and others in terms of binary opposites such as good/evil, ally/enemy, and man/woman.

The conclusion of this wordplay passage alludes to the type of relationship that David must achieve between himself and others in order to transcend the binary opposites that

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<sup>59</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, *War and Guilt* (Washington: National Council of Catholic Men, 1941), 154.

haunt him. Once again he echoes the earlier “Sun/Son” passage, but instead of expanding upon its words, he alters and adds to the final words of this passage. The earlier “Jesus. *Je sus*. I knew. He knew, and I know!” (6) reemerges as, “‘Ye to Je. Je to Jesus. Jesus to Je suis.’ Then I knew I had it. ‘Je suis and Jesus are the same. God in his own image is Man. Je suis—Jesus. Tu es—Tuer, to kill. Il est—île, island. Nous sommes—new sum. Vous êtes—you are. Its (sic) sont—they are’” (62). David’s addition of the letter “i” to his dissection of “Jesus” transforms “Je sus” (I knew) into “Je suis” (I am). This shift from the verb “to know,” which evokes his argument with his mother, to the verb “to be” signals David’s movement away from self-contained knowledge toward an understanding of reality that is contingent on his relations with others. In fact, even though he immediately interprets this second splitting of “Jesus” as evidence that he “knew,” this knowledge is qualified by the temporal marker “then.” More important, he also applies his new understanding of what it means “to be” to the singular and plural first-, second-, and third-person pronouns. In fact, his “conjugation” of “to be” approximates the way in which the private “I/eye” slowly incorporates the perspectives of other patients and “persons” in the later part of the novel. That is, David gradually incorporates the words and perspectives of others into his interior monologues after being isolated both within and outside of them. But before he can make this perspectival shift, he must abandon his conception of the intimate “you” as one who poses a threat (“Tu es—Tuer, to kill”) and the distant “he” as an isolated figure (“Il est—île, island”).<sup>60</sup>

David’s definitions of “you” and “he” suggests the degree to which pack shapes his perspective. His double vision makes everyone appear to be nearby and remote simultaneously, including his fellow patients, the judges, and himself. This might explain

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<sup>60</sup> David refers to the beds in pack as “small islands jutting into the room” (31).

why his translations of the second- and third-person plural forms of “to be” are literal while the first-person plural (“Nous sommes” [we are]) is not. In other words, he identifies most easily with others when they belong to a group or category of which he is not a part or from which he stands apart. When the judges fail to understand David’s word association, he “recapitulate[s] it for them”:

“Jesus is killed—dead, leaving him alone on an island, but no man is an island, we are a new sum, you are, they are Jesus. But this time you must not kill him. Je suis tué, but I will live again, and you and they will be. See?”

They began to disappear slowly. I had passed the examination.

I opened my eyes. The room was dark except for a light in the center of the ceiling. I was no longer directly below it. The panel of judges had disappeared and I could not see where they had been. Had I been asleep? Had I been moved?

Was this reality? How about the examination? (62)

David suggests that even though the death of Jesus isolates him “on an island,” the “new sum” of “you” (both plural and singular) and “they” are a community of believers who can bring about his resurrection only if they unite because “no man is an island.” But like the “Je suis” passage, this “new sum” is not a congregation of equals. The second “you” who “must not kill” Jesus poses the same threat as the first (“Tu es—Tuer, to kill”), a homicidal threat, in fact, on which “you” has already acted and, perhaps, one that “you” is always carrying out (“Je suis tué”: I am killed). The perpetual murder of “I” by “you” indicates the former’s eternal return and/or the living death that David endures in the “coffin” of pack (“but I will live again”). Notably, David’s recapitulation reverses the pronoun order of the first passage: instead of moving toward the communal perspective

(“a new sum”) and the recognition of others (“you/they are”), this passage begins with a redemptive, collective “we” and concludes with an always-already murdered “I,” a potentially homicidal “you,” and a “you” and “they” who have yet to exist (“will be”). The literal and figurative union of David and those he describes is possible only after his body has been liberated from the bondage of pack and his mind has escaped from the confines of the private “I/eye.” He must first realize, to borrow Dylan Rodriguez’s words, that “[t]here are no individuals within the regime of imprisonment, only subcategories of punishment and classification that evaporate the individual into her or his condition of existence.”<sup>61</sup> David’s desire to individualize his condition is a delusional stance: the more he attempts to manipulate and understand his “fiction” from his disoriented viewpoint, the more he will become an expression of the institutional perspective. But he is not faced with an either/or proposition that forces him to choose between a self-contained identity and one that is the effect of a contingent set of relations. In fact, the communalization of the blind “I/eye,” which continues until the novel’s penultimate chapter, comprises numerous advances and reversals similar to those evident in the aforementioned conjugations of “to be.”

The next appearance of the judges in the narrative is also characterized by the double vision of the “I/eye” as David once again echoes words he spoke on May 11<sup>th</sup> and regards himself as if he were an other. This passage signals an intensification of the previously discussed body/mind split in two ways. First, for several pages David describes an experience so “excruciating[ly] painful” (88) that it eventually carries him “beyond the point of feeling” (89). Second, instead of indifferently examining his body from above and “talk[ing] incessantly” (33), he attempts to answer the judges’ question, “What is the

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<sup>61</sup> *Forced Passages*, 36.

formula?” (83), with his body rather than his mind. The judges need this formula in order to disentangle a “figure eight” that is “not really a figure eight but a circle which had been twisted upon itself in such a way as to form an eight” (83). Echoing his claim from his interior monologue on May 11<sup>th</sup> that the “[r]esistance to words in all people” makes it necessary “to understand with eyes, [and] hearts” (9), David tells the judges that “[i]t is not a formula in words” (84). The proper formula will transform the figure eight into a circle again by manipulating its shape and redistributing its darkness and light so that it becomes a fully illuminated square with “no black at all” (84). While David’s transformation and illumination of this counterfeit figure eight offers a metaphor for his enlightenment—his emergence from the “profound darkness of the existential ‘I’”<sup>62</sup>—the way in which he uses his body to implement the formula represents yet another delusional attempt to escape from the physical reality of the hospital, particularly the suffering caused by the procedure to which he is being subjected.

In fact, the procedure from which David is trying to escape shapes the very terms of the formula and its implementation. Like most madhouse characters and writers, David’s and Peters’s words are “marked by the hospital phraseology.”<sup>63</sup> Though such words cannot be avoided entirely in this type of narrative, David’s frequent adoption of the language of the institution is a sign of

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<sup>62</sup> Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (37).

<sup>63</sup> Hillyer, *Reluctantly Told* (146). The language of madness or “hospital phraseology” is present throughout *The World Next Door*. For instance, various doctors use relatively vague terms to refer to David’s mental health. They tell him that he is “hysterical” (78), “upset” (157), and suffering from a “nervous condition” (169). They also refer to his fellow patients as “temporarily imbalanced, not insane” (80). David employs the language of madness to label himself and differentiate himself from others: “I know I’m nuts, too ... but some of those men, some of the attendants ...” (229, emphasis added). David generally avoids psychiatric language altogether or uses general terms such as “nuts” (130, 136-37, 178, 229, etc), “crazy” (19-21, 189, and 260), “mad” (180-81), or refers to his condition as a “sickness” or “illness” (147, 154, 191, 222, 229, etc.). David does, however, refer to an Army general as a “psychoneurotic” (179). Only Joe College regularly applies specific psychiatric categories to himself and others. At one point, for instance, he diagnoses himself, “I am a schizo with paranoid complications,” and another patient, “All the signs of a manic” (114).

the internalized Inquisitor of the hospital system who indicate[s] by the most elaborate punitive modern machinery that if [one thinks one is not] much of anybody *before* [one's] 'experience' [in the mental hospital] [one] could be certain that what [one] had become was a total non person in a non environment of [one's] own non making. [This Inquisitor is] [t]he internalized Other.<sup>64</sup>

This internalization of the Other is manifest, for instance, when David thinks, "I introduced the thread of blue [light], like *an illuminated wire*, into my brain. [...] it seem[s] that I was forcing a *giant cold needle* through my flesh" (86, emphasis added). Subsequently, he is awakened after he hears a "terrible cry of pain" (86) that he does not recognize as his own.<sup>65</sup> His disassociation from himself is evident in his unfamiliarity with his own voice and the passive way in which he describes his awakening: "My body moved violently on the bed" (86). Eventually David locates the source of his pain "[n]ot in the bed, then. In me" (86), and pulls two *wires* out of his shoulder and "a small disk with three sharp prongs" out of his spine. When he calls out for help upon realizing that he is still in the hospital, the staff members who appear express anger and terror when they realize that "[h]e's pulled it out!" (87). David, however, is "completely in the dark" (87) regarding their distress. As soon as their voices fade away, he realizes that "the wires disappeared from [his] hands," and "[he] hear[s] the voices of the judges" "shout[ing] at [him]" that he "will have to begin again" (87). Ultimately, David's repetition of the wordless formula causes him so much pain that, like his detached observation of his body

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<sup>64</sup> Jill Johnston, *Admission Accomplished* (191, emphasis added). Quoted by Susan Hubert in *Questions of Power* (102). Johnston writes that former mental patients are reluctant to grant themselves the authority to write their own stories.

<sup>65</sup> David also hears and sees himself as an "other" in an hallucination as he stares at the sun (122-23). The fact that he is able to see this other self only after he turns away from the world and stares at the sun provides the reader with an example of what might be called the double blindness of his private "I/eye." David seems doubly blind not only because he is looking away from himself and others, but also because we can easily imagine that the sun's rays are temporarily blinding him and permanently damaging his eyes.

earlier, he becomes indifferent to his suffering—"I did not care what might happen to me" (89)—and impervious to pain—"I was certain that [having a "rocket bomb" fired through me] had been accompanied by great pain, almost unendurable pain, but I had felt nothing" (89). His indifference and lack of feeling vanish only after the formula is fully implemented and "there [is] nothing but shining white in every direction" (90). Upon his completion of this task, David wakes up disoriented and in great pain; he is certain of only one thing: the "war, the conflict, whatever had been going on since I had first been incarcerated here, was over" (90).

The conclusion of this conflict, like the end of WWII, leaves behind the wreckage of David's divided self and calls for a salvage operation to commence. The first sign of this process of self-recovery is David's substitution of the passivity and indifference that he exhibits in pack with questions regarding his sanity that seem "to take physical shape" in a "separate and special compartment" of his brain, "not [his] mind" (184). He identifies this part of his brain as "a second self [that] intrude[s] upon whatever it was that had been me" before May 11<sup>th</sup>. The existence of this "second self" makes "[w]hatever you knew," "felt," and "were" "suspect [and] unreliable" (184). David's recognition of this internalized Other uncovers a seemingly bottomless "pit" of uncertainty that provides him with "a projection, a shape which I could fasten upon," in the form of the "one thing I knew ... the fact of my own fallibility. I knew that I knew nothing, and knowing nothing is part of the cement at the foundation" (184).<sup>66</sup> His ability to detect this "second self" enables him to undermine the private "I/eye" and therefore distance himself from

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<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that David's recognition of his fallibility coincides with the reappearance of the second-person pronoun "you" in the narrative. As Butler suggests in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, "to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community" (83).

the institutional perspective whose techniques of surveillance and violence have shaped his actions and words. The distance he is able to achieve facilitates a relatively amicable conversation with his mother during her first visit to the hospital. This conversation not only reveals gaps in David's recollection of May 11<sup>th</sup>,<sup>67</sup> but it also enables him to make his first gesture of identification and community with his fellow patients immediately following his mother's visit. Most importantly, this gesture occasions a friendship with a patient named David Everett, a bond that ultimately enables David Mitchell to understand that his identity depends on the reciprocity of "I" and "you."

#### IV. I Am Where You Are

Shortly after waking up following his second arrest and institutionalization David engages in an extended dialogue with a fellow patient named Walt, who, before telling David his name, refers to himself as "[j]ust another patient. Another locked up bastard" (222). In fact, before Walt tells David his name, he seems to embody the communal knowledge that is shared by fellow patients. First, he echoes David Everett who earlier tells David Mitchell, "'I'll call you Mitch'" when he learns that they "'have the same name'" (199). After Walt says David most likely received insulin shock the night before, he says, "'I thought you were home on pass'" (222). This prompts David to ask him, "'How do you know so much?'" to which Walt replies, using the first-person plural, "'We know everything up here. We look out of the windows all day long. We see

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<sup>67</sup> Similar to the way in which the outside perspective of Virginia's husband Robert must be silenced in *The Snake Pit* so the story can unfold moment by moment, David's mother's perspective is largely kept out of *The World Next Door*. During her visit, however, she offers another version of the events that preceded David's hospitalization on May 11<sup>th</sup>: "'We had Dr. Spencer up to see you, but you wouldn't go [to the mental hospital] with him. We had to get the police'" (193). Like Robert, David's mother tends to echo the sentiments of the institution's doctors until the very end of the novel; in fact, both Robert and David's mom decide to secure their loved one's release from the hospital only after they no longer agree with the doctors.

everybody coming in, going out’” (222). He then orients David, who once again “couldn’t see anything” even though he is wearing his glasses (221), by telling him that he is on Ward Six, the “suicide ward” (222).<sup>68</sup> Walt also helps David wash his face (221), walk (222), and eat (223). Still baffled by Walt’s familiarity with him, David rephrases his earlier question:

“How did you know me?”

“We all know you. I think the whole hospital knows you, after the pack room. You’re a character around here. We’re glad you’re back. Are you going to raise more hell for us?”

“My God, was it that bad?”

“Bad, my foot! You got ‘em all worried. I hope you keep it up. How come you didn’t stay home? Didn’t they give you a week? It’s always a week for the first visit.” (223)

After repeatedly situating himself as part of the communal perspective for whom “characters” like David are essential, Walt’s second reference to David’s trial visit triggers a “flood of knowing” (224) in David’s mind that reveals the events that led to his second hospitalization. At moments like these, David’s memories take the form of a reflection one step removed from the continuous past that dominates the narrative. They “flood” him “seemingly without warning; they interfere with the order of [his] life both in the content of the story [he] tells and in the structure of the story itself.”<sup>69</sup> David “didn’t

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<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, David is placed on the suicide ward after threatening to murder his family and the police who take him back to the mental hospital. He does exhibit suicidal tendencies long before and after his stay on Ward Six. For instance, he is indifferent to his own death upon arriving at the institution (12), and he passively awaits it later in the narrative (252-54, 296-303). Like Peters, Clifford Beers denies responsibility for his suicide attempts (12, 64-67), and Jane Hillyer remarks that her suicide attempt, during which she fashions a noose to hang herself, is “the one incident I have never been able to remember” (81).

<sup>69</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 145.

want to remember, but it was like the other times when [he] tried to hold it in [his] chest and it wouldn't stay in" (223-24). The words with which David "alienated [his] family" continue to reemerge despite his attempts to suppress them:

"I'll kill you, I'll kill you!" That's what I'd said. I'd told her never to come back, never to come see me again. Well, that was that. But why the pain? Words, words, words. They poured down over me, submerging me in an avalanche of silent sound. "Won't somebody believe me? Won't somebody please believe me? You have to believe me." That was it. That was the whole thing. I had to have somebody believe me.

I swallowed hard. Nobody did. That was what had happened. Nobody believed me at all. (224)

This "avalanche of silent sound" recalls the points at which David turns away from his mother and stepfather at the beginning of the novel and during his trial visit when he interprets their gestures, movements, and words from his isolated and alienating perspective. The deficit of trust at the root of his silence is also evident in the ways he turns away from others and himself throughout much of his institutionalization—most notably in his reliance on binary opposites and his employment of double vision—and the reciprocation of his distrust by others in the form of verbal and physical violence. In order to gain the trust of an other, David must listen in silence, understand the universality of his "fallibility," and fully embrace the idea that he "know[s] nothing" (184). In effect, David's conclusion that he must have "somebody believe" him implies that he recognizes the limitations of his personal perspective and suggests that he desires

to believe someone else.<sup>70</sup> This desire for an other to believe him is fundamental to the communalization of the “I/eye” as only the reciprocity of dialogue, which implies the reversibility of the listener and the speaker, can occasion the appearance of the “I/you” bond.

But before David can embrace the communal perspective he must learn to see himself as an other without regarding this “second self” as an invading force. Like Ward’s use of “you” when Virginia’s “corpus” is subjected to electroshock treatment and thereby multiplied, EST causes a virtual conflation of the private “I/eye” and the “he” or second self that originally appears to David as an unfamiliar, distant other. This conflation does not attest to the effectiveness of EST as a therapeutic measure in the same way that David’s encounter with Walt does not demonstrate the positive effects of insulin shock. Instead, David is able to benefit from the disorientation and identity crisis brought on by EST because his desire for someone to believe him motivates him to replace the self-alienating perspective of his “double vision” with an “I/eye” that defines itself in relation to an other.<sup>71</sup> He is able to recognize this “he” as himself (and vice versa) in part because

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<sup>70</sup> When David’s return to the hospital is certain, his mother tells him, “‘Why you hardly know what happened anyway. The doctor himself told me that you were in a delusion most of the time!’ I struck my chest hard with my clenched fist, but I couldn’t keep it in. ‘But you have to believe me! You have to! I know what happened there!’” His mother’s response echoes the “to know” passage discussed above: “‘David . . . You forget that I know about these things from my own experience. You couldn’t have known,’” to which he replies, “‘But you have to believe me! I looked around at the faces in the room. ‘Doesn’t anyone believe me?’ No answer” (216). Moments later David asks if anyone has “faith in another human being” (218), but at this point he is already in handcuffs and has threatened to kill them.

<sup>71</sup> My argument corresponds in several ways to the following passage from Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself*: “Other readings of Hegel, however, insist that the relation to the other is ecstatic, that the ‘I’ repeatedly finds itself outside itself, and that nothing can put an end to the repeated upsurge of this exteriority that is, paradoxically, my own. I am, as it were, always other to myself, and there is no final moment in which my return to myself takes place [...] recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was. There is, then, a constitutive loss in the process of recognition, since the ‘I’ is transformed through the act of recognition. [...] What is recognized about a self in the course of this exchange is that the self is the sort of being for whom staying inside itself proves impossible. One is compelled and comported *outside oneself*; one finds that the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself, exterior to oneself, by virtue of a convention or a norm that one did not make, in which one cannot discern oneself as an author or an

he has imagined others viewing his private “I/eye” as “he,” observed his body as if it belonged to an other, withdrew into his body in an effort to escape from the institution’s machinery, and contained the part of himself that represents the institutional perspective (“second self”) in a cordoned off part of his brain. This new perspective begins to emerge following the trauma and memory loss caused by EST.<sup>72</sup> Initially, David describes an unfamiliar room occupied by “several men in blue” and “a lady in gray” who hands out food and coffee (255). He then uses third-person pronouns to identify himself: “He sat in the middle of one bench, his head lying back against the bench, his mouth open. Slowly, his eyelids moved, his eyes opened, his head jerked forward. Blinking, blinking, his eyes saw the woman, looking at the cross in red on her little grey cap” (256). Not only does David position this other version of himself as a part of the community of “men in blue,” but he also makes the perspective of the reader possible as s/he can situate her/himself between these two versions of David, neither of which appear to be an unambiguous or anonymous “I,” and anticipate David’s portrayal of “his” actions.<sup>73</sup>

While there is no trace of David’s earlier indifference in this detailed description of his other self, his ability to describe the room, his fellow patients, himself, and the nurse before “he” opens his eyes suggests a distance between his two selves that enables him to look at this version of himself as if “he” were a “you,” that is, as if “he” were an intimate other. This intimacy is most easily observed in David’s interweaving of first- and third-person pronouns, an interweaving that suggests David’s radically uncertain status could

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agent of one’s own making. In this sense, then, the Hegelian subject of recognition is one for whom a vacillation between loss and ecstasy is inevitable. The possibility of the ‘I,’ of speaking and knowing the ‘I,’ resides in a perspective that dislocates the first-person perspective it conditions” (27-28, emphasis in original).

<sup>72</sup> Significantly, David reflects on the effects of EST on himself (265-66) and his fellow patients, whom he thinks of as “[m]en whose faces were blank and dull, smileless and without life” (264).

<sup>73</sup> We also read, “He looked at the men on either side of him, then down at himself” (256).

either signal the loss of his identity or mark the arrival of a “you” who will provide the communal ground in which the private “I/eye” can be situated. The reciprocity of “I” and “you” is essential, as Butler notes, because “the account” one gives of oneself “is completed only on the occasion when it is effectively exported and expropriated from the domain of what is [one’s] own. It is only in dispossession that [one] can and do[es] give any account of [one]self.”<sup>74</sup> David’s dispossession is apparent immediately after a nurse offers him coffee and an egg with salt:

Have an egg. Coffee. Cracker ... salt ... blue material, the floor, pattern on the floor. *I*. What was, who am *I*?

He drank from the paper cup of coffee. *Paper. Hot.*

“What has happened to ... to ... *me*. To me?”

“Have a cracker. An egg?”

“Who am I?”

“Don’t you know who you are? Don’t you know, David?”

Who said that? Man at my ... his ... right? Look at him. David? Heard that before ... that, heard that before. David, david, david, david. He ... I ... me. Pain, knot tied in my head. Where ... “Who are you, please?”

“You know me, David. This is the hospital. You’ve just come out of shock.”

Shock. Shock. Something up above him. Something below me. I, you ... you belong to me. Lower, lower, lower, in and in, inside him. I, we, *They*. Belong to ... him?

Breathing hard, I was breathing hard. Hands, arms, legs, stomach. Touch my head. Hands on face. I ... *David Mitchell*. Hospital? Hospital? Shock? *Shock!!*

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<sup>74</sup> *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 36-37.

Egg. Spit it out. No. Somewhere else that. Rolling around on a plate ... spinning. They didn't do anything to me. What's that? Man in white walking behind the bench. Look ... he smiles. You smile. Who? (256-57, emphasis in original)

Shortly after experiencing this identity crisis, David Mitchell tells David Everett that shock is a profoundly disorienting and unsettling experience: “It was like being born. I thought I was somebody else. In fact I didn't think I knew who or what *I* was” (262, emphasis in original).<sup>75</sup> David's dispossession enables him to accept the inherent fallibility and contingency of his self and passively anticipate his death, which he thinks will allow him to escape from a “[l]ife” that he regards as “simply a larger insane asylum, with an atomic bomb for shock treatment” (298). The passage above also marks the transformation of the “I” from its status as an object to that of a subject (“*What was, who am I?*”), a transformation that is expressed in the intimacy with which David portrays his other self. This “he” enables the narrative's anonymous “I” to become more than an isolated spectator; it propels David into the action of the novel by allowing him to see that his relations with others are what make his “I” possible.

The reciprocal relation of David's “I” and intimate “he” is first evident in the rapid shifts between first- and third-person pronouns (I/he/me; my/his; he/I/me) though this pronoun shifting does not necessarily indicate corresponding shifts in David's perspective. In fact, the distinction between “my right” and “his right,” and the directive, seemingly to himself and to the reader, to “[l]ook at him” suggests that David's “I/eye” is positioned directly in front of “him.” Moreover, David's description of the experience of

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<sup>75</sup> During his reflection on his experience with EST, David refers to the time preceding the procedure as his “pre-shock existence” (265).

shock therapy as “[s]omething up above him. Something below me” evokes both the instruments of the procedure and his separation from his other self. His memory of shock also marks the reappearance of the second person (“I, you ... you belong to me”) in a line that suggests the reciprocity and complementarity of the “I/you” dyad.<sup>76</sup> The list of pronouns that follows (“Him. I, we. *They.*”) reflects the post-shock passage discussed above where “he” precedes “I,” and it also recalls David’s conjugation of “to be” in the “Je suis” passage (62). The way in which David punctuates this list of pronouns, which is all-inclusive except for its exclusion of “she,” indicates that the first-person plural “we” (that is, the union of “I” and “you”) not only enables the “I” to exist but also facilitates its coexistence with other “persons,” including one’s other “he” and the institutional Other or “they,” none of which can be fully comprehended.

Though David is able to achieve a degree of coherency after Dr. Russell “answers” his internalized question “Who?” with a greeting, “Hello, David,” similar to the appearance and disappearance of attendants in the “wire” or hospital phraseology passage discussed above, “violent flashes of unconnected memory” call David’s identity into question as soon as he is left alone. This insidious, disjointed remembrance echoes previous wordplay passages (“Sun. Son”), expresses his fear of abandonment (“*Mother, take me with you!!*”), and recounts various things he has experienced in the hospital (258, emphasis in original). He is able to still this “avalanche of silent sound” (224) and re-establish his identity only after he forges an alliance with David Everett. Signs of their

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<sup>76</sup> Butler also notes the interdependent relationship of “I” and “you” in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: “one might say, reflectively, and with a certain sense of humility, that in the beginning *I am my relation to you*, ambiguously addressed and addressing, given over to a ‘you’ without whom I cannot be and upon whom I depend to survive” (81, emphasis in original). She continues, “So, if at the beginning [...] *I am only the address to you*, then the ‘I’ that I am is nothing without this ‘you,’ and cannot even begin to refer to itself outside the relation to the other by which its capacity for self-reference emerges” (82, emphasis in original).

union can be detected in the pronouns David Mitchell employs toward the end of this flood of memories: “You’ve lost your ... memory. I have not! I am ... No, I’m David. Me, this, David” (258). After identifying himself as “Me. David, me. Me Mitchell. I am David Mitchell,” and positioning himself as a patient recovering from shock in a mental hospital, he reveals the degree to which his relationship with David Everett is crucial to his sense of self:

I burned my hands with a cigarette and then I ... David. But no, not me. Black David. David and Goliath. No, *black*. Smile. David Everett. I’m glad we have the same name. I think it’s nice. [...] <sup>77</sup> Black David in the room with white David. David and David. How do you do? Do you want to talk about it? Look what’s happening to him, you can see it happening to him. (259, emphasis in original)

While David’s reliance on the binary opposites black/white seems to indicate that he sees David Everett as his antithesis or alter ego, as is the case with his mother, for the most part the latter David’s blackness serves as an outward sign of the stigma of difference and madness, and thus allows David Mitchell simultaneously to regard their names as interchangeable (“David and David”) and to maintain his own identity. After this doubling of “David,” however, it is unclear which one of the Davids is “I” and which one is “you,” or if their relation as a “we” (or “I/you”) suggests that one should no longer regard these terms as exclusive. The questions that follow issue from an ambiguous, though no longer anonymous, source. The final line (“Look what’s happening to him, you can see it happening to him”), for instance, echoes directives that precede it, including the

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<sup>77</sup> While the following excised lines are important in terms of questions of race and racism in the novel, they are not relevant to my argument about the union of David Mitchell and David Everett: “Buddies with a coon! Coon? They always wash their food before they eat it. My father had a pet raccoon once and he always washed his food before he ate it? Did he?”

aforementioned “Look at him” (256) and “Look ... he smiles. You smile. Who?” (257). While it seems that David directs the first “look” at himself, the next line calls his identity into question (“David?”). Moreover, the fact that his name merely sounds familiar to him (“Heard that before ... that, heard that before”) suggests the ambiguity of his name, as does his repeated reference to it with the demonstrative pronoun “that.” This unfamiliarity and ambiguity is even more pronounced in the three lower-case “davids,” which make his name seem more like a pronoun than a proper noun; more specifically, the repeated undermining of David’s name makes it more like a third-person pronoun than an unambiguous, anonymous “I.”<sup>78</sup>

The intermingling of David Mitchell’s and David Everett’s words and identities in this interior monologue is indicative of the reversibility of the “I/you” dyad that makes both “persons” possible. This intermingling is most evident in the reappearance of the multivalent “it” in the last two sentences of the passage: “Do you want to talk about it? Look what’s happening to him, you can see it happening to him” (259). Shortly before David Mitchell regains consciousness after shock and regards himself as an intimate

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<sup>78</sup> As I mentioned earlier, throughout most of *The World Next Door* David Mitchell is an anonymous, narrator-less “I” who must constantly name himself. Since he alone can verify his identity, it is notable that he repeatedly calls his name into question. The first example occurs on the day he is institutionalized: “‘I was christened ...’ I started to say and then remembered that, as far as I knew, I had not been christened at all. ‘I was named David Mitchell. People call me Mitch sometimes, too’” (14). Later, a patient doubts his name is David: “‘Your name’s Mitchell all right, but not David’” (128). This patient then tells David, “‘My name’s Mitchell [...] but not David either. [...] You’re a phony, and you know it.’ He paused. ‘Maybe Mitchell, but not David Mitchell. I know’” (129, emphasis in original). Despite David’s protests to the contrary (“‘It is so!’”), their exchange makes him temporarily uncertain about his identity: “‘Wasn’t my name David Mitchell? I had to remember’” (129). Apart from the previously mentioned, “‘For me, *myself*, an individual named, by some accident of preference or choice, David Mitchell’” (294), which he thinks shortly after reading “‘*Mitchell is a committed patient*’” (291, emphasis in original), we read, “‘I took the pencil and wrote the word *Mitchell*’” (266, emphasis in original), which positions “David Mitchell” as someone who writes and is written, a fictional and factual person. Finally, David’s identity is called into question when he meets a staff member named Mr. Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell, whose first name we never learn, informs David that he is responsible for the firing of a nurse named Mr. Neider (188-89). Mr. Mitchell’s and Miss Yaddo’s cheerful reaction to this news makes David wonder if “the attendants and nurses were really cuckoo” (189). The appearance of Mr. Mitchell enables David to see someone other than himself as the “mad” Mitchell and position himself as a member of the hospital staff—perhaps the only “sane” one.

“he,” David Everett tells him that a young man who stares at them in the shower has been changed by this “it”: ““It was happening to him inside. You could see it”” (244). Rather than simply repeating David Everett’s words, David Mitchell makes them his own by changing “[i]t was happening to him inside” to “[l]ook what’s happening to him,” and “[y]ou could see it” to “you can see it happening to him.” In what appears to be a linguistic manifestation of the shared perspective of the “I/you,” David Mitchell doubles “happening to him,” changes verbs from past to present tense (could/can, could/can), eliminates “inside,” perhaps suggesting that the omnipresence of “it” blurs or obliterates the line that separates inside and outside, and, most significantly, combines two complete sentences with a comma, thus providing a textual indication of the proximity—both in terms of difference and interdependence—and contingency of the “I/you” dyad. Like his rephrasing of David Everett’s comments regarding “it,” David Mitchell also changes the former’s “[f]unny we should have the same name” (199) to “I’m glad we have the same name” (259), and then repeats verbatim his own “I think it’s nice” (199, 259), thus incorporating both sides of the earlier dialogue into this interior monologue.

Ultimately, David Mitchell must be willing to trust David Everett for their “I/you” bond to shape more than his interior monologue.<sup>79</sup> As I have suggested earlier, his desire to have “somebody believe” him can only be realized if he believes someone else enough to communicate “the fact of [his] own fallibility,” that is, to acknowledge to another that he knows nothing. It is not surprising, especially given his status as a mental patient, that he reveals himself to David Everett and others only slowly and sporadically over the last

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<sup>79</sup> At one point David Mitchell demonstrates that he still does not trust David Everett when David Everett advises him that he can leave against medical advice if he is not a committed patient. Though David Mitchell ultimately attempts to follow this advice, he first “wonder[s] if I could really trust this information. After all, [David Everett] must be in here for some reason. Was this conversation just an indication of his particular illness?” (275).

half of the novel. Indeed, even after David Mitchell's perspective incorporates the "you" of David Everett and the communal perspective, both the private "I/eye" and the institutional perspective necessarily persevere; instead of nullifying the institutional perspective, these perspectival unions create a situation where, to rephrase Whitman's famous line, David's "I" contains multitudes.<sup>80</sup> David Mitchell's communal "I," which his relationship with David Everett makes possible, continues to shape and be shaped by others whose perspectives are similarly constituted. The self-exposure that is required for this "I" to emerge puts both Davids in a vulnerable position, but, as Judith Butler contends,

ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To become undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient "I" as a kind of possession.<sup>81</sup>

During his mother's first visit to the mental hospital, the madness David sees everywhere he looks makes it impossible for him to trust staff, patients, or his family. This changes, however, after he shares a bag of fruit that his mother brings with his fellow patients. David's offering causes "some strange change [...] [to] come over the attendants and the other patients. [...] Finally one of them, a big husky colored man who had often looked at [David] but who had never spoken to [him]" (197) engages him in a conversation. Like

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<sup>80</sup> Walt Whitman asks, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)." See "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass: Comprehensive Reader's Edition*, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley. New York: New York UP, 1965), 88.

<sup>81</sup> *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 136.

Walt, before this “husky” man introduces himself as David Everett, he begins to reciprocate David’s gift—appropriately, an apple—by offering him advice on how to convince his mother to secure his release. David Everett then describes the desperate situation of patients with no one “waiting for [them]” outside the hospital, and shares his mistake of “rais[ing] hell with [his family] trying to get out” (198). As we have seen, instead of heeding this advice, David Mitchell repeats David Everett’s mistake, a repetition that initiates a pattern that continues until the end of the novel. Though the union of David and David is not quick or without trepidation, the ways in which their lives parallel one another after this initial exchange of “gifts” ultimately enables them to experience the dispossession to which Butler refers. That neither David is a “self-sufficient ‘I’” from this point on is evident, for example, when David Everett echoes David Mitchell’s sentiment that if Christ were alive he would be put in “a nut factory” (24, 238); David Everett is already at Occupational Therapy when David Mitchell arrives (261); David Mitchell gets a “pass” to walk around the hospital grounds (273-74) shortly before David Everett receives one (326); and, most important, when David Mitchell is about to be released, Dr. Russell tells him that David Everett is likely “‘going to be the first [patient] to follow [him]’” out of the hospital because David Mitchell “‘helped [David Everett] out [...] He’s carrying the torch for you. He was in here this morning raising hell with Dr. Bowles. I know he’ll get out now’” (360).

But before either David can get out of the mental institution they must contend with the aforementioned multivalent institutional “it.” David Everett suggests that one must recognize the ways in which this “it” transforms oneself and others. Doing so enables one to empathize with one’s fellow patients, staff, and family members. His perspective

appears to be the antithesis of David Mitchell's private "I": David Everett perceives with what one might call a self-less, communal "I." He tells David Mitchell that for Black Americans mental institutions are "[n]ot so different from life on the outside, actually. Almost as if we'd done it all before" (245). Though his experience on the outside enables him to "get used to anything," "the more you get so you can stand it yourself, the harder it is to look at others: like when I saw you for the first time. Maybe what was happening to you, what you were feeling, was no worse than it had been with me, but you couldn't cover it up the way I can" (245). One way that David Everett "cover[s] it up"—here we should regard "it" as the "I" that he at least partially conceals behind the communal "we," general "you," and "I/you," as well as that which is "happening" to the "I" and these other "persons"—by observing other patients instead of focusing his attention on himself. After telling David Mitchell, "You're about the only one I ever talk to here," David Everett says, "when you've been in a place for a long time, and you watch and watch, you begin to understand things. You look at these men and you'll see everything one time or another. Everything that can happen to them happens here" (245). David Everett then explains to David Mitchell that people spend their entire lives in mental institutions because "[n]obody really understands them" (245). He tells him that nurses, attendants, and families "can't project over to us" and see that mental patients are "just ordinary people" who have been "knocked down" (245).

Notably, even though David Everett tells David Mitchell that he too has been "knocked down" and can see and feel the pain of his fellow patients, he concedes that he does not "*know* what happened" to David Mitchell (246, emphasis added). Accordingly,

he repeatedly defines what happens to patients with the multivalent “it.” He tells David Mitchell,

“Like with you this morning: I’ve been home, I’ve been sent back. Hell, I was prepared for it before I even went home. I expected it. It wasn’t much of anything for me. But for you ... it was all over you, like you’d been given a death blow. I don’t know what happened, Mitch, but it hit your guts. Different things hit different people different ways. What you got at home hit you in the center, right in the middle, they got you where you live. That’s what happens to all the guys ... people don’t know where they live, inside, so they’re bound to hit it sometime. Especially the bastards that work in these places.” (245-46)

Right before David Everett suggests that “nobody really understands” patients, David Mitchell echoes and elaborates on a question he asks Walt earlier in the novel: “‘How do you know so much?’” (222).<sup>82</sup> He asks David Everett, “‘How come you know so much about all this? How long have you been here? What *are* you anyway? I mean when you’re not in here?’” (244, emphasis in original).<sup>83</sup> Once again David Everett’s response is characterized by the multivalent “it.” He says that he was training to be an attendant in a Veterans Administration mental hospital when he “cracked up” because “he couldn’t take it. It was a hell of a place. [...] I began to dream about it at night and pretty soon I’d had it. I was in the pack room here for almost three months ... off and on” (245). Like Miss Sommerville from *The Snake Pit*, David Everett is living proof that the line that separates staff and inmates is tenuous at best. Just as Miss Sommerville’s inability to perform her role mechanically led to her being re-placed on the “other” side of this line, David

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<sup>82</sup> This is the same conversation in which Walt echoes David Everett by calling David Mitchell “Mitch.”

<sup>83</sup> David Mitchell asks this series of questions directly after David Everett says, “‘It was happening to him inside. You could see it’” (244).

Everett's desire to help patients was quickly transformed by his role in the institution. Thus, after he refers to the attendants as "bastards," David Everett explains what the institutional "it" does to these men who are

"like the rest of us. Nothing wrong with them, and yet after they've been in here for a while, they change. You can see them come in ... it's what was happening to me that finally got me. You see a new guy come in and he's all steamed up. He's come to work here because he wants to do something for the nuts, he wants to *help* and for a while he's a house on fire, can't do enough, and then it happens to him, too. You see him losing his heart or the thing that makes him tick. One day he'll kick a patient and if he goes through that one all right, then he's an attendant good and proper. It's like getting a degree. Guess it's just that too much misery is something you can't take and look at. You get so that you have to beat it up and strike at it. That's what I did. I hit a poor bastard and I liked it. It made me feel good when I'd done it, and then it knocked me for a loop. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't live with myself. I'd hit myself really." (246, emphasis in original)

David Everett suggests that the institutional "it" shapes both staff and patients in ways that cannot be fully understood. Like the multi-perspective of *The Snake Pit*, his words are defined by a complicated interweaving of personal pronouns. This rapid switching of pronouns suggests that patients and staff always occupy both positions, a dual occupancy that suggests an in-between status similar to that which is engendered by the reciprocity of "I/you." Venturing into this in-between realm may further expose one to the machinations of the institutional "it," but it also makes various escape routes available, however provisional they may be. David Everett uses these pronoun shifts to position

himself on both sides of the line that separates mental patients and staff. He employs the general “you,” which is both singular and plural, together with the third person plural (““You can see them””), the third person singular (““he wants to help””), the general “you” and the third person singular (““You see him losing his heart””), and the general “you” (““You get so that you have to beat it up””). Though it is clear from the beginning of the passage that David Everett is referring to himself (““it’s what was happening to me that finally got me””), the first-person singular reemerges only after he situates himself as both a patient and an attendant (““That’s what I did””). Finally, the general “you,” which can refer to the attendants, both Davids, and the reader, acts as an outside observer—much like David Everett as he “watch[es] and watch[es]” his fellow patients—until “you have to beat it up and strike at it.”

The climactic moment of the doubling of David and David represents the consummation of their union. David Everett tells David Mitchell that they are “[p]ioneers of the only thing left [...] we have to fight doctors and wars and mental hospitals to get to another world” (332). David Everett then looks into his eyes and “[h]is hand moves over to [David Mitchell’s] and cover[s] it, and his lips tremble when he [speaks]” (332). Echoing the union of the Davids in the previously cited interior monologue (259), David Everett refers to David Mitchell as “David” and “Dave” (332) instead of “Mitch” for the first time. He then shares something with him that he has never shared and will never share again with anyone else, something which, as David Mitchell suggests early in the novel, can be understood with “eyes” and “hearts” rather than words. Indeed, it seems that David Everett can understand the things he tells David Mitchell only because of the “I/you” relation they share. David Everett says,

“Dave, you *know*. And I *know*, too. The rest of them don’t know, or they forget, but I can’t forget it and you can’t either.<sup>84</sup> And I don’t want to. Out there ...” he looked at the sky again “... out there I found something. I don’t know what it was, maybe I’ll never know really, but I can see it in your eyes, so I know it wasn’t just me. If I know you’ll never forget that, that you’ll always remember that you’ve been there, too, then I’ll be all right, I’ll know it was not *madness* ... that it was finding something, and something that was ... good. I’m different now than I was when I came here. I’m not all tied up inside any more, and I don’t hate. Almost as if what I found out there was something to do with love.”

I nodded, and once again the embarrassment crawled onto his face. He gripped my hand more firmly and then took it away. “What I wanted to tell you,” he said, “was ...”

“What?”

He smiled. “I love you ... because ...” He spread out his hands. “Because you know ... because you make it all right having been there.”

I looked away from him and then back at him again. “I’ll never forget, Dave. I couldn’t anyway.” (332-33, emphasis in original)

Though this union enables David Everett and David Mitchell to resist the institutional perspective and to merge with a more inclusive communal perspective, the risk to which this gesture of love exposes them is evident in David Everett’s hesitancy (ellipses),

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<sup>84</sup> Previous to his conversation with David Everett, David Mitchell expresses a desire to forgive that contrasts with his reflection that he forgets and consequently forgives everyone on May 11<sup>th</sup> (297). He thinks, “I did not know about my discharge being *up to me* in any literal sense of those words, but another kind of discharge, some release from the bondage in which I had placed myself in relation to people, the world, was certainly up to me. Instinctively, unquestionably, I knew that it was up to me to *forgive*. Forgive who or what, and for what? In a sense, to forgive whoever and whatever besides myself had brought me to where I was” (313-14, emphasis in original).

uncertainty (“Almost as if”), and the aversion of the Davids’ eyes before and during the passage quoted above. Like the earlier union of the words and names of “David and David” in David Mitchell’s interior monologue, however, David Everett’s declaration of love suggests that the reciprocity that defines the mutual relation of the “I/you” dyad is indispensable to knowledge and identity. In other words, the ability of one of the Davids to know that which cannot be known (“I don’t know what it was”) is dependent on the memory of his counterpart (“I can see it in your eyes, so I know it wasn’t just me”). The union of David and David as the reciprocal “I/you” enables David Mitchell to face the world in ways that his observation of himself as a distant other, his careful description of himself as an intimate other, and his recognition of himself in a fellow patient cannot.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, this union gives David Everett, who perpetually looks at but rarely speaks to other patients, a perspective from which his experience does not appear to be madness. In contrast to the perspectives provided by their private “I/eyes,” which make them “hate” and feel “all tied up inside,”<sup>86</sup> their shared perspective is enriched by the “love” that they find “out there” between “I” and “you.”

Immediately after this declaration of love, David Mitchell once again repeats David Everett’s words; indeed, the latter’s identification of the Davids as “[p]ioneers of the mind” enables David Mitchell to recognize the bond he shares with other patients:

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<sup>85</sup> In a scene that recalls David Mitchell’s description of himself as an intimate other, after he witnesses a fellow patient come out of shock he thinks, “His eyes were closed—he seemed to be walking in his sleep. Now I had seen it all and heard it, as well. I had seen myself go onto one of those beds, watched the preparation being made on me, and now I had heard the cry (had I myself made such an outcry?). Finally here was a man ... myself even ... staggering out after treatment, held up by attendants” (309). After identifying with this patient David says, “Look at him, Dr. Russell, take a good look. I don’t know his name, but he doesn’t either, so it doesn’t matter. But don’t look at *him*, look at me ... even more than that, look at yourself. That’s a man, not a ‘him,’ or just a patient in a hospital. He’s you and me or anyone” (311, emphasis in original).

<sup>86</sup> David Everett’s description is reminiscent of Virginia’s claim that her “memory is all tied up and separated from the rest of [her]” (93). It often seems that David Mitchell has purposefully tied up his memories in order to keep them out of the narrative.

PIONEERS of the mind. ... I had not realized that I was anything other than alone, until Dave had talked to me, and it now seemed to me curious that I should have divorced myself so completely from any identification with the other patients in the hospital. I had never believed or realized that their experience could have been in any way like my own. The knowledge that my experience was shared did not level it out, flatten it, but gave it instead a special and new importance to me. Whatever the doctors, attendants, families ... the outside world might think of us, however they might judge us, we were a special company and had traveled to a special place. (335-36)<sup>87</sup>

At the end of the novel David Mitchell's acknowledgment of his membership in this "special company" and his bond with David Everett allow him to see himself from a distance and say, "I could love him" (351). David Mitchell's declaration of love for this intimate "he" enables him to give an authentic account of himself both to others and to himself. But "I could love him" can also be interpreted as "I," but not everyone, can love this "him" who is now an "ex-nut" (345). Like David and David's "I/you" bond, the "special company" is a fairly exclusive "we": it admits only similarly "marked" members who can truly identify with and believe in one another.<sup>88</sup> Thus, while David Mitchell's membership in this "special company" and his union with David Everett allow him to

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<sup>87</sup> Besides Dave Everett, David Mitchell has bonded in various ways with a number of his fellow patients, including Ned (115-18), Andy (163-64, 287-89), Walt (222-225), and Joseph (328).

<sup>88</sup> This exclusive "company" includes a former patient named Mary L. Anderson who reaches out to David Mitchell with a letter (302). After reading it, he thinks, "I had been told that she had been in a hospital. I did not remember if I had liked or not liked her. I only knew that now, by writing to me, she had grasped my hand and was pulling me as I could not have been pulled by anything else; setting my course back towards recovery which I dreaded and hated. '...it was made very difficult for us, God knows.' Not only God" (303). "Mary L. Anderson" appears to be a combination of Peters's mother's name, Lois Anderson, and his wife's name, Mary Lou Aswell. In his dedication of *The World Next Door*, Peters writes, "Mary Lou, without whom this book would not have been written ... AND the veterans, of war and society, in all psychiatric institutions."

transcend the isolated and alienating private “I/eye” that dominates much of the narrative, he continues to be defined by the institutional “it.”

#### V. Coda

As I have suggested earlier, there is a resistance to the communalization of the private “I/eye” at the heart of *The World Next Door*. This resistance is most noticeable at points where in/sanity and sex/uality are inextricably entangled.<sup>89</sup> The most significant example of this entanglement occurs during an interview that takes place at the very center of the novel. During this interview Mr. Newton links David Mitchell’s decision to take off his clothes on May 11<sup>th</sup> to his possible homosexuality.<sup>90</sup> Newton also refers to two past instances in which someone in a position of power, an attendant named Arnold (65-67, 78, 176, 178-81) and an Army general (177-78), tried to force themselves sexually on David. Newton’s primary point of interest, however, is David’s “unwillingness to say that [he is] a homosexual” after he acknowledges that he has had a “homosexual experience” (176). David insists that the difference between sexual activity and sexuality is analogous to the difference between drinking an alcoholic beverage and alcoholism; in other words, one is the result of a momentary desire and the other is driven by compulsion.<sup>91</sup> Unsatisfied with David’s analogy, Newton continues to ask him to divulge the root cause of his sexual experience with another man. He asks David,

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<sup>89</sup> The first such example is when David suggests that “women and madmen [are] linked to the moon” (3).

<sup>90</sup> Curiously, Mr. Newton is from Vocational Rehabilitation. As I have suggested in the Introduction, a similar relationship between sex/uality and madness appears in Marian King’s *The Recovery of Myself*. See 31, 39-40, and 71. Also, see Hillyer’s interpretation of her affection for her teacher, Miss Winthrop, as symptomatic of her madness (38-40). Hillyer also writes that her attraction to her father’s male friend led her to dig “a ditch of ignominy before [she] reached it” (48).

<sup>91</sup> At several points, particularly early in the novel, David falls in love with or compulsively desires male attendants and patients and female staff. See 58-60, 81-82, 109-10, 140-41, 119-20, and 340.

“Well, I’d like to know why ... since you admit, uh ... why you say you are not a homosexual?”

“Look, Mr. Newton. Don’t be embarrassed. Tell me what a homosexual is first. What is the difference between a homosexual and someone who isn’t homosexual.”

He continued to be embarrassed. “Well, perhaps we could say that a homosexual is a person who prefers to have sexual relations with his own sex ... with other men.”

“All right then, I’m not one.”

“But you have had ...”

“Yes, I’ve had an experience. I slept with another man.”

“Well, do you know why?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I was in love with him, that’s all.”

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. It just wasn’t any good. It’s very simple, really, even if it’s hard to explain. I didn’t even want to go to bed with him at first, and then when I did, I simply thought what the hell, maybe that’s the way I am. So what? So I went to bed with him. It was all right for a while, but it didn’t last. It wasn’t any good. I don’t know *why* ... it just wasn’t. It wasn’t right, somehow. So, that was the end of it.” (176-77, emphasis in original)

David resists Newton’s questions in two ways. First, he attempts to make his interrogator articulate and define “homosexual,” a term Newton continually refers to as “it.”<sup>92</sup> The

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<sup>92</sup> In *Finistère* Peters writes, “They were, both he and Michel, *homosexual*. He whipped himself silently with the word. There was no getting away from it” (277, emphasis in original). The word that similarly

definition he finally provides is marked by uncertain terms (“perhaps,” “could say,” “prefers”) as well as nervous pauses (ellipses) and an averted gaze, all of which punctuate the entire interview and are repeated later in David Everett’s declaration of love. David Mitchell adamantly refuses to be defined by the term “homosexual”; he repeatedly describes his “experience” with the multivalent pronouns “it” and “that,” both of which might refer to the sex act, his relationship with the man he loved, the reasons why their relationship did not work out, or the unknown cause of his love. David employs these vague terms in part because he does not understand this “experience.” He confesses his confusion to Newton: “*I’ve asked myself all these questions. It is true that at that time, in the beginning, I was willing to be a fairy, or whatever you want to call it, if that’s the way it was. But it wasn’t any good ... it didn’t turn out to be that way*” (178, emphasis added).<sup>93</sup> The only answer David can provide Newton is that there are no answers, and thus any definition of this experience is both uncertain and only a matter of opinion (“whatever you want to call it”). When Newton tells David that his mother “mentioned [his] early [homosexual] experience and then [the one with the general] ... as a possible cause of [his] illness,” however, David defines his mother and the general with terms he refuses to apply to himself: ““Did she also mention that the general was sent back to the

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“whips” David in *The World Next Door* is “commitment,” a term that David associates with “helplessness, emasculation, [and] powerlessness. And beyond that one word, the actual treachery of words themselves extended throughout language” (294). It is worth noting that David reads that “*David Mitchell is a committed patient*” (291, emphasis in original), but chooses to focus on the meaning of the word “commitment,” a term that evokes both marriage and madness.

<sup>93</sup> Later David tells Newton, ““Well, I have nothing to hide’ [...] ‘I’ve thought about all this. I’ve admitted to myself that I was attracted by a man once, and I’ve been afraid of it, I’ve worried about it, I’ve lived with it. But what does it make me? Abnormal? Is that why I’m locked up here? Is it especially unusual? Do you have any record on Arnold for instance? Do you have any record on me that makes you think that I’d force somebody to ...’” (180). He also calls into question the sexuality and madness of an attendant named Jerry and a nurse named Mr. Neider when he says, ““Now *there* are a couple of boys for you! One teases a patient into getting violent and then has him cuffed and gives him a shot. And Mr. Neider! Why does he pass himself off as a doctor?” (181, emphasis in original).

states because he was psychoneurotic, or did she forget that?' [...] 'Did she by any chance tell you that she'd spent a good deal of time in the nut house herself?'" (179).<sup>94</sup>

Another reason David is unable to identify with others surfaces when patients ask him about his sexual encounters during his trial visit. Their tone, the terms they use ("Nookie," "a piece"), and their labeling of David as a "nance" when he tells them that he did not "get any" (236), suddenly makes David desire "any woman" (237). This compulsive desire causes him to think, "Did sex have to be dirty always? [...] Vile words (and we all used them, I used them) and suggestive, ugly connotations. The desire, as I thought, underwent a sudden and complete transformation inside of me" (237). The language of sexuality transforms David's desire into an irrepressible urge. Similar to his understanding of the term "homosexual," however, he refuses to define himself or to be defined by these "vile words" that pathologize sex by constantly "drag[ing] it in the filth" (237); still, these words necessarily shape his dialogue and thoughts ("we all used them") in such a way that what is essentially "beautiful" becomes "ugly," and this transformation effects radical changes "inside" individuals (237). As David suggests on May 11<sup>th</sup>, these changes isolate people from one another by engendering shame and fear: "Everybody was afraid of [sex]. Everybody pretended they didn't have any sex by hiding it" (8). Without the repression of sex there would be "[n]othing hidden, no secrets; no secrets, no excitement, no suspicion. No excitement, no suspicion, no fear" (8).

David seems unable to identify fully with those who are closest to him even when he appears to be most open to the possibility of the communalization of his private "I/eye." For instance, while in the shower, David experiences what he identifies as "the not-so-

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<sup>94</sup> After David "outs" the general and his mother as former mental patients, he expresses doubt that "Arnold and the rest of the attendants are all sane" (181).

faint, suppressed sexual interest that all men seem to have in other men” (243). He thinks that this feeling “was like when you took a shower in school or the Army” except “there was more detachment, the glances were less repressed, more overt and in a sense less involving. It was not so much the feeling of being looked at as a person, but as a thing, an object without any specific identity, without humanity” (243).<sup>95</sup> In this scene, which recalls David’s somewhat indifferent observation of himself in a coffin from above, David projects his own generalized sense of sex/uality onto others. He describes this “sexual interest” as something that exists outside of individuals: it does not have to be “repressed” because it is “detached,” and it can be “more overt” because it is “less involving.” On the other hand, the self-contained nature of David’s sexuality shields him from the risks that love and desire demand. The lack of humanity and identity to which he refers at least temporarily enables him to avoid being defined and thus provides him a sense of security, however illusory it might prove.

The resistance to community at the heart of *The World Next Door* is most apparent when David Everett points out a “young blond boy” who “watche[s]” them “intently” with “a kind of hunger in his eyes and right along with it you could sense, and even see, the battle going on inside him” (243). This “battle,” which is evident in the transformation that the language of sex/uality effects in David Mitchell, must be waged

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<sup>95</sup> David Everett’s declaration of love, which David Mitchell does not explicitly reciprocate, might be called a love “without humanity” because it is an exclusive love, that is, it is a love that is directed at one person only, and it represents the love of another version of one’s self. Though it is vitally important, this love does not put one in danger of becoming entangled in one’s desire, of risking oneself in an exchange with another. In *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, “Freud in his discussion of Dr. Schreber gives the following list of the possible eroto-grammatical transformations that can be generated in contradiction of the sentence, unspeakable under a homophobic regime of utterance, ‘I (a man) love him (a man).’ First, ‘I do not love him—I hate him’; second, ‘I do not love him, I love her’ third, ‘I do not love him; she loves him’; and finally, “‘I do not love him; I do not love any one’” (161, emphasis in original). Sedgwick concludes that Nietzsche’s “own most characteristic and invested grammar for this prohibited sentence is a different one, one that underlies Freud’s project so intimately that it does not occur to Freud to make it explicit, and far closer to the bone of the emergent ‘homo-’ reading of what it means for man to desire man: ‘I do not love him, I am him’” (161-62, emphasis in original).

against the multivalent institutional “it.” David Everett tells David Mitchell that they were “witnessing the beginning of something. I’ve seen it lots of times. It’s like being witness to a birth” (244). He then differentiates between the blond boy’s desire for “[p]ure sex” and that of other men in the institution who do not

“stop wanting sex just because [they are] locked up ... anybody knows that ... but that’s not the bad part of it. The bad part is when you see it happening to a kid like that. A perfectly normal guy.”

“You mean you think he’s going to end up homo?”

“I don’t know ... yet. Probably though. Kids like that take it hard. They don’t know how to fight it. With some of these other guys, it doesn’t matter what they do. They run it off at night, or if they get a chance, they’ll go after one of the other patients, but that’s not the same thing ... it’s just gratification with them. Nothing more. But with him it’s the works. He didn’t just want any old thing, you could see that in his eyes. He wanted one of us, you or me, personally and specifically.

*It was happening to him inside. You could see it.*” (244, emphasis added)<sup>96</sup>

My suppression of the context of the last two lines of this passage during my discussion of the ways in which the words and identities of David Mitchell and David Everett intermingle was necessary in part because the battle to overcome the institutional “it” in *The World Next Door* is ceaseless and often paradoxical. Though David and David attempt to transcend their private “I/eyes,” they solidify their bond via this homophobic

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<sup>96</sup> This personal and specific desire is pointed out as the “culprit” at the end of *Finistère*. Matthew tells Michel, “It’s because of what you’ve done to me; you’ve destroyed me, you’ve helped me to destroy myself. You’re a man, you know about these things, but you have to have what you want, you don’t care what happens to me. You knew what this was like, you knew what would happen – you’ve always said so – but nothing would stop you. You *wanted* me – that’s all it ever was with you, you said it, you said you wanted me, and now you’ve had me and you can’t get enough. You’re like all the rest of them [...] you’re perverted!” (311, emphasis in original).

distancing. The “I/you” bond they form can simultaneously engender a compassionate openness and an uncompromising guardedness. But one can also interpret the “stand” that David Everett takes against the “it” that changes the blond boy as an effort to resist the category “homosexual,” which the mental hospital and society at large regard as a sign of madness. In doing so, he expresses an aversion to static categories and compulsive acts, like the sadism he engaged in as an attendant-in-training, analogous to David Mitchell’s refusal to define the term homosexual or himself as “one of them.”

While David Mitchell ultimately defines himself in terms of the “I/you” bond that he shares with David Everett and the “special company” of his fellow patients, these unions make other types of marriage impossible. Near the end of the novel David’s mother brings his former girlfriend, Sarah Rogers, to the hospital. When his mother leaves them alone, Sarah tells David that she is still willing to marry him. David, who has fought in WWII and spent time in a mental institution since they were a couple, turns her down. He tells her, “I’ve been someplace, Sarah, someplace you don’t know anything about. I’m not back now. I don’t know that I’ll ever be back really” (346). David’s new dwelling place, which is situated in between “here” and “there”—he can “‘roam through two worlds simultaneously” (336)— makes it impossible for him to accept the obligations of the institution of marriage, including its consummation. These obligations epitomize what David regards as the pathology of sex/uality because they compel one to desire someone “personally and specifically” (244).

David’s stance in between worlds also prevents him from entering into a symbolic marriage with his mother even though their relationship seems almost incestuous at the beginning of her final visit. Immediately before telling David that she brought Sarah to

the hospital, an act which required her to open and then answer a love letter Sarah had written to him, David and his mother “advanced towards each other in the hall, tentatively, rather like lovers meeting after a quarrel, hesitant, unsure, and yet with their thoughts firmly tied to the prospect of a joyful making-up. After she kissed me, we drew apart” (341). But neither of these potential marriages is possible because they intertwine sexuality and madness. David provides his status as an “ex-nut” as the reason he cannot marry Sarah. His status as in/sane is still dependent on his mother as she will once again author a “report” on his second trial visit (356), and because her in/sanity is directly tied to his, which is evident when she tells him, ““Why you’re as sane as I am!”” (349).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> In the following chapter, I juxtapose madhouse texts that stress the incompatibility of marriage and madness with others that suggest marriage is the only thing that can secure one’s release from the mental institution and ensure one’s sanity.

## Chapter 3

“*But Now You’ll See Yourself as I See You*”<sup>1</sup>

The Collaborative Composition of Sanity and Marriage in Paul Hackett’s *The Cardboard Giants* and Marie Hackett’s *The Cliff’s Edge*

### I. The Double-voiced Madhouse Text

I double you, of course you do. You double me, very likely to be. You double I double I double you double. I double you double me I double you you double me. When this you see remarkably. (576)

–Gertrude Stein, *Patriarchal Poetry*<sup>2</sup>

Mary Jane Ward’s and Fritz Peters’s decisions to write their asylum autobiographies in novel form allows them to describe the “inside” world of the mad subject from the “outside” world of the sane writer. While the dual nature of this subgenre enables them to disassociate themselves from the madness of a not entirely distinct other, it also prevents author and protagonist from being positioned simultaneously on both sides of the walls of the mental institution. This inherent limitation of the subgenre is most apparent when Virginia Cunningham and David Mitchell begin to reclaim their subjectivity. Virginia’s release from the hospital corresponds to the emergence of a private “I” that leaves her, like Ward, on the outside looking in,<sup>3</sup> and David’s strands him between a world that he must leave and another to which he may never fully return.<sup>4</sup> Paul Hackett’s asylum autobiography *The Cardboard Giants* (1952) and Marie Hackett’s autobiography *The Cliff’s Edge* (1954)<sup>5</sup> bridge the gap between these seemingly distinct and isolated worlds

<sup>1</sup> Marie Hackett says this to her husband Paul Hackett in his autobiography *The Cardboard Giants*, 168.

<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Writings 1903-1932* (New York: Library of America, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> The emergence of the private “I” corresponds to Virginia’s ability to assert her sanity and to distance herself from the patients whom she labels “mad.”

<sup>4</sup> This return is doubtful because both the “I/you” bond that David Mitchell and David Everett forge and David Mitchell’s allegiance to the “special company” of patients make other unions seem impossible.

<sup>5</sup> *The Cliff’s Edge* is Marie Hackett’s autobiographical account of the events surrounding Paul’s institutionalization in a Veterans Administration mental hospital in Newark, New Jersey. In subsequent citations and footnotes, I abbreviate *The Cardboard Giants* as *CG* and *The Cliff’s Edge* as *CE*.

through an intermingling of perspectives that occurs within and between their texts. The Hacketts' perspectival union expands the geographical and temporal dimensions of madhouse literature.<sup>6</sup> Shifting between the mental institution and the family home, as well as the past and the present, the Hacketts construct a double-voiced narrative that echoes and undermines the institutional perspective and demonstrates the interdependence of marriage and in/sanity by repeatedly juxtaposing their marriage and Paul's madness with those of other mental patients.

A brief exploration of the different types of dual perspective in madhouse literature preceding and contemporary with the Hacketts' texts will reveal the singular nature of their textual union. Though perspectival doubling is a standard feature of madhouse literature, it is almost always characterized by the opposition or conflation of inside and outside perspectives. In the autobiographical novel, for instance, the positions from which the author and protagonist speak make their perspectives either indistinguishable or absolutely distinct.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the author disappears from the narrative either by doubling the mental patient's "inside" perspective or by representing a perspective that is completely removed from the narrative scene.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the protagonist only represents the "outside" perspective when s/he adopts the perspective of the institution in relation to the

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<sup>6</sup> As we have seen, the visits home described by patients like Jane Hillyer and David Mitchell often signal an expansion of the geography of the madhouse by doubling the jurisdiction of the institution. Marie's text, on the other hand, blurs the distinction between inside and outside the mental hospital, eventually repositioning Paul and his text firmly in their family home. She also expands the temporal dimensions of madhouse literature as half of the time she describes in *The Cliff's Edge* occurs after Paul's release from the hospital.

<sup>7</sup> While Ward's multi-perspective doubles Virginia with the reader, the narrator, and herself, it always represents a multiplication of the inside perspective.

<sup>8</sup> Similarly, though the communal perspective multiplies and diversifies the inside perspective, it almost always remains within the mental hospital. The degree to which Virginia is distanced from her fellow patients is increased when she moves out of the state after her release (263). Likewise, upon leaving the hospital, David thinks, "That world up there—I looked up and then down at the scars on my hands—where I am not, but where I have been" (362).

“truly mad.”<sup>9</sup> As in most genres of madhouse literature, those who are in a position to offer an outside perspective that might corroborate that of the mad subject are virtually absent in the autobiographical novel. As I have suggested above, the perspectives of Virginia’s husband Robert and David’s mother are largely kept out of *The Snake Pit* and *The World Next Door*. Until the very end of both novels, Virginia’s and David’s guardians function almost exclusively as agents of the mental institution, echoing the expert opinions of staff members until they decide to secure their loved one’s release.<sup>10</sup>

The inside perspective of mental patients is also circumscribed in a number of madhouse texts written in the first half of the twentieth-century. This is particularly true in autobiographies whose focus is the “psychological journey” of individual patients.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the emergence of the psychological journey autobiography paradoxically signals the silencing of the voices of former mental patients. Notably, “these narratives began to appear with addenda by psychologists and psychiatrists who presented the texts as evidence of both their professional ability to cure the patient and the wonders and terrors of mental illness as experienced from the inside.”<sup>12</sup> Not only do these addenda potentially shape the reader’s interpretation of the autobiographies to which they are attached, but

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia and David regard themselves as special cases who are more sane than their fellow patients.

<sup>10</sup> The perspective of loved ones is crucial in madhouse texts, as Erving Goffman suggests in *Asylums*, because “[i]f the guardian is satisfied with what is happening to the new inpatient, the world ought to be” (142).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 125. As I mention in the Introduction, Wood describes a generic shift from reform-oriented madhouse texts to texts in which the psychological journey of individual patients is of primary importance. Like the autobiographical madhouse novel, the perspectives of guardians are virtually absent in the psychological journey autobiography.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Madhouse texts with addenda by psychiatric professionals include Clifford Beers’s *A Mind That Found Itself* (1908), Jane Hillyer’s *Reluctantly Told* (1926), Marian King’s *The Recovery of Myself* (1931), Lara Jefferson’s [pseud.] *These Are My Sisters* (1947), Robert Dahl’s *Breakdown* (1959), Jan Marks’ *Doctor Purgatory* (1959), Harrell Thach’s *God Gets in the Way of a Sailor* (1964), Morag Coate’s *Beyond All Reason* (1965), Clare Marc Wallace’s *Portrait of a Schizophrenic Nurse* (1965), and John Leach’s *Fear No Evil* (1969). The addenda included in these texts are generally written by doctors other than those who treated the authors when they were mental patients. Thus, the psychiatric viewpoint appears to be objective and omnipresent because it is corroborated by ostensibly independent doctors from inside and outside the mental hospital.

the texts themselves often echo the institutional perspective.<sup>13</sup> Rather than contest the authority of the psychiatric establishment to diagnose and institutionalize them as insane, these authors adopt a psychiatric gaze with which they diagnose themselves and other patients. For instance, due to her adoption of the institutional perspective in her autobiography *The Recovery of Myself*, Marian King's "own experience of subjectivity falls away before the assumption of a 'we' that invites the psychiatric expert to represent the mass of humankind."<sup>14</sup> In his preface to King's text, renowned psychiatrist Adolf Meyer writes that her narrative demonstrates that she is "finally capable of seeing herself as the physician sees her, with a growing sense of proportion and perspective"(x).<sup>15</sup> Significantly, Meyer employs "growing" here to indicate a gradual diminution of King's perspective, a decline that ultimately occasions the virtual disappearance of her voice from the narrative. At one point, King interrupts her doctor to tell him, "I soon found out that I did not have anything to say" (126). As is often the case in the psychological journey autobiography, King simultaneously speaks for her doctor and silences herself, thus becoming a cipher through which the psychiatric "we" can speak for her and other mental patients.

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<sup>13</sup> As I have suggested in the first two chapters, madhouse writers frequently multiply the "I" in their texts in order to stand apart from their former "mad" selves. In doing so, they can ally themselves with the doctor and scrutinize their madness as if it belonged to an other.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 129.

<sup>15</sup> Meyer also writes, "Knowing how many-sided the facts and the events are, and how varied and numerous the questions of the outsider and the insider concerning the why's and the how's and the what's, I wish it were possible to put side by side with the patient's memoranda that which the nurses and the physicians made it their duty to pay attention to and to record and discuss" (x). In his introduction to Jane Hillyer's autobiography, Joseph Collins, a neurologist, acknowledges that "there is so much discord among academic psychologists" that the "layman is puzzled and does not know what to believe and what to reject" (xvii). Then, after suggesting that this discord is lessening, Collins writes, "We can learn more about the mind when it is disintegrating than when it is integrating. That is one reason why the public should find an interest in this book" (xvii). Finally, as I have suggested in Chapter One, William James positions the reader of Clifford Beers's autobiography as an "uninitiated" outsider (204).

A different type of silencing occurs in Thomas Wilkes's *Hell's Cauldron* (1953)<sup>16</sup> and Alton Brea's *Half a Lifetime* (1968), autobiographies that ostensibly offer the perspectives of married couples who are on opposite sides of the walls of the mental hospital. Wilkes's autobiography is a textual refutation of the diagnoses and writings of his wife Camille and his doctors. In order to demonstrate his sanity, he reproduces Camille's letters, her written reports of their visits and phone calls, transcriptions of her interviews with doctors, and her testimony in his commitment hearing. He also challenges the distinction between inside and outside perspectives when he gainsays his doctors' diagnosis by juxtaposing their writings with those of experts who are not connected to the mental hospital. Though Alton Brea also relates a story of marriage and madness, he does so from outside of the mental institution. He adopts the tone of a quasi-psychiatrist in order to analyze the causes and symptoms of his wife Mary's madness. Brea continually undermines his wife's story, which he claims to present "in her own words, as I recall them, as she related it to me" (66). He describes her story as "an interruption to this bizarre series of events" that he depicts in the first part of the autobiography, and "an account of a strange and unusual interlude" written by someone "without formal training" (66). Though Wilkes and Brea occupy opposite standpoints in relation to the mental hospital, their simultaneous inclusion and negation of their wives' stories constitutes a type of textual ventriloquy that prevents the union of inside and outside perspectives.

The doubling of perspectives in the Hacketts' autobiographies represents the first time, to my knowledge, that a mental patient and her or his guardian have collaborated to compose a tale of recovery and release. The Hacketts form a perspectival union with

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas G.E. Wilkes is the pseudonym of Gerald Wilcox.

which they explain and contain Paul's "mad" past and attest to the permanence of his sanity long after he is released from the mental hospital. They do so in part by constructing a double-voiced diagnosis that identifies the potential situational and deeply-rooted causes of his madness and counters the institution's diagnosis.<sup>17</sup> Their collaboration is necessary because, as Erving Goffman argues, staff in mental institutions equate "the difficulties caused by a patient [...] to his version of what has been happening to him, and if co-operation is to be secured, it helps if this version is discredited. The patient must 'insightfully' come to take, or affect to take, the hospital's view of himself."<sup>18</sup> The "insight" that Paul gains over the course of the Hacketts' texts is an expression of their perspectival union rather than his adoption of the institution's version of his story. Instead of wholly rejecting the "psychiatric view" of Paul's past, however, the Hacketts construct a diagnosis that builds on and undermines the one offered by his doctors. Thus, their texts fulfill generic expectations, such as identifying incidents in Paul's past that are symptomatic of his madness, while frustrating the reader's attempts to formulate an unambiguous diagnosis.

In order to preserve the uncertainty inherent in Paul's experience with madness, the Hacketts compose a portrait of him that cannot be easily understood and interpreted from an outside perspective. Their collaborative composition of his ambiguous story is evident, for instance, in their depictions of their separate conversations with Dr. Edwards about

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<sup>17</sup> The Hacketts' employment of the institution's terms to diagnose Paul, to borrow Hugh English's words, suggests that "[t]here is always a need to organize within the very categories of identity that we also need to destroy or destabilize so that we may become free of their limitations" ("Learning and Unlearning Historical Sexual Identities," *Radical Teacher* 66 (Spring 2003): 6. Though Paul's hospitalization is voluntary, the Hacketts' narrative strategy also corresponds to Kate Millett's assertion that, as Susan Hubert writes in *Questions of Power*, "the most effective way to fight involuntary hospitalization is to accept madness while simultaneously rejecting the need for psychiatric treatment. 'Not till you permit madness,' she tells herself, 'can you really stand against the bin as prison and punishment'" (108).

<sup>18</sup> Erving Goffman, *Asylums*, 155.

the potential causes of Paul's madness. These conversations are particularly noteworthy due to the uncertainty with which Dr. Edwards expresses his opinion and the degree to which the Hacketts' accounts parallel one another.<sup>19</sup> In *The Cardboard Giants*, Dr. Edwards tells Paul, "No one knows exactly what causes [schizophrenia]" (121), after which he provides four "theories," which include "a lifetime of social maladjustment," an "improper level of aspiration," "damage to the brain cells," and "emotional stresses in childhood which are re-enacted in later life situations [that] make the later life situations impossible and there is a break with reality" (121).<sup>20</sup> Marie records nearly the same words in *The Cliff's Edge*, though in a more concise manner and a slightly different order. After Dr. Edwards tells her, "We don't know exactly why someone becomes so sick," he relates the four theories: "some say a lifetime of frustrations; others say improper level of aspirations; some say it's a retreat from reality; others claim it's physiological in nature" (37).<sup>21</sup> Dr. Edwards again indicates the uncertainty of psychiatric knowledge when he tells Paul, "Personally, I think there is some truth in each theory and that each case is different" (121).<sup>22</sup> In other words, Dr. Edwards suggests that the accuracy of a psychiatric theory is contingent on the life stories

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<sup>19</sup> Though Dr. Edwards tells Paul and Marie that Paul's diagnosis is schizophrenia, he almost always couches Paul's diagnosis in uncertain terms. In *The Cardboard Giants*, Dr. Edwards says, "Officially your diagnosis is paranoid schizophrenia" (121, emphasis added), and in *The Cliff's Edge* he tells Marie, "In our opinion, he is a paranoid schizophrenic" (36, emphasis added).

<sup>20</sup> Three of the four theories that Dr. Edwards describes suggest that Paul's madness was caused by external factors. Moreover, Paul's emphasis on the theory that "emotional stresses in childhood" are to blame for his condition corresponds to his and Marie's explanation of the origin of his madness in their texts.

<sup>21</sup> After hearing Dr. Edwards's diagnosis and prognosis, Marie writes, "I was stunned. This doctor was saying that Paul was insane and he might not recover and they didn't know why. It couldn't happen to him" (CE 37). As do the Hacketts' texts more generally, Marie simultaneously points to the uncertainty of the doctors' knowledge ("they didn't know why") and offers an unequivocal denial of Paul's madness ("It couldn't happen to him").

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Edwards tells Marie, "We don't exactly know why someone becomes so sick," "we don't know exactly," and "we really don't know enough about this sickness" (CE 37).

of individual patients,<sup>23</sup> thus privileging the type of intimate knowledge of Paul's life prior to and during his institutionalization that only the Hacketts possess. Ultimately, this shared knowledge enables Paul and Marie to unearth signs of his madness and identify them as incidental or inherent to his nature in ways his doctors cannot.

Toward the end of *The Cardboard Giants*, Paul includes a conversation between himself and Dr. Edwards that reiterates the uncertainty of Dr. Edwards's diagnosis and undermines further the authority of psychiatric experts. After Dr. Edwards "half-jokingly" asks him if he was "conscious of the evil force 'the Mind' when [he] first went into business," Paul says, "I don't remember. When it's in your mind, it's like it's the most familiar thought you ever had and once it's gone you hardly remember thinking it" (242).<sup>24</sup> Paul describes the Mind as something that he was possessed by, as if it were "in [his] mind" but never a part of it, something that thought for him and barely left a trace. After Paul asks what caused his delusions, Dr. Edwards echoes his conversations with Paul and Marie regarding the four theories: "Like everything else in the field there is a lot of speculation and a pile of theories." Dr. Edwards tells Paul that "[t]he most commonly accepted explanation is the one a former mental patient named Beers gives in a book he wrote called *The Mind That Found Itself*<sup>25</sup> that paranoid types cannot accept

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<sup>23</sup> None of the theories that Paul and Marie present to the reader as Dr. Edwards's is hereditary in nature. In fact, Marie writes that Dr. Edwards assures her that "[t]he physical effects of the head injury would not cause the trouble, but its psychological effects could have" (CE 38). Earlier Paul and Marie offer the head injury he suffered in a plane crash during WWII as a cause of his madness. See CG 8-9 and CE 26-27.

<sup>24</sup> For passages in which Paul and others mention "the Mind," see CG 4-5, 7, 9, 11, 13-14, 16, 21, 29, 42, 45, 56-57, 62-63, 72-73, 76-77, 80, 85-86, 98, 181-82, 184, 188-89, 195-97, 202, 242, and 269.

<sup>25</sup> The title of Beers's autobiography is *A Mind That Found Itself* not *The Mind That Found Itself*. While the modification of Beers's title may have been unintentional, the altered title implies both the conflation and opposition of Paul's mind and "the Mind" that pursues him. I explore this seemingly paradoxical relationship between these minds below while discussing autobiographical compositions of Paul whose authorship is unclear.

the blame for their failure and invent someone to blame’” (242).<sup>26</sup> Dr. Edwards indicates that the opinions of a former mental patient are more accepted than and at least as credible as his own and those of other psychiatric experts. He then alludes to another work written by a former mental patient in order to discredit a theory which explains that delusions are the result of an individual’s rejection of reality and subsequent retreat into madness. He says that this theory “annoys” him because “it would justify *snakepit* treatment, making the new reality more painful so the patient will retreat back to sanity” (242-43, emphasis added). Like Beers and other mental patients, the Hacketts possess intimate knowledge of Paul’s past that enables them to compose an account of his madness that is more informed, credible, and authoritative than those offered by psychiatric experts.

Similar to the way in which Virginia Cunningham positions herself as a more credible source than authors of “romantic book[s],”<sup>27</sup> Marie undermines the opinions of psychiatric experts that she encounters in Paul’s psychology books.<sup>28</sup> In particular, she implies that their theories are disconnected from the reality of madness, mental hospitals, and the families of patients. She writes that she regrets “searching the psychology books for some magic words which would make Paul well” (51), especially because the fulfillment of her duties as a wife and mother are more important to the amelioration of

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<sup>26</sup> The Hacketts’ texts are defined by a double move in which they blame Paul for his failure to meet his obligations as a husband, father, and citizen, and portray him as a helpless victim of his madness.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Jane Ward, *The Snake Pit*, 87. Virginia also refers to Dr. Kik’s analysis of her as “the sort of thing that would be nice in a book” (256).

<sup>28</sup> Marie echoes the frustration Paul experienced when reading psychology books while in graduate school. She writes, Paul “couldn’t continue to study psychology because psychologists seemed to have given up any study of the emotions and of the nature of the human mind” (CE 22). Paul also suggests that his viewpoint is more credible than those of experts when he “discuss[es] books on psychology with Bill.” Commenting on Andrew Salter’s *Conditioned Reflex Therapy*, Paul writes, “Salter went to the opposite extreme from the Freudians; he put everything on a physical basis and they put too much emphasis on the mental basis, and that some explanation in between was possibly right” (CG 221).

Paul's mental health. Marie implies that her written and silently expressed words are more useful than those found in psychology books when she lists "devoting" herself "to writing [Paul] extra letters and to saying more prayers that he would be better" (51) among her duties. Later, she writes,

Perhaps the authors never meant that the relatives of the sick should read them, but I could not contain my irritation at the flip authority of the books—their clever solutions, their smug characterizations, their selected case histories. There was for me no hope in these books, only words on words. (61)

Marie suggests that the "outside" perspective of psychiatric experts represents a self-referential "inside" world of the institution that is composed of "words on words," a world that is completely removed from the experiences of mental patients and their families. In contrast, throughout *The Cliff's Edge* Marie positions herself as someone who represents the "outside" perspective of someone who cannot issue a superficial analysis of an abstract patient who is suffering from a psychiatric disorder. Rather than offer the reader "clever solutions" and "smug characterizations," she continually stresses the uncertain and extremely idiosyncratic nature of Paul's madness.

Marie also counters the perspective of psychiatric professionals when she allies herself with women whose husbands and sons are in the mental institution. One of these women, a co-worker of Marie's named Esther, confirms Marie's assessment of psychology books when she tells Marie, "I spent three years looking for the answer to [my husband] Ben's sickness, and there's just no answer, or they haven't found it yet" (85).<sup>29</sup> In their addenda

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<sup>29</sup> Esther tells Marie, "I went to a doctor, and he arranged for [Ben] to have electric-shock treatments. I think they made him worse" (CE 84). Esther's assessment of EST confirms Marie's earlier decision not to sign a consent form which would have authorized the hospital to give Paul insulin shock or electroshock treatments. When Marie searches through Paul's psychology books to decide if she should sign the form,

to Jane Hillyer's and Marian King's autobiographies, Joseph Collins and Adolf Meyer acknowledge the paucity of psychiatric knowledge that Esther and Marie describe. Nonetheless, Collins asserts, "Physicians do not know much about insanity, but what they know is colossal compared to what laymen know" (xii). He later adds, "Parents and relatives are the friends the lunatic should fear" (xiv).<sup>30</sup> As we have seen, the relatives of mental patients either become mute agents of the institution when they echo its perspective or they are perceived as a threat to the psychiatric establishment's claim to expertise. Marie suggests a third possibility after she imagines that the women who visit their relatives in the mental hospital have "the same question in their minds, How will he be today?" (95). Dr. Edwards notes the silence of the relatives of mental patients that Dr. Collins seems to advocate when he tells Marie, "'You never hear of [the wives and mothers who visit patients], but they're part of our society and damn well big in their way'" (99). Throughout *The Cliff's Edge* Marie gives voice to the stories of those who "must have relatives as sick as Paul and try to keep it secret, as something shameful to them" (125).<sup>31</sup> She articulates the deep-seated uncertainty that these women have concerning the mental health of their loved ones. Founded on these women's intimate knowledge of their husbands' and sons' lives, these stories potentially represent a

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she finds "the same confusion again. On one page four disagreeing articles as to the worth of the treatments were cited. There were the same uncertain generalities that had disturbed me in previous reading—'more research is needed,' 'contradictory results,' 'recovery in 23 percent of 1,000 cases studied,' 'possible brain damage,' 'actual effect on the brain unknown'" (CE 62-63).

<sup>30</sup> Collins also writes, "In the first place if the patient does not have symptoms so conspicuous and convincing that a child would realize that he was insane; [friends and relatives of mental patients] refuse to believe it, or to take the proper steps to safeguard the patient and facilitate his recovery. In the second place they cannot be convinced that when an individual is deprived of his liberty he is not branded for ever" (xiv).

<sup>31</sup> Marie writes, "Later, many people were to tell me of their relatives who, like Paul, were in institutions. Up until then I had really thought of the other wives only as visitors at the hospital but not as people who worked with you and lived lives outside the visits" (CE 84).

perspective that can corroborate that of their loved ones and contradict the opinions of psychiatric professionals.

Like Marie, Paul allies himself with his fellow patients in order to counter the writings of laymen and psychiatric professionals. In *The Cliff's Edge* Marie describes Paul's second visit home during which he says, "'there are so many similarities between myself and [other mental patients]'" (69). After indicating the diversity of his fellow patients, he discounts the way in which they are portrayed. Echoing Virginia's rejection of the writer who contends that mental patients "dwell in dreams,"<sup>32</sup> Paul tells Marie,

"I'd read plays on how people say that people in asylums are the only happy ones, and nonsense like that. Now I know it's not only the place you're in and the conditions and the feeling that comes when you love your freedom and are locked up, it's the look that comes on everyone's face there sometimes—when he remembers where he is. A look of half fear and some shame, with a kind of watery-eyed panic to it." (CE 70)

Paul suggests that only those who have experienced waking to the nightmare of institutionalization can accurately portray it. Upon returning from this visit home, he tells a group of patients, "'Someday, I'll write a play for you guys'" (CG 176), after which Paul and others orally compose a tale of a man named Rudolph O'Sullivan who is institutionalized for selling shoes in a mental hospital. The patients' collaborative composition focuses on the institution's diagnosis of Rudolph's personal history. Paul says, "'How they dig into his childhood!'" (176). He then writes, "I was laughing at the doctors, and at the hospital, and at life" (177). He suggests that their play is indicative of the "'neat'" (177) diagnosis staff would manufacture to justify Rudolph's

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<sup>32</sup> Ward, *The Snake Pit*, 54.

institutionalization and the ““great cure”” that they would bring about by erasing his memory with shock treatment and ““get[ting] him a job in a shoe factory”” (178).

Apart from expanding their inside and outside perspectives through their membership in the “special compan[ies]”<sup>33</sup> described above, the Hacketts’ textual union enables Paul to claim the authority and authenticity of an autobiographer by multiplying him into “sane” and “mad” selves. Like Clifford Beers and other madhouse writers, the distance afforded Paul by this multiplication allows him to participate in the composition of his autobiography and the biography of another self. This auto/biographical doubling in *The Cardboard Giants* is particularly evident in the ways in which the Hacketts contrast “sane” Paul with “mad” Paul, his fellow patients, and others, all of whom gradually disappear as the narrative progresses. Marie and Paul transfer his madness onto others in part because they are “torn between finding evidence of mental illness in his past and insisting on his normality.”<sup>34</sup> Their ability to demonstrate the continuity of Paul’s sanity while searching his past for evidence of madness depends on their composition of a diagnosis that does not forever label Paul as a madman. Thus, the Hacketts suggest that Paul is not responsible for the behavior in which they detect signs of madness. Instead, we learn that he is influenced by unsavory individuals, possessed by outside forces beyond his control, and haunted by figures from his past, all of whom correspond to “mad” doubles whose stories are less hopeful than Paul’s.

But before the Hacketts double “sane” Paul with his “mad” self and others, two of his fellow patients inform him that he doubles their former and current selves. Echoing David Everett’s conversations with David Mitchell in *The World Next Door*, Bill Dolan

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<sup>33</sup> Peters, *The World Next Door*, 336.

<sup>34</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 145.

and Jack Hayden<sup>35</sup> describe Paul's madness in terms of a multivalent "it" which they can recognize but not define. Bill tells Paul,

"We know we've been sick and we can see it in someone else. I can tell by the way you walk, the way you look around a room. Look at your eyes in the mirror. I can have you talk to ten guys here that have secret cosmic knowledge. Look, we don't care how far out in left field you are, but to see someone doing just what we used to do, that's the trouble. You're sick and this is a hospital and it's a good one, but you have to know you're sick and stop thinking that cosmic junk. Every time it comes in your head, think of something else. Isn't that it, Jack?" (63)

Bill's comment that it is difficult "to see someone doing just what we used to do," recalls David Everett's statement that "'the more you get so you can stand it yourself, the harder it is to look at others.'"<sup>36</sup> Immediately after Bill suggests that mental patients depend on one another to recognize and contain their own and one another's madness, he asks Jack to describe his former delusions to Paul. Jack says that, like Paul, he "'had all that evil forces against me stuff, too. [...] When I got here, I knew I was sick. They told me just what Bill's telling you'" (63-64). This communal knowledge enabled Jack to overcome his delusions because he knew that "'[i]t was in my head and it's in your head, whatever is on your mind. It may be guilt, or fear, or hate. Whatever it is, you've got to get over it or you'll end up like the old men here'" (64). Even though Paul continues to disregard Bill's and Jack's advice because he thinks that accepting it would be an admission that he

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<sup>35</sup> When Paul first meets Jack Hayden he thinks he is lying about his name because "Jack Hayden was killed in the battle of Britain" (CG 35-36). In fact, the improvement of Paul's mental health is signaled in part by his ability to distinguish between the living and dead Jack Haydens (58). In certain ways, Jack's role in *The Cardboard Giants* is similar to David Everett's in *The World Next Door*. For instance, Jack tells Paul about the hospital's censorship of patients' letters (60), informs him how to behave if he wants to be released (69, 209-10), gets Dr. Edwards to let Paul work in the kitchen with him (61), and tells Paul where he has hidden Marie's letters from himself (113).

<sup>36</sup> Peters, *The World Next Door*, 245.

is insane like them, this exchange anticipates the containment and erasure characteristic of the Hacketts' compositional practice. It also provides the title for and inspires the first pages of *The Cardboard Giants*. Bill, who initially describes his and Jack's madness in the past tense ("we've been sick"), tells Paul that all mental patients must continually conceal their madness: "It's something inside, Paul, and we all have it. We can't face ourselves as we are. [...] You know what we are, we're the cardboard giants. And when we find we're made of cardboard, we can't face it and end up in an asylum'" (64).

Paul's desire to distance himself from his madness is unmistakable in "the question that was most important" to him: "Could emotional experiences in my past life be so impressed on my mind that whenever similar situations occur in the present I explode?" (154).<sup>37</sup> In order to become the author of his own story, Paul must learn to suppress and contain memories that seem to interrupt his thoughts and narrative, particularly in the first half of *The Cardboard Giants*. At moments like these, Paul's memories "interfere with the order of [his] life both in the content of the story [he] tells and in the structure of the story itself."<sup>38</sup> He realizes that he must "guard against memories or streams of thought" (154) in order to keep them from invading the present and making him appear mad. On one occasion, immediately after he distances himself from his fellow patients by saying that he feels "he [is] not one of them," Paul watches an unnamed patient light matches. The patient's fascination with fire suddenly evokes Paul's memory of his sister, Ruth, whom he regards as "dangerous" due to an attraction to fire that made her face look like

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<sup>37</sup> This question corresponds to the theory mentioned above that Paul's madness was caused by "emotional stresses in childhood which are re-enacted in later life situations [that] make the later life situations impossible and there is a break with reality" (CG 121).

<sup>38</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 145.

“the face of an insane child” (77).<sup>39</sup> Paul’s remembrance of his sister’s past, during which he reveals various reasons that she became “sick inside with a growing secret joy in lighting a match and watching the flames grow” (78), is cut short by the “confusion” (79) of the present moment. When Paul regains consciousness he discovers that he has been identified as one of the “two of them” (79) who was present when a fire was set. Paul’s association with this act of arson that simultaneously links him to madness in his past (his sister Ruth) and his present (a fellow patient) causes him to think, “The circle was complete and I did not care for I was depressed” (79). But even though Paul’s dishonesty and criminality are reflected in his sister’s pyromania, rage, lies, and the pleasure she takes in “stealing trinkets and giving them away” (78), and his status as a mental patient is confirmed by his association with his fellow patient, the “circle” that contains Paul is less “complete” than he initially suggests.

The Hacketts describe Paul’s criminal behavior as a battle between his “sane” and “mad” selves.<sup>40</sup> Like Beers’s “mental civil war,”<sup>41</sup> Paul explains that his criminal past was driven by an internal struggle of “the two forces in me. The need to do good and the desire to do evil” (49). Paul’s double life is also evident in his inability to tell Dr. Edwards what he discloses to the reader about his “problem [...] of conscience, of no conscience, respect for law and no respect for anything, and in those years after the army I alternated between good and evil and the quitting of law school might have symbolized the choice. I had become a criminal” (49). At one point, Dr. Edwards informs Paul that his cure and release may depend on his ability to comprehend the relationship between

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<sup>39</sup> The Hacketts seem to describe Ruth and other madmen as childlike at least in part because their thoughts and actions are determined by their pasts.

<sup>40</sup> For passages related to Paul’s criminal activities and tendencies, see *CE* 3-4, 17-20, 24, 105, 189, and 193-95. Also, see *CG* 119, 186-88, and 245-46.

<sup>41</sup> *A Mind That Found Itself*, 1.

his criminality and his madness: “I should think it would be important to know if the sickness caused the delinquency [...] or if the guilt from the wrongdoing caused the illness” (186). He then says that if Paul were to determine that “a sickness caused the crimes,” then he could prevent himself from repeating them, thus enabling Paul to get off the “merry-go-round of crime and guilt” (186). Echoing his rejection of Bill’s and Jack’s advice, Paul thinks, “It had nothing to do with me so I was silent” (186). Late in the narrative, however, Paul suggests that his criminality and madness might be located in a specific part of his mind. As in the arson scene described above, he suggests that he may not be fully conscious of or responsible for the actions he performs in the circle of madness. He writes, “Perhaps even some part of my personality was psychopathic” (246). Likewise, Marie describes Paul’s criminal behavior as an aberration rather than an essential part of Paul’s character: “Now he could understand that the *streak* of criminality had been related to some need he had to rebel against authority, some urgency to prove he was above laws, some reflection of his coming delusions of grandeur” (189, emphasis added). She suggests that Paul was eventually so “torn by a struggle within himself” that he became a “self-tortured paranoiac” (189).

Ultimately, Paul and Marie blur the line that separates criminal and noncriminal by insisting that his status as a schizophrenic grants him immunity from his past crimes. Paul writes, “I enjoyed listening to [Marie] talk of the unfairness of arresting me, especially in North Jersey where everything that couldn’t be done in New York was carried on openly” (268-69). Similarly, Angus MacNiven, who served as Physician Superintendent at Glasgow Royal Mental Hospital from the 1930s to the 1960s, argues that instead of arising from “criminal intent,” a schizophrenic’s crime is caused by “his inability to cope

with life's problems and to fulfill his social obligations. The enfeeblement of his mental powers and his lack of good sense, make him yield readily to temptation, and he is often a helpless tool in the hands of unscrupulous associates."<sup>42</sup> Marie explains that Paul was a "smart, honest boy" from a "tough area" who was obligated to adhere to "an old [Irish] code" that required him to steal for others even if, as Paul tells Marie, "I'd never steal anything for myself" (18). Instead, Paul "helped out friends who stole," and he illegally sold cars to mill workers in order to help them and to support his family (24). Marie writes that Paul's "integrity" was compromised by the "code" because it compelled him to ignore the dictates of his conscience. In fact, she realizes that not only was Paul "trapped" by this code and "his job into doing what his conscience said he shouldn't do," but that she and "the children were part of that trap" (24).

## II. Marriage and Madness

*The young giant felt his stomach turn to cardboard, and he knew now that his strength would soon leave him. He was a proud giant and told no one of his plight. Instead he did bad things to show how strong he was, and felt bad, for he was trained to be a good giant.*

*The doctors looked at him and said nothing is wrong with your arm or your stomach. It is in your mind. Go home now and rest, and perhaps your strength will return. [...]*

*It happened he met a good, beautiful, strong girl. They married, and her strength was his strength, and she steadied him, and they had children. But in his mind the giant still knew he was turning to cardboard, and panic gripped him, and he did foolish things, and got into trouble. He loved his wife and children very much, and the more he loved them, the more he worried because he could not learn as fast, and was forgetting things, and busy with great thoughts that came to him. (v-vi, emphasis in original)*

–Paul Hackett, *The Cardboard Giants*

As I have suggested in the Introduction and Chapter 2, marriage is frequently not a feasible option for writers after they are released from the madhouse. In her discussion of

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<sup>42</sup> Angus MacNiven, "Psychoses and Criminal Responsibility" in *Mental Abnormality and Crime* (Eds. L. Radzinowicz and J.W.C. Turner), 23.

asylum autobiographies written by women in the late nineteenth century, Wood draws attention to the fact that marriage had to be dissolved, redefined, or abandoned as an idea after these writers were released from the mental institution.<sup>43</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, the subject of marriage virtually disappears from madhouse literature. In contrast to the texts of Packard, Peters and others, marriage plays a central role in numerous post-WWII madhouse texts.<sup>44</sup> The Hacketts, for instance, repeatedly suggest that a strong marriage is vital not only to cure madness, but also to maintain one's sanity. Rather than signify the defects of the institution of marriage, the Hacketts' and other writers' texts demonstrate that marital and mental problems can be attributed to individuals' personality flaws and deviant behavior, particularly ones that transgress the marriage bond and social norms. Throughout *The Cardboard Giants* and *The Cliff's Edge*, the Hacketts demonstrate the interconnectedness of patients' marriages and madness and signal the critical role of marriage in one's cure by doubling the story of their marriage with those of his former "mad" self and other mental patients.

Though the Hacketts suggest that their marriage is the only thing that can reestablish Paul's sanity and secure his release from the mental hospital, the ghosts of his past repeatedly threaten to destroy their bond. Marie unwittingly records the appearance of one of these ghosts during Paul's second visit home. After the Hacketts watch a television show that employs the "favorite device" of "solv[ing] the mystery by blaming" (CE 79) a madman, Paul breaks a glass by throwing it against a wall. When Marie asks him not to break another glass, he tells her, "'You're afraid of me, Marie; that's the real trouble. You've been afraid all day; and if you stay afraid, you won't love me, because

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<sup>43</sup> See Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, especially 32-35, 43-45, 99, and 102.

<sup>44</sup> It is not surprising that this shift in the role of marriage in madhouse texts coincides with the high birth rate and low divorce rate of the post-WWII "baby boom."

*love won't live with fear*'' (79, emphasis added).<sup>45</sup> Paul's comment about the incompatibility of love and fear echo something he thinks while ending his extra-marital affair with Lorrie, a married woman to whom Paul falsely claimed to be married when he was in the army (CG 98). Paul and Lorrie's faux marriage eventually ends after they are haunted by their aborted child: "We didn't let the baby live, for she was married and not married and could not marry me" (99). After Lorrie tells Paul that "inside" they are equally "sick," "confused," and "weak," he thinks, "I knew something had died between us—something we could have shared—and she and the thing that died blended in my mind. [...] The fear had come and the caution, and *love cannot live with fear like that*" (100, emphasis added). Though Lorrie continues to haunt Paul after her death, at times by "blend[ing] in [his] mind" with Marie, the Hacketts ultimately demonstrate the strength of their love and the permanence of Paul's cure by showing that Marie, unlike Lorrie, can overcome her fear of Paul.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, in contrast to Lorrie's inability to have Paul's child, Marie has three children with Paul before he is institutionalized and gives birth to a baby girl named Paula a year after he is released from the mental hospital (CE 241).<sup>47</sup>

Similar to the way in which Paul and Lorrie's extra-marital affair haunts the Hacketts' marriage, Paul relates the stories of mental patients who face the dual crisis of infidelity and madness.<sup>48</sup> After reading a letter from Marie one morning, Paul writes that Jack

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<sup>45</sup> Marie expresses fear of various kinds throughout *The Cliff's Edge*. See 39, 51, 66, 90, 150, 162, 187, 204, 214, and 231.

<sup>46</sup> Marie repeatedly demonstrates that she is able to overcome her fear due to her love of Paul. For example, see CE 67, 71, 80, 170, and 195.

<sup>47</sup> In madhouse texts a mental patient's ability to procreate often corresponds to the health of her/his marriage and mind. It is significant, then, that Paul briefly mentions "the baby we lost" (120), and Marie includes passages in which she credits Paul with preventing the miscarriage of their son John Paul (23-24). When Paul is in the mental hospital his in/sanity is directly tied to the recovery of John Paul from a life-threatening illness. See CG 195-202, 205-6, CE 87-95 and 101-2.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Wilkes's and Alton Brea's autobiographies describe the institutionalization of unfaithful spouses. While Brea suggests that his wife's infidelity causes her madness and threatens the family unit,

receives a “bad letter” from an anonymous woman who informs him that his wife is “bringing other men to their apartment” (CG 151). Though Paul tells Jack to disregard the letter’s claims until he has a chance to discuss them with his wife, he too doubts her fidelity because “she hadn’t visited him in weeks and hadn’t written” (151). When Jack’s mental state begins to deteriorate, Paul suggests that if someone like Jack, who was “ready to go home” and who had helped Paul avoid trouble with staff “when [he] was at [his] worst” by making him “hospital-wise” could “los[e] the group” (151), then all patients are similarly threatened by their own marriages and those of others. Later, a patient named Jim tells Paul that Jack’s failed marriage will continue to threaten his fellow patients after he is released from the hospital. Jim mockingly says that Jack is one of the hospital’s ““best cures”” because “[h]e has learned just what to say to the nurses, aides, and especially to the doctors, and they intend to release him within ten days”” (208). Jim then opposes the limited information of staff with the intimate knowledge that patients have of one another: ““Sometimes I think they should have a board of patients pass on these guys before they’re released. Jack there looks so calm but anyone trying to sleep can hear him grinding his teeth all night”” (208). Paul confirms Jim’s assessment of Jack when he writes that Jack “rav[es]” (247) in the bed next to his own the night before he is released, becoming silent only when an aide and nurse come by to wish him luck. Though Jim tells Paul, ““I wouldn’t want to be within a country mile of [Jack’s] house when he gets home to his wife”” (208), ultimately no amount of distance can protect

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Wilkes’s wife Camille implies that his extramarital affairs demonstrate that he is a dangerous madman. She reportedly tells his aunt, ““Why, all during our married life he’d keep women in hotels—and the things he’d do! Most of the paranoids are that way; but he’s not passive like some of them. He’s worse than he ever was! There’s no telling what he will do next! [...] The psychiatrists tell me he’s the most dangerous mental case they ever saw. Why, he’ll be sitting right there, smiling at you, and all the time he’s plotting to kill you, or something even worse”” (91). Below I explore madhouse texts in which, contrary to Wilkes’s and Brea’s autobiographies, faithful spouses are institutionalized and/or their mental health is negatively impacted due to their partners’ infidelity.

mental patients from what occurs in Jack's home because the walls of the mental hospital and the bonds of the institution of marriage are inextricably intertwined and markedly expanded. It is clear that the status of mental patients depends on the continuing success of the marriages of former patients when staff loses contact with Jack. Dr. Edwards tells Paul that "[i]f anything goes wrong, it just makes it harder for the others to get released'" (279-80).<sup>49</sup>

Like Paul Hackett, Emily Harvin identifies infidelity as a primary cause of madness in her biographical novel *The Stubborn Wood* (1948).<sup>50</sup> Unlike Jack Hayden, the novel's protagonist, Monica Prystal, repeatedly finds evidence that her husband Deem is cheating. In fact, at one point Deem strikes Monica when she insists that his lover refrain from calling their house. Later that same night, she stares at his face as he lies sleeping and thinks, "it was a face completely known and infinitely dear, but molded briefly and latterly by foreign forces. The presence of the other woman was here in this room and on his lips" (17-18). In an effort to "patch together what remained of her understanding of marriage" (18), Monica consults a psychiatrist who determines that her bond with Deem is the source of her psychological problems. Like Jack's deterioration after reading his wife's "bad letter" and his subsequent acceptance of the blame for her apparent infidelity, the doctor informs Monica that Deem "has the illness while [she] exhibit[s] the symptoms. Vicarious atonement, you might call it, for his—er—errors'" (18). Though Monica asks to be admitted to the mental hospital rather than return home, the doctor tells

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<sup>49</sup> After his conversation with Dr. Edwards, Paul writes, "Perhaps [Jack] just wanted to go somewhere and make a new start. I didn't think so inside, but I tried to tell myself that was what happened; inside I remembered Big Jim's words: 'He's a real cure but I wouldn't want to be within a country mile of his house when he gets home'" (280).

<sup>50</sup> Emily Harvin is the pseudonym of Maude Emily Taylor.

her, ““You must return to your children, your place is there”” (18).<sup>51</sup> When Monica returns to the hospital the next night to ask to be admitted again, the doctor says she must return to the children because, “[i]n effect, they have no father now [...] Go home, pretend your husband does not exist, if you must”” (19).<sup>52</sup> After Monica unsuccessfully tries “to pretend that [Deem] was not there and a ghost” (20) the next day, she suffers a miscarriage. The following chapter opens with Monica entering “[t]he door of the fourth sanitarium in six weary months” (22), an institutionalization that she ultimately regards as a consequence of her feelings for Deem—““Oh, love, *love* did this to me!”” (269, emphasis in original)—which he denies ever existed (364).

Paul also suggests that societal definitions of a person’s marriage can undermine her/his sanity. Specifically, he tells the story of his fellow patient Roger Gordon, an African American who his married to and has two children with a white woman. Another African American patient named Old Mac informs Paul that Roger’s marriage has isolated him in various ways. We learn, for instance, that Roger refuses to speak to African American aides, instigates fights with white men, thinks he is superior to his own parents, and is rejected by his wife’s parents (*CG* 147). In addition, the whiteness of Roger’s children—Paul tells Roger that he ““thought it strange both of [his] kids were white”” (146)—is a sign of his wife’s potential infidelity and thus undermines their marriage. The question of infidelity and paternity reemerges shortly after Roger returns from a three-month visit home during which he fails to save his marriage or his sanity.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The Prystals have two children, aged six and fifteen (2).

<sup>52</sup> These comments indicate the degree to which the family and marriage fall under the jurisdiction of psychiatric professionals.

<sup>53</sup> Roger is the first patient that Paul knows who goes home (150).

Paul finds Roger “raving to himself in a half-laughing, half-crying voice” (225),<sup>54</sup> speaking his own words and the words of others in a soliloquy replete with directives and statements about race, marriage, and sexuality that repeatedly calls into question his marriage and the paternity of his children:

“Walk, walk in the circle, Gordon, because the circle has a white line around it and inside and outside you’re black. [...] I don’t think it’s your wife, Mr. Gordon, I mean, well, this baby’s 99 and 99/100 per cent pure white Ivory soap. [...] No offense, Gordon, it’s just that when your wife came in we assume (sic) that, well, this neighborhood [...] With the light out, we’re all the same. Does she hate the smell of me? I’m afraid to go to bed without Mr. Mennen or Mr. Yardley or Mr. Lifebuoy—don’t forget Lifebuoy. It’s the pigmentation. She smells sweet. Her sweat smells good. She says she loves you, Gordon, not just for that not just because she loves that but what does she really think. [...] In the feeling you forget everything and she talks sexy talk and you hurt her and you know if you go in further, you’ll be inside her and come out white. The first was white. There was something in biology [...] I don’t mind, Roger, my father mined coal in Scranton. He looked darker than you. [...] You’re white inside, Roger, whiter than anyone ever. They’re the nicest people in the world when they’re sober and they like you, Roger. Isn’t she pretty, Roger, a little black Polack baby? God, I forgot to take a bath—I’ve tried Witch Hazel. Use plenty of Witch Hazel.” (225-27)

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<sup>54</sup> Near the beginning of *The Cardboard Giants*, Paul hears Roger reading the Bible to a fellow patient and becomes aware of his surroundings for the first time. He writes, “It was as though a new dimension of sound was open to me, for listening to the colored boy reading the Bible, I heard all the other sounds, too, which I had not heard before. The wild laughing, the patients walking back and forth giving speeches, the card players quarreling, the radio on the wall playing selections from ‘Oklahoma,’ the sounds of a summer storm approaching, a distant rumble of thunder and the wind outside, and closest of all the young boy’s voice reading to the old man” (28).

Roger's marriage and sanity are undermined in large part due to his inability to escape the confinement of the categorical boundaries that determine racial identity. His "raving" echoes David Everett's assertion that for African Americans mental institutions are "[n]ot so different from life on the outside, actually. Almost as if we'd done it all before."<sup>55</sup> The "white line" that defines Roger as black "inside and outside" separates him from his wife and children both at home and inside the mental hospital. Roger suggests that he might be able to gain access to an alternative white circle<sup>56</sup> by having sex with his wife: after hiding his blackness and scent, he imagines that he can "forget everything" and "be inside her and come out white."<sup>57</sup> The possibility that Roger might erase his blackness is also suggested in the description of his child as "99 and 99/100 per cent pure white Ivory soap." He then points to "something in biology" which indicates that his child's whiteness is the product of the dominant nature of his wife's genetics: "The first was white." Interestingly, Roger's wife suggests that racial distinctions can be blurred in the opposite direction. She refers to her father's coal-blackened face and describes their child as a "little black Polack baby," a description that immediately makes Roger think of using Witch Hazel to wipe out all traces of his blackness.

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<sup>55</sup> Peters, *The World Next Door*, 245.

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps related to the white circle that destroys Roger's mind and marriage, Thornwell Jacobs' novel *The Law of the White Circle* (1908) offers a defense of racial segregation through the story of an African American woman's failed attempt to "pass" in order to marry a white man. Also, founded in 1949, the White Circle League of America organized whites in opposition to integrated housing and civil rights for African Americans.

<sup>57</sup> Though I do not quote them above, Roger's memories of his father and mother, whom he respectively refers to as "a darky" (225) and a "whore" (226), constitute half of his "raving" monologue. The way in which his memories of his parents' marriage are interwoven with those of his own suggest that his madness is due in part to his inability to dictate the terms of his own story, which is also evident in his consistent voicing of others' words ("I don't think it's your wife, Mr. Gordon") and employment of the third person ("she says she loves you, Gordon"), which make the speaker of his monologue seem indeterminate.

Roger's failed marriage, like Jack Hayden's, threatens to undermine the sanity of his fellow patients.<sup>58</sup> After he is handcuffed and put "in an ice pack" (229) for barricading himself in the bathroom the morning after his raving, Dr. Shepard, a patient who occupies an in-between role similar to that of Miss Sommerville and David Everett in *The Snake Pit* and *The World Next Door*, advises Paul to distance himself from Roger.<sup>59</sup> Suggesting that the intimate knowledge patients have of one another exposes them to certain risks, he tells Paul, "We're here 168 hours a week, the doctors are only here forty. So if you spend too much time thinking about guys like Gordon, something of their depression and despair rubs off onto you. And you can't make out in the world outside any more than Gordon could" (229). When Paul says that he only wants to understand the cause of Roger's madness, Dr. Shepard provides him with an ambivalent explanation not unlike Dr. Edwards's four theories. He says, "'Forget it, Paul. Don't try to figure it out. It could be blamed on the slave traders or the Civil War, or his family or the army, or his wife or himself for getting into such a damn fool position marrying a white girl, or society, or the Southern Democrats or the people outside'" (229). Then, echoing Bill's comment that it is difficult "to see someone doing just what we used to do" (63), Dr. Shepard tells Paul, "Don't let this place get inside of you'" (230),<sup>60</sup> suggesting that Roger's madness threatens Paul's mental stability as well as that of his fellow patients even if its origins are indeterminate and idiosyncratic.

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<sup>58</sup> Not only are Roger and Paul both pilots, but both of them hate their own race. Paul writes, "Now we have a full house. A Jew who hates Jews, and a colored boy who hates Negroes and an Irish Catholic who hates the Irish Catholics. The nice black bars that hate built" (146).

<sup>59</sup> Dr. Shepard suggests that patients form a Psychotics Club after they have been released from the mental institution. See *CG* 282-83 and 292. Also, see *CE* 179-83, 189-192, 198, and 205-15.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in *The Cardboard Giants* and *The Cliff's Edge* the mental institution emerges as a threat to Marie's sanity. For instance, she writes, "the dread of the whole place got inside me, and I started to cry" (96). Also see *CE* 97, 145, 157, and 159. In *CG*, see 40-41, 120, and 300-1.

The day before Paul is released from the mental hospital he suggests that very little distinguishes him from patients like Roger and Jim who remain locked behind “the black bars and screens” (307).<sup>61</sup> Though Paul claims that his “love and Marie and the children” (308) will keep him out of the hospital, the Hacketts’ marriage is also given as the primary reason that he must be institutionalized. When Marie asks Paul to go to the hospital ““for [her] and the children,”” he replies, ““If you want me to, I’ll go, Marie.’ It was simple. She loved me and I loved her and we had three children named Chris, Gina, John. Last names same as mine, Hackett” (CG 3-4). After they arrive at the hospital, Paul asks, ““Do you think I’m sick, Doctor?”” to which the doctor responds, ““Yes, Paul, I do and because of your wife and children you must go into the hospital”” (9). While Paul must be institutionalized for the sake of his wife and children, his status as a married man increases his chances of being released. Dr. Edwards tells Paul that he is different than other patients who have “killed their wives or tried to kill their parents” (54) because he has a place to which he can return.<sup>62</sup> In fact, at one point in *The Cliff’s Edge* Dr. Edwards implies that the Hacketts’ marriage and family has a better chance of curing Paul than does psychiatry. He tells Marie, ““Sometimes I think that only Paul’s love of you and the children holds him together. Of course, that’s not science, but he has so much violence and anger and hate floating free in him that it comes over him like a wave; but that love of you four never gets washed out”” (98). Similarly, Jim offers Paul’s ““prime woman and kids”” (CG 299) as the reason he should stay out of the hospital even though in doing

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<sup>61</sup> Before Paul is released he learns that Roger is totally mad. Jim tells him, ““They have an old player piano, one you push the pedals on, Gordon sits and plays that and laughs”” (299).

<sup>62</sup> Dr. Edwards also tells him, ““We do not want to keep anyone here who can go out, especially anyone with a wife and children; but what you have described to me is a type of sickness and it is not fair to you, or to your wife and children to go home still sick. It will only end in serious trouble”” (CG 53). Also see CG 123 and 305.

so Jim condemns himself to spending the rest of his life in the institution because he will not or cannot get married.

The interdependence of marriage and in/sanity that is evident in post-WWII madhouse texts like the Hacketts' autobiographies also defines Anatole Litvak's screen adaptation of Mary Jane Ward's *The Snake Pit*. Unlike Ward's novel, the film establishes the dominance of Dr. Kik's and Robert's perspectives in order to advance the idea that a healthy marriage is key to a mental patient's cure.<sup>63</sup> In doing so, the film replaces Ward's multi-perspective conflation of Virginia, her fellow patients, the narrator, and the reader with a case study that portrays Virginia as a voiceless subject. In a reversal of Ward's depiction of Virginia's increasing independence from Dr. Kik as the narrative progresses, the film juxtaposes her voice-over narration, which Veda Semarne describes as "disoriented and full of self-doubt," to Dr. Kik's "confident, logical, and impersonal" voice.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Robert's relative absence in the novel develops into a major speaking role in the film. After Dr. Kik tells him, "We've seldom had a case history that told so little," Robert replies, "when you love someone you are not looking for symptoms."<sup>65</sup> He then provides Dr. Kik with a detailed account of Virginia's symptoms from their first meeting to the day he had her institutionalized. Not long before he took her to the hospital, for instance, Robert says that Virginia told him, "I can't love anybody! I can't

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<sup>63</sup> Litvak's *The Snake Pit*, which was released November 4, 1948, was the fourth most popular movie of the year. The screenplay was co-written by Millen Brand and Frank Partos.

<sup>64</sup> Veda Semarne, "The Snake Pit: a Woman's Serpentine Journey toward (W)holeness," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 22.3 (1994): 144-150, 146.

<sup>65</sup> Like Robert, Marie Hackett writes, "I alternated between thinking that I had been foolish to ask [Paul] to go [to the mental hospital] and suspecting that what the doctor had said was true and that Paul should have been hospitalized years ago. It's the last thing you think of about someone you love, that they belong in an asylum; and even after Paul had gone to the hospital because I had asked him to and after weeks had gone by without his release, I still felt that he didn't belong there" (CE 29).

love you! You can't make me love you! You can't make me belong to you!"<sup>66</sup> Later, Robert signs a consent form for Virginia to receive EST, thus authorizing the institution to nullify further her perspective. Typed reports chronicling the "effect" of her treatment graphically demonstrate Virginia's inability to think for herself: "Patient confused and disoriented. Lacks insight and judgment"; "No essential change"; "Contact continues poor. Sensorium clouded. No insight or judgment"; and "Slight improvement noticed. Patient more alert, but still confused in surroundings." Like Marian King, at the end of the film Virginia has become a mere echo of the institutional perspective, a voicelessness that is perhaps most evident during her final visit to Staff. When Virginia asks Dr. Gifford if he would like her to answer any questions, he looks at and closes her case file before telling her, "I guess we have enough information here to take your word for it."

The film adaptation of *The Snake Pit* also provides closure and coherence to Virginia's case by incorporating elements of Millen Brand's novel *The Outward Room* (1937) in Ward's narrative.<sup>67</sup> The cure of Brand's protagonist, an escaped mental patient named Harriet Demuth, depends on her corroboration of her doctor's conclusion that her dreams provide irrefutable evidence that she is incapable of "reach[ing] full adult love" (30). Dr. Revlin tells Harriet that his interpretation "isn't a matter of belief" but rather is supported by "hundreds, thousands of details" that he has "uncovered" (30-31).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Virginia repeats these exact words to Dr. Kik later in the movie.

<sup>67</sup> The new role of marriage in madhouse texts is also evident in the question posed on the cover of the 1950 Lions Books paperback edition of Brand's novel. It reads, "Does an insane woman have the right to love?" Harriet rejects her doctor's diagnosis for much of the book and escapes from the mental hospital to leave his sphere of influence. Though she does not marry in the novel, she is ultimately able to fall in love. In Litvak's *The Snake Pit*, on the other hand, love and marriage represent *the* cure to Virginia's madness from the very beginning.

<sup>68</sup> In contrast to Dr. Kik's analysis of Virginia, the Hacketts determine the symptomatic significance of Paul's "mad" past after he is released from the hospital. Marie writes that Paul "could recall hundreds of incidents which had foreshadowed his sickness, and we often talked about them. We could now laugh at

Similarly, Virginia's sanity depends on her acceptance of Dr. Kik's analysis as well as her ability to recognize that Robert is her husband. Dr. Kik's analysis of Virginia's past provides "an elaborate case history [that is] missing in the novel,"<sup>69</sup> a case history that characterizes Virginia and Robert's marriage as a victim of a past of which she is largely unaware. Virginia's experience with psychotherapy demonstrates, as Wood suggests, that "[t]he advent of the 'talking cure' brings with it both a space for the female patient's voice and the co-optation of that voice by psychiatric discourse."<sup>70</sup> After Dr. Kik gives Virginia sodium pentathol in order to exact a confession from her, she corroborates the details of her symptomatic history that Robert provided the doctor with earlier. Virginia's confession also reveals that her madness has its origins in her unsuccessful attempt to compete with her pregnant mother for her father's love when she was a small child. Her father's sudden death shortly after this conflict leads to Virginia's "complete inability to accept [Robert's] love or any man she could think of as a husband." Ultimately, Dr. Kik's excavation of Virginia's past reveals that "[h]er ability to resume marital relations, to love a man other than her father, will be the litmus test for her psychic health."<sup>71</sup> Virginia is deemed cured when she understands that, as Kik says, "husbands and fathers cannot be the same thing," a realization that leads her to abandon her love for Dr. Kik and reiterate his analysis of her childhood. Ultimately, Dr. Kik successfully reshapes Virginia's past so that it conforms to the story that he wants to tell, a story that fittingly "ends in a symbolic remarriage, when Robert re-replaces Virginia's wedding band on her finger."<sup>72</sup>

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some of them, as though time had somehow removed the tragedy and wrapped them in humor. Paul could now relate these incidents clearly to his sickness" (*CE* 189).

<sup>69</sup> Semarne, "The Snake Pit: a Woman's Serpentine Journey toward (W)holeness," 143.

<sup>70</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Semarne, "The Snake Pit: a Woman's Serpentine Journey toward (W)holeness," 146.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

The co-optation of Virginia's voice and memory in the screen adaptation of Ward's novel is paralleled in *The Cardboard Giants* by the erasure and suppression of the "wild" thoughts, memory, and behavior of a patient named Steve Kimble.<sup>73</sup> Paul first describes Steve as a patient who has "a nervous habit of shaking his head as though to clear some bad thought from his mind" (157). This "bad thought" is a feeling of "uncertainty" (159) which is rooted in Steve's childhood memories of his parents' constant fighting. Though Steve does not explicitly identify the effects of this uncertainty, it soon becomes clear that he is institutionalized due to his sexual orientation.<sup>74</sup> He tells Paul about a discussion with doctors during which "they ask you if you know what you're saying. Then they give you insulin shock and send you home and everything's different. There is no haze and you see a pretty blonde at a dance and she takes your hand and you get married" (159). Like Esther Greenwood in Plath's *The Bell Jar*,<sup>75</sup> Steve's identity is "wiped out," an erasure that enables him to marry and lead a life in which "[e]verything is simple like with everyone else" (159). But this newly reconstituted Steve soon discovers that he cannot maintain the "simple" life of a married man. Instead, he is institutionalized again after he attempts to commit suicide because he "hears the voices fighting again," "feels

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<sup>73</sup> When they first meet, Steve tells Paul, "You're lucky, you're out in left field but I see everything that happens here and know what's going on and they won't let me out" (CG 27). Paul then asks if Steve knows when he came to the hospital, and Steve tells him, "About a month ago. They'll send you over to eight building for buzz-bomb treatment unless you pull out of it" (27).

<sup>74</sup> Steve alludes most directly to his sexuality when he tells Paul, "I tried to do what they said to do but sometimes it was as though the whole thing couldn't be true. Like as if you were living in the wrong cycle of time. Then the worst thing that can happen to a guy happens to you in a shower. You heard talk about it but you just didn't know it really happened to someone. You get out of there and walk down on the beach and look at the water. It's like sometimes when you're at the sea. You watch a lone seagull circle in the empty sky. You say to yourself, "It's impossible. I couldn't be here. I couldn't be in a war. I am not alive like the others. I try to act as they act but I'm alive like the seagull is alive. I circle over the ocean and the wind carries me away"" (206).

<sup>75</sup> Like Steve, Mary Brea's cure sustains the institution of marriage at the expense of her identity. Alton Brea domesticates her writing in order to collapse her into the role of wife and mother. Mary and another mental patient named Ruth recognize that their sanity depends on their ability to fulfill "the requirements of being a wife" (128). Mary says, "I believe that I got sick because I hated housework. Now I am willing to go home and do housework until I drop dead" (128).

sick inside,” and senses the return of “the old haze” of uncertainty (159). As before, Steve’s sanity is tied to his ability to forget his past and sound like an “average young married fellow” (287). At one point, an attendant named Van tells him, “Don’t do any talking about that boy stuff or the doctors will put you upstairs again. You’re a young guy with a terrific-looking wife. All you have to do is to learn to enjoy yourself and to hell with the past” (160).

Like Van, Paul suggests that Steve must contain his “mad” thoughts in order to be regarded as sane. He also suggests that he must contain his own madness after Steve links his wife’s miscarriages to Paul’s son’s illness.<sup>76</sup> It occurs to Paul for the first time

that Steve’s talk was the result of the same kind of rumbling, racing thought that had bothered me. The only difference was that he spoke aloud in conversation while I could talk on one level and have my mind operating on another. This discovering yourself in others was disturbing. (205)<sup>77</sup>

After Paul discovers himself in Steve, he begins to help him identify and silence the “raving [Steve] did about his parents” (205). Like the doctors’ obliteration of Steve’s memory with shock and Van’s suggestion that Steve forget his past, Paul regards the uncertainty of Steve’s thoughts as a sign of madness that must be redirected or, if possible, obliterated. Accordingly, Paul “interrupt[s]” Steve in order to change his “mood” (206) and to remind him “to keep [thoughts from his past] out of his head and

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<sup>76</sup> When Paul suggests that having children might have helped Steve get better, Steve says, “you hate to get some little kids involved in it. It’s like having a good girl like my wife married to me. When you do what I did a lot of people blame your wife and say she must be the reason” (206). Similarly, earlier in *The Cardboard Giants* Paul thinks that his madness might destroy his children’s lives. He writes, “If I had died [in WWII], I would not have involved a good girl like Marie and we would not have had the children. [...] The children knowing only at first that their father was in the hospital. Then, as they grew older, not wanting to visit and hear from their cruel little friends about their father, and always in the back of their minds, the worry that they too might end in a hospital” (42-43).

<sup>77</sup> Paul also hides certain “mad” thoughts from Dr. Edwards which he shares with the reader. For instance, see *CG* 49, 97, and 186.

concentrate on getting out” (207).<sup>78</sup> He writes, “I interrupted [Steve] each time he started talking about his mother and father and his twisted boyhood,” and “[m]ost of all, I would keep reminding him to write to his wife and make sure he shaved” on visiting day (220). With Paul’s help, Steve is able to contain his “mad” thoughts and communicate to his wife and doctors that he is almost well enough to be released.<sup>79</sup> Later, Steve’s uncertainty disappears after he undergoes another series of insulin shock treatments that erase his identity to such a degree that he cannot remember his or his wife’s name (286). Paul hopes that Steve can continue to forget, or at least to contain, the thoughts that threaten to destroy his sanity and his marriage. He writes, “I [...] hoped that the terrible stream of troubled thought was not dammed up somewhere inside him, struggling to break free and overcome him. I had heard that the insulin may wear off. I hope it never does on Steve. He went home less than a week later” (287).

The Hacketts are able to contain Paul’s “mad” thoughts and the ghosts of their pasts in part by portraying their marriage as immune to failure. The strength of their marriage is evident, for instance, in Marie’s repeated rejections of the advice that she divorce Paul.<sup>80</sup> Even Dr. Edwards suggests that divorce is a possibility when he tells Marie, ““you’ll have to plan some way of keeping the children and waiting for him, *if that’s what you want to do*” (37, emphasis added). Marie helps Paul compose a story that answers the question that she repeatedly hears, ““What will you do now?”” This question implies “that Paul had somehow forfeited his right to love and loyalty, though [Marie] knew no one who

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<sup>78</sup> Paul also interrupts Jack. He writes, “I interrupted him because his talk made me uneasy and because if he was getting out I wanted to ask him what he had said to the doctors that they were releasing him” (209).

<sup>79</sup> Paul ability to contain Steve’s thoughts is also suggested when Steve attempts to commit suicide in part because he is unable to speak to Paul (250-51).

<sup>80</sup> For examples of people who advise Marie to divorce Paul, see *CE* 53 and 56-57. Rejecting their advice, Marie declares her steadfast commitment to Paul. She writes that she would be satisfied to stay married to him even “if there was positively no chance of his being better” (*CE* 70).

deserved both more” (54). The Hacketts must compose their tale of recovery and release because “[p]eople like to help where there is hope for a happy ending, but not where there is no hope. [...] People didn’t want to think about him, and I was his wife and reminded them of a problem for which there was no solution” (53-54).

### III. The Collaborative Text as Marriage Contract

*Christ, to Thee I dedicate my madness  
To atone for the proud minds of men,  
I offer Thee my mad mind.  
If I curse You and hate You and rant against You  
You know still that part of me loves You.*

*The shifting mass of pain that is my mind  
I offer to Thee.  
Before the black waves come and overpower me,  
Before the matter comes and overwhelms me,  
I dedicate to Thee each act of my insanity.* (109, emphasis in original)

–Paul Hackett, *The Cardboard Giants*

People often say that this or that person has not yet found himself. But the self is not something one finds; it is something one creates. (49)

–Thomas Szasz, *The Second Sin*

The collaborative nature of *The Cardboard Giants* is most evident in Marie’s account of its production in *The Cliff’s Edge*. She presents Paul’s autobiography as an example of shared authorship that includes herself, Paul, Dr. Edwards, their neighbor, and a nun and priest from the Hacketts’ church. This highly communal undertaking, which distinguishes Paul’s text from all other works of madhouse literature, bridges the gap between the seemingly distinct and isolated worlds of the family home and the mental hospital, thus expanding and uniting the inside and outside perspectives. This expansion enables the Hacketts to authorize their version of Paul’s story and reestablish his position in society

as a sane husband and father.<sup>81</sup> But before they can write this story, the Hacketts must overcome the isolation of the mental hospital and contain the ghosts of Paul's past, both of which entail the containment and erasure of his "wild writing" (CE 129).

Similar to the lack of the outside perspective in *The Snake Pit* and *The World Next Door*, Marie's perspective is largely absent in the first third of *The Cardboard Giants*. Marie writes that the walls of the mental hospital engender a "silence [that] seem[s] to settle over the house, the children, and [her]" (28). She suggests that the lines of communication have been cut at both ends: staff prevent Paul and Marie from speaking to one another on the phone, censor their letters, and prohibit her from visiting him. Even when she is allowed to visit, Paul is so affected by the hospital that he is uncommunicative (29-30). Marie indicates that this lack of communication poses a threat to her and Paul's marriage when she tells the story of Esther's husband Ben, whose paranoid schizophrenia is defined by his unwillingness to communicate with her. Esther tells Marie that Ben "wouldn't speak at all. He just wrote a note that it had nothing to do with me," "rav[ed] about his family and the war," and started hearing voices after undergoing EST (84). Ultimately, doctors inform Esther that Ben "will never be well and that she should forget about him," and "the voices" tell Ben "that Esther should divorce him" (85). In addition to the censorship of the Hacketts' letters by staff, which at least in

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<sup>81</sup> Paul's and Marie's influence on one another's autobiographies is apparent throughout *The Cliff's Edge* and *The Cardboard Giants*. For instance, Paul uses various forms of the term "cliff's edge" to describe life, his job, his madness, and the madness of others. See CG 16, 152, 190 and 245. Though *The Cardboard Giants* was published a year and a half before *The Cliff's Edge*, a sticker advertising Marie's version of Paul's story was attached to the dust jacket of Paul's book: "Read Marie Hackett's story 'In Sickness and in Health' in the December, 1952 issue of REDBOOK." In fact, the contents of Marie's article, in which she tells Paul's story from his institutionalization to his release from the hospital, suggest that she had already written two-thirds of her book when Paul's was published. The editors of her article describe the Hacketts' story as "a frightening family crisis" (17) that "will be a powerful dispeller of the fogs of secrecy and false shame which surround mental illness and thus operate against early diagnosis and treatment." They also portray Marie's writing as "an unself-conscious testament of the human heart's capacity for courage, faith and devotion" (18).

part accounts for Paul's refusal to write Marie, we learn that Paul hides Marie's letters from himself. Though a nurse tells him that he receives "two every day" (CG 111), Paul claims that he has no memory of receiving or reading them. When Paul returns to the dormitory, Jack tells him, "'You've got [the letters] under your mattress. I've watched you. You never read them, just hide them away'" (113). While Paul cannot remember hiding Marie's letters, he is confident that he "could not have written her" (114).<sup>82</sup> Significantly, Paul claims to remember something that he did not do—write Marie—and to forget something that he did—hide her letters—thereby suggesting that sometimes he is unaware of and therefore not responsible for his actions.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, Paul is able to become the author of his own story when he overcomes his isolation from Marie and her writing, a transformation that Marie facilitates by helping him compose *The Cardboard Giants* while he is in the mental hospital and after he is released.

Early in *The Cardboard Giants*, Paul's inability to control his thoughts and actions results in compositions whose contents are determined by outside forces. Like David Mitchell, Paul is often "a spectator at the movie reel of [his] own mind," though his "movie" is typically a distorted view of the past rather than "a preview of what [is] to come."<sup>84</sup> Marie writes that at times Paul's "past would become a nightmare; scenes from his childhood would unreel through his mind endlessly, like a film played over and over" (40-41). One such nightmare scene from Paul's past emerges when he is compelled by an

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<sup>82</sup> Marie confirms that Paul has not written because of the hospital's censorship (CE 29, 33-34).

<sup>83</sup> Paul's detailed account of his experience as a mental patient up to this point in *The Cardboard Giants* suggests that he purposefully excludes Marie's perspective by hiding her letters from himself. Before he finds them, his text includes verbatim interviews and conversations, detailed accounts of particular days, including the fourth of July and his birthday, July 19 (89). He even writes about asking when he was institutionalized (27, 35, and 106) and describes Marie's visit to the hospital and his first visit home (71-73).

<sup>84</sup> Peters, *The World Next Door*, 242. Similarly, Marie writes that Paul's "streak of criminality" is related to "some reflection of his coming delusions of grandeur" (189),

“urge to paint” for the first time in his life while in Occupational Therapy, a compulsion that ultimately distances him from the autobiographical portrait he creates. He writes,

The empty white canvas seemed to glare like a brilliant light. Then I felt as though I were on a bridge swaying back and forth over a deep river canyon. It was as if from the bridge I could see things passing in the wild river below and I put on the white surface what I saw. On the top, I painted a round ball like the sun and across from it a red ball of violence and hate and between them two hands dripping blood with holes in the center, the red hands of one crucified. Passing beneath the bridge was a house-- the house of my childhood colored in violent red and somber black with a little man hanging from a Christmas tree. On the other side of the bridge was a girl with green hair and a red mouth and a window with black bars and two puppets with the scythe of death through them and at the bottom a coffin with a man's body in it.

I worked at the painting furiously as though driven by an unseen force. (55-56)

Paul mechanically records this nightmarish scene. When his childhood home passes beneath him, it is already “colored in violent red and somber black,” and Lorrie appears to him as a ghoulish figure with “green hair and a red mouth.” His initial reaction to the painting suggests that he has functioned as a mere medium for the Mind: “The room seemed to spin and the focal point of the whirling room was the center of the picture in which was painted an eye of red rim and blood-red pupil. I knew that this was the Mind watching my life” (56). Nonetheless, after a patient who is “looking at the painting over [Paul's] shoulder” says, ““You're in the right place, brother, that damn thing would make anyone crazy,”” Paul asks, “Did this wild violent painting represent my mind? And if it

did not, how had that surface picked up these representations? Was the picture my own production or was I influenced into painting something my enemies could use against me?" (56). Though Paul never acts on his desire to "destroy the painting" (56), its disappearance from the narrative<sup>85</sup> and his suggestion that it might be the product of the Mind, his enemies, or himself corresponds to the Hacketts' repeated containment, erasure, and partial disavowal of the madness of Paul's past and texts.

In contrast to madhouse texts like Ward's *The Snake Pit*, in which the primary structuring device is ward-to-ward movement, the Hacketts' texts are structured by Paul's movement between their family home and the mental hospital. During his first weekend visit home,<sup>86</sup> for instance, Paul seems possessed moments after he thinks, "our love was upon us as we went to sleep" (72). He then writes, "It was the moon. The moon was creeping in from too many windows. I was awake and watching brown wires trail away in the moonlight [...] Marie was sleeping peacefully beside me and unaware of the creeping danger" (72).<sup>87</sup> In order to protect his wife and children, Paul goes downstairs and arms himself with "a long knife."<sup>88</sup> Marie describes this moment in the opening passage of *The Cliff's Edge* as she awakens to find that Paul is no longer by her side: "I sat up in the bed and looked around the moonlit room and listened for some sound of

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<sup>85</sup> Though it is not discussed, this painting reappears during Paul's second-to-last visit to Staff (CG 255).

<sup>86</sup> This visit occurs before Paul discovers Marie's letters under his bed.

<sup>87</sup> This passage is a reversal of an incident that precedes Paul's institutionalization. He writes, "I awoke suddenly. I had let down my guard and slept. The Mind could have struck at me. The fear and terror washed over me like a wave. I started up. Marie reached over and touched my hand," after which she tells him, "Tonight I'll watch for you, Paul. Tonight you sleep. It's been so long since you have slept" (5).

<sup>88</sup> Clifford Beers and Jane Hillyer also suggest that they are not responsible for acts of violence they commit against themselves and others. For instance, Beers writes, "So far as I had the control of my faculties, it must be admitted that I deliberated; but, strictly speaking, the rash act which followed cannot correctly be called an attempt at suicide—for how can a man who is not himself kill himself?" (12). Similarly, after Hillyer fashions "a very cleverly made noose" to hang herself, she writes, "I had apparently done it with no consciousness. The urge to 'get away' had worked, perhaps, as had the sex urge, without my being present. I have no memory of this, which is significant in that it is the *one incident* I have never been able to recall" (81, emphasis in original).

Paul” (1). After getting out of bed and going to the top of the staircase, Marie “call[s] to him softly,” but hears only “a long silence that follow[s] [her] voice like an echo” (1). As if he is explaining the origin of this silent echo, Paul writes that he “hear[s] Marie’s voice calling [him] as though from the top of a pit” (72).

With the intention of protecting his family from the Mind, Paul closes the distance between himself and Marie by quickly ascending the staircase. Both Paul’s inability to control his actions and perceptions *and* the Hacketts’ textual union are readily apparent in the passages that follow. Thus, Paul and Marie are able to demonstrate the strength of their marriage when his madness seems most likely to destroy it. Paul writes that he tells Marie,

“Go guard the children; I will stay here.”

She did not move. Something of sadness was on her face, something of grief which changed to fear, but she did not move. I was angry. She defied my orders. She was a stupid woman. I looked at her closely. It was as though the familiar face was fading and in its place a strange woman who was working against me. I hit the face with my right hand. She made a sound like a hurt animal and ran into the children’s room. (CG 72-73)

Compare this to Marie’s account of this incident:

He looked at me uncertainly, and then said, “Marie, gather the children in one room. I’ll make a stand here.”

I looked at him. His eyes flashed black and wild in the half-light of the hallway. Then I asked, “What’s the matter, Paul? Is there someone in the house?”

“Do as I say. Gather the children in the girls’ room.”

I hesitated. Then with his right hand, he struck a blow across my cheek. I was stunned, not feeling the numbness or the quick pain; only the awareness that Paul, whom I love, had hit me. (*CE* 1-2)

Similar to the “unseen force” that “drive[s]” Paul to paint, the shadows of his past distort his vision and compel him to act violently. After fear<sup>89</sup> makes Marie’s “familiar” face appear “strange” to Paul, he describes “her face” as “the face.” It seems that Paul is once again haunted by his memories of Lorrie and his sister Ruth as his violence toward Marie parallels incidents in which he hit Ruth after he realized that he was sexually attracted to her (*CG* 32) and hit Lorrie twice during their breakup (101). Tellingly, Paul realizes that he has struck Marie only after he can no longer see her: “Marie! I had not meant to hit her. I was confused. [...] I had served the Mind myself” (73, emphasis added).<sup>90</sup> Though Paul and Marie seem furthest apart at this moment, their textual union reflects the strength of their marriage when they agree that he must remain in the hospital. Paul writes, “She cried as I held her and tried to tell me it did not matter. But to me it did and I then knew that I must fight the battle against the Mind alone behind the bars of the red brick building” (73). Likewise, Marie writes that Paul tells her “that he would have to fight the battle alone in the red-brick building with the black bars. I told him it didn’t matter, but I didn’t ask him what it was he feared would mount the stairs against him” (*CE* 2).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The way that fear seems to transform Marie’s face in this passage recalls Paul’s claim that love and fear are incompatible.

<sup>90</sup> The Mind haunts the Hackett home and Paul at the mental hospital. See *CG* 5, 7, 26, 67, 195, and 202. It disappears in part because of Marie. See *CG* 71 and 264.

<sup>91</sup> A similar scene occurs during another one of Paul’s visits home. Marie writes, “I saw Paul standing, wild-eyed, and staring at me” (107). Paul tells her, ““You are a part of the evil that walks in the darkness [...] Windows are strange. Everything in the room is in the window, and the outside darkness swallows everything of light. A woman’s soul is a window glass that holds both dark and light. You should be in the dark side of the window, as you walked in the darkness”” (107-8). After one of their children speaks, Paul

Paul's isolation from Marie, his fellow patients, and staff is most apparent upon his return to the mental hospital.<sup>92</sup> Lacking all confidence in Dr. Edwards's psychiatric expertise, Paul writes, "I had only one mission: to write what I knew of the Mind before this cold numbness reached my heart" (CG 85). He writes a letter that exposes "the plot against" (85) him and addresses three copies to "General Delivery" in New York, Boston, and Los Angeles. In the letter Paul explains that he is locked in an institution because he has discovered that "the Mind created the world to be evil" (85). Though writing the letter initially makes Paul feel like he is "fighting back," later that night "the creeping tide of depression washes away the sand of self-esteem" (86). Significantly, Paul's attempt to defeat the Mind by revealing its plot in a letter addressed to himself<sup>93</sup> represents yet another instance of his past haunting him. During a subsequent conversation with Dr. Edwards, Paul remembers thinking, "I would write a letter, seal it, and carry it in my pocket and if anything happened to me the police would have a full description of [Lorrie's dolls]" (103). Instead of enabling him to defeat the Mind, Paul's letter about its "plot" makes him regard himself as "the king of the insane [...] the king in exile; this was my throne room; I was the giant of cardboard and this was my jail" (87). Paul is so isolated at this point in the narrative that his fellow patients begin to appear as "shadows" from "another life or another medium of sound" (89). These shadows are accompanied by

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says, "I didn't know you, Marie, almost as if the light had not gone on. I connected you with the forces against me" (108). Describing this episode as "the blackout of insanity" (108), Marie once again suggests that Paul is not responsible for his "mad" behavior.

<sup>92</sup> Though Paul feels a "kinship" with his fellow patients unlike anything he has ever experienced, he knows that unlike him, "they are insane, or close to it" (CG 81). Paul also believes that Marie has "[b]etrayed" him after Dr. Edwards tells him that she called the mental institution to discuss his visit home. Dr. Edwards tells Paul, "You know we have a responsibility to the people outside and if we let you go home and you run around the house with a knife, we can't let you out again" (83). Finally, Paul tells Dr. Edwards that he cannot understand why he hit Marie because the doctor has "'never crept in the moonlight through a dark creaking house and locked the windows against the evil'" (84).

<sup>93</sup> One of these letters resurfaces later in the narrative. Paul writes, "I turned over the envelope in my hand. It was addressed in my handwriting to myself, care of General Delivery, Los Angeles. I put it back unopened into my pocket" (110).

“voices,” including Marie’s, Doctor Edwards’s, his fellow patients’, and those from his past, which were always there, blending in such a way that he finds it “difficult to know what was present and what was past” (91).

The adverse effect of the Hacketts’ isolation from one another is undeniable when Marie receives Paul’s first letter. Echoing Paul’s interpretation of the letter he writes about the Mind, Marie regards his letter to her as a sign of his madness.<sup>94</sup> Notably, she does not include the first paragraph of Paul’s letter in which he explains how he circumvents the hospital’s censorship policy with the help of a fellow patient. Instead, she includes only “[t]he words that frightened” her, which she says are “written in a quickly scribbled handwriting” (34).<sup>95</sup> Though it is unclear whether Marie interprets the change in Paul’s handwriting as a sign of his need to write quickly or an indication that his hand is manipulated by an outside force, the excerpt from Paul’s letter included in *The Cliff’s Edge*, quoted in its entirety below, seems anything but frightening:

The others here say that a wife can sign out a husband if she will be responsible for him. Before I heard this, there wasn’t much hope but you can tell the doctor Sunday, you need me home and that you’ll sign to be responsible for me, and they’ll let me out.

This is a tremendous victory, knowing that this is almost finished; nothing can break me now. I love you.

*Paul*

P.S. I love you and tell the kids I’ll be home forever. (34)

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<sup>94</sup> Later, Marie searches Paul’s letters for signs that his mental health is improving. She writes, “Paul had started to write me, and although the letters were not daily events, I read and reread them and tried to read from them how well he was” (73).

<sup>95</sup> Paul also describes his writing as “scribbling” to Marie and their priest, Father Graham (*CE* 147, 152).

Initially, Marie “read[s] and reread[s]” the letter, and is “glad for Paul’s love because [she] love[s] him” (34). The meaning of Paul’s letter changes, however, as soon as Marie senses “the undertones of doubt and fear.” Like David Mitchell’s mother’s claim that he cannot accurately diagnose himself because he “can’t know” how sick he is,<sup>96</sup> Marie writes, “[Paul] wanted me to sign him out of the hospital although I knew that he was sick and he didn’t. I knew that he was dangerous to me and the children, and he didn’t know that” (34). Unlike David, Paul is not there to challenge what Marie claims to know about his in/sanity. Marie recognizes that her and Paul’s isolation from one another poses a threat to their marriage regardless of her decision. Though she knows that he is too sick to be released, Marie writes, “Worst of all, I knew that if I didn’t sign him out, he would doubt me, and perhaps blame me, and I might lose his love [...] that was the most important thing to me” (34-35).<sup>97</sup>

After telling Paul that the hospital’s censorship policy require[s] him to “‘read some of the letters [he] sen[ds] [his] wife’” (CG 149), Dr. Edwards suggests that Paul can write for him as a substitute for psychotherapy. The institutional perspective seems to disappear behind Dr. Edwards’s open-ended request that Paul “[w]rite four pages a day for [him]—anything that’s on your mind.”<sup>98</sup> He decides to write only after suggesting that the line that separates staff and mental patients is tenuous: “This old guy is as soft in

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<sup>96</sup> Peters, *The World Next Door*, 260.

<sup>97</sup> When Marie asks Dr. Edwards if she can sign Paul out, he says, “‘In some cases, a wife can sign a husband out of here; but we have a responsibility to people outside, and, if necessary, we can commit patients with so serious a diagnosis’” (36).

<sup>98</sup> As when he paints in Occupational Therapy, Paul claims that he has never written before. Mental hospital staff’s encouragement or requirement of patient writing is a common theme in madhouse texts. In *Modern Persecution* (1873), for instance, Elizabeth Packard writes, “[Dr. McFarland] allowed me to write a book, hoping thus to secure the sanction of my readers in calling me insane” (314). Likewise, in *The Mind in Chains* (1955) William Moore writes that Dr. List tells him, “‘I know it will do no good to give you further treatment. Why don’t you write down in diary form the things that have happened to you for a year before coming to the hospital, listing your reasons for believing the way you do? I will read it and show you how your reasoning is wrong’” (185).

the squash as any of us. I'll humor him, though" (149). Like the "unseen force" (56) that compels him to paint the eye of the Mind on the "empty white canvas," Paul does not appear to dictate what he writes on the pages that Dr. Edwards asks him to fill. As if confirming Marie's claim that at times Paul "would feel detachment so complete that he could look at his own hand or foot as though it was no longer connected to his body" (*CE* 40), Paul stares at his hands as if they belong to someone else immediately before writing the only four-page passage included in *The Cardboard Giants*.<sup>99</sup> After Paul claims that his hands are impervious to pain, can "control life or death," and have "a personality of their own," he writes, "I watched the hand hold the stub of the pencil and write the words. Four pages of writing for the doctor and the hand moved and wrote the words" (183). This passage, which is less than a page long in the published text, is notable for its lack of authorship, associative nature, and the repeated appearance of first-person plural pronouns: "We are those who must ever stand in the cold night and look in on the dance, and the snow in which we stand is smooth and without footprints" (184). While it is clear that this "[w]e who walk[s] in the shadows" and "should have our lives in the shadows" represents Paul and his fellow mental patients, immediately before writing this passage Paul "wonder[s] how [he] could ever have been friendly with this group of madmen" (182). Regardless of Paul's attempt to disassociate himself from these men, the influence of one of them on his composition is apparent when he wonders why "a chord of music cause[s] [him] to pause," abruptly stops writing at the words "when for them the music stops," and then tells a patient named Carl to stop playing the piano. Paul further links himself to Carl when he identifies his fellow patient's inability to control his hands as a

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<sup>99</sup> The appearance of only one four-page passage in the published text suggests that the majority of *The Cardboard Giants* was composed by Paul and Marie after he was released from the mental institution.

sign of his madness: “I knew Carl was part of the plan of the Mind against me, playing the Black Symphony. I watched his hands. His left hand was insane” (184).

Paradoxically, Paul is able to become the author of his own story only after Dr. Edwards asks Marie to type up a folder of his writing. Echoing his conversation with Paul, Dr. Edwards tells Marie that patient writing can serve as a substitute for psychotherapy. Staff ask patients to write ““anything they think of—just a few pages a day,”” because it ““gives them a good deal of knowledge as to [patients’] trouble, and in some cases they begin to gain insight”” (CE 117). As suggested earlier, the type of insight that Marie enables Paul to gain is ultimately an expression of their perspectival union rather than Paul’s adoption of the institution’s version of his story. One way that Marie helps Paul re-envision his story is by locating his madness in his childhood. Though I have suggested that Paul’s memories appear to interrupt his narrative, Marie’s initial reading of his writing suggests that they may in fact be a palimpsest upon which the story of his cure is later written. After writing that she “had forgotten Paul had written” what she is reading, Marie writes that much of his writing conveys “an almost childlike simplicity,” and presents “the picture of a young boy violently angry at his environment, [...] a conscience ridden young boy not understanding his violence or his feelings” (118). Marie suggests that Paul might be able to overcome the anger and confusion that is responsible for his madness if he alters his environment and perspective. The Hacketts ultimately effect these changes by containing and erasing signs of Paul’s madness as he moves from the isolation of the mental hospital to his reunion with Marie in their family home. Rather than being the central focus of their texts, Paul’s madness becomes “the *disruption* of story. Narrative becomes possible only after the cure, which is proved by

the ascendancy of coherent narration over disorder, misinterpretation, misreading of the world and self.”<sup>100</sup> The Hacketts achieve a coherent narrative via a two-fold domestication of Paul’s “mad” writing in which they distance him and his writing from the mental hospital and firmly establish him in the family home.

The domestication of Paul’s writing is also apparent in doubled passages in the Hacketts’ texts that depict a conversation they have about his mind. This conversation, which appears shortly after Marie tells Paul, ““But now you’ll see yourself as I see you”” (CG 168),<sup>101</sup> indicates that Paul can contain his “mad” thoughts if he adopts Marie’s perspective. Earlier in *The Cardboard Giants*, Paul writes, “my mind has sections like the hands of the clock”: the second hand “carries” his memories as it “races around [his] head,” the minute hand governs the mundane aspects of life that enable him to seem normal, and the hour hand “holds the terrible awareness of the evil influence of the Mind” (45). After giving a similar description of his tri-part mind to Dr. Edwards, Paul says, ““Everyone most likely experiences the same racing of his thoughts. Everyone possibly feels as I that there are open wires in his mind and that from these wires comes a stream of consciousness over which he has no control”” (53). Paul attributes this lack of control to his isolation in the mental hospital: ““In a place like this you start to think too much of yourself and how your mind operates, and a normal man becomes sick from this endless introspection”” (53). He is able to free himself from this introspection and regain control of his mind, which he says is ““continuously alive like radios in the same room””

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<sup>100</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 135, emphasis added. Wood is discussing Clifford Beers’s autobiography in this passage.

<sup>101</sup> The conflation of the Hacketts’ perspectives is also suggested by the title of a proposed, but never produced, filmic adaptation of their autobiographies. Thomas M. Pryor writes, “Two points of view about an emotional disturbance as it was experienced by the victim himself and by his wife will be combined in a screenplay under the title ‘The Cliff’s Edge.’” See Thomas M. Pryor, “Books by Couple to be Film’s Basis,” *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 1957: 17.

(170), by adopting Marie's perspective. In her account of their conversation, Marie simultaneously offers her mind as a mundane counterpoint to Paul's and undermines his description of his mind: "'*Maybe* I have a prosaic mind that only thinks of one thing at a time. You have a brilliant, talented mind, Paul; so *perhaps* it's different'" (CE 68, emphasis added).<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, the moment at which their texts no longer double one another, Paul writes that Marie suggests that he can suppress his negative thoughts by focusing on his family and home. Marie tells him, "'Try not to think of anything that upsets you, often I get discouraged too. [...] But when I feel this way I write you or think of the children or make up a little dream of how it will be when you're home'" (CG 171).<sup>103</sup> Though Paul takes comfort in Marie's words, he "wonder[s] how it would feel to have only one tiny voice in your mind. A slow-thinking tiny voice that just spoke to you of what you were doing in the present unless you released it to roam in the past or future" (171).

In addition to wanting Paul to see himself through her eyes, Marie also thinks he should "make his writing into a book [...] for people to know him as [she does]" (CE 129).<sup>104</sup> Marie accomplishes this in part by situating Paul's story in a communal context,

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<sup>102</sup> Paul also notes Marie's uncertainty in *The Cardboard Giants*. Marie tells him, "'Maybe you just think differently from me. Perhaps I just have a prosaic mind that only considers one thing at a time'" (170-71).

<sup>103</sup> Marie's advice echoes the conversation cited above in which Bill tells Paul that his cure depends on his ability to contain or displace the "cosmic junk" that signifies his madness. Bill says, "Every time it comes in your head, think of something else" (CG 63). Paul also writes that Marie's perspective enables him to doubt the reality of the Mind: "Perhaps there was no Mind and I hugged a delusion to my breast and would not pray for my son. [...] For the first time we talked of the Mind. I told her that once the thought of the evil force was in your brain and the fear and panic came there was nothing you could do. She told me to look at the picture of the children when this feeling came. I did not know if it would help, I did know I felt better inside because I could tell her about my thoughts, and because I was closer to her than ever before, and because our son was alive" (202).

<sup>104</sup> Elsewhere in *The Cliff's Edge* Marie suggests to Paul and the reader that his madhouse writings could be a book (127, 133, and 147). In order for others to see Paul as Marie does, she must help him compose a text that is not defined by its "whirling momentum" and "changing moods of fierce anger and deep depression" (129). Paul and others employ the term "whirling" in *The Cardboard Giants* to refer to madness (33, 56, 186, and 193).

which grants her access to outside readers prior to the publication of *The Cardboard Giants*. She enlists community members in the production of Paul's autobiography, including her neighbor, Harriet Wilson, who babysits the Hackett children so Marie can type Paul's writing, and Sister Helen, a nun at the Hacketts' church, who types in her stead.<sup>105</sup> Even though Marie says that Paul's writing "frighten[s]" (129) her because she "know[s] so little of what was inside him," similar to her response to his first letter she suggests that Paul may know even less about himself than she does: "it may be true that to know ourselves is the most difficult knowledge of all" (130). At one point, Marie seeks the opinion of an expert to determine if Paul's mostly "confused, stream of consciousness" (141) writing is comprehensible to someone who does not know her or Paul. She gives a sample of Paul's writing to an assistant editor at a woman's magazine "without telling her the whole story" (141), after which the editor says that though Paul's writing is "unusual and brilliant, it [is] obviously the product of a very sick mind, either neurotic or psychotic" (142). Though she is initially angered by the editor's assessment of Paul's writing, Marie both anticipates and echoes her remarks, suggesting that her own perspective might be distorted because she is "too close to Paul" (141) and because she "let Paul's writing become too important to [her]" (142). Paul's writing finally receives the "fair reading" (142) that Marie thinks it deserves after the Hacketts' priest, Father Graham, asks her to submit a selection of it to the *Catholic World*. Rather than interpret Paul's writing as a sign of his pathology, Father Graham calls it a "very unusual"

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<sup>105</sup> Apart from Marie being a former nun, a fact that Paul briefly mentions (*CG* 118-19), Sister Helen doubles Marie because her brother suffered from mental illness upon returning from WWI. Marie writes, "how many people must have relatives as sick as Paul and try to keep it a secret, as something shameful to them" (*CE* 125).

example of “rolling prose” that “[l]ends [...] some disturbing modern realism in short, terse sentences and then fine classical prose” (144).<sup>106</sup>

The collaborative nature of the Hacketts’ texts is also apparent in the ways in which they are able to overcome their isolation from one another through their letters. While Marie’s letters enable Paul to see her perspective, they are also shaped by his precarious position in the mental hospital. She writes, “I tried, too, to keep the letters free from any hint of self-pity or from anything that might upset or depress him” (CE 33).<sup>107</sup> Similarly, after reading Marie’s letters for the first time, Paul is so concerned that his institutionalization is adversely affecting her that he writes, “I decided to see the doctor and to face the thing squarely and find out what was wrong and how long I would be here and what would happen to me. I felt that at least I owed this to Marie and the children” (CG 120). Toward the end of *The Cardboard Giants*, Paul writes Marie “longer letters” to “give her some hope,” realizing that he “had to get home. It was as if that night [he] became aware of her position for the first time” (300).<sup>108</sup> Uniting his writing, Marie, and his need to be released from the hospital, Paul writes, “I considered many pages of writing I might do for the doctor, or what I would tell him, and then it occurred to me to tell him how I felt about Marie” (301). When Paul expresses his desire to go home for Marie’s sake, Dr. Edward’s tells him, “‘We’ve waited a long time for you to ask to go out

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<sup>106</sup> When Paul is unable to find work because he encounters a “wall of fear and prejudice” (CE 147) due to his status as a mental patient, Marie writes, “our only hope was the magazine article” (150).

<sup>107</sup> Paul also notes the effect of his status as a mental patient on Marie’s letters when he first reads them. He writes that though she initially expresses “her love calmly and with confidence,” in subsequent letters “her love was worried and with a desperate insistence as though she could make me feel the love by the letter” (120).

<sup>108</sup> Paul writes that he “wouldn’t have survived a month” if their positions were reversed (301). In fact, early in his autobiography, he writes, “I could hear [Marie’s] voice, she was saying I should come home, that I was worse here than ever. I could hear the man’s [a doctor’s] voice soothing her as though she, too, were confined” (40-41). Likewise, Marie describes a scene in which she prays, “‘God, please don’t forget us. You are our only hope and we’re trapped and alone’” (CE 44). For other passages in which Marie describes herself as trapped, see CE 8, 31-32, and 75.

in this way. [...] You've lost that damn excessive self-reference that goes with this sickness'" (301). Indeed, Paul suggests that he may have stayed in the mental institution longer than many of his fellow patients because he "had *written* too much of what [he] thought, and the others, having *thought* the same thoughts, no one could tell" (302, emphasis added).<sup>109</sup> Significantly, Paul suggests that his sanity is contingent on his ability to limit what he expresses in writing and to abandon his isolated perspective, both of which define the Hacketts' collaborative writing process. Paul also stresses the importance of his and Marie's perspectival union in his final visit to Staff. He says, "No one knows who is dependent, man or wife, Doctor, and the need for help shifts from one to another. My wife and I both know that'" (305). Accordingly, it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle the Hacketts' voices after Paul leaves the mental hospital and reenters the family home.

The story of the composition of *The Cardboard Giants* and Paul's development as a writer after he is released from the mental hospital is described almost exclusively by Marie in *The Cliff's Edge*.<sup>110</sup> As a mental patient, Paul repeatedly dismisses Marie's and others' suggestions that his "wild writing" can become a book.<sup>111</sup> The first time Marie shows Paul the pages she has typed he tells her that "the doctors will probably think it is a symptom'" (*CE* 128) if he carries his writing around to prevent other patients from

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<sup>109</sup> Paul's suggestion that one must suppress one's "mad" thoughts echoes his advice to Steve as well as Marie's, Bill's, and Jack's advice to him.

<sup>110</sup> Marie's description of Paul's writing process after he is released from the mental hospital and the publication of *The Cardboard Giants* encompasses slightly more time than Paul's one year institutionalization.

<sup>111</sup> Marie then suggests that in order for Paul to know himself "he must know how great his writing is" (*CE* 130). She is convinced that Paul's writing "will make him better" (130). She also links his writing to his cure elsewhere (126-127, 133).

tearing it up.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, shortly before he is released Paul tells Marie, ““If I got a job, I’d probably tear all that scribbling up”” (147).<sup>113</sup> Only after there is sufficient distance between Paul and the mental hospital does he begin to claim his writing as his own. Marie suggests that Paul creates this distance in part by “work[ing] at a tremendous pace to bring a story line into the writing he had done in the hospital. Even as I typed it, I could see the pattern of the story emerge” (178).<sup>114</sup> Though the Hacketts’ textual union takes shape relative to Paul’s distance from his isolation in the mental hospital, Marie echoes her initial reaction to Paul’s writing when she expresses a fear that it is still so “sick and whirling” that he might be “shaken” by it when he rereads it.<sup>115</sup> She also suggests that Paul’s dedication to the writing process might trigger a relapse, describing him as “gr[owing] more quiet and preoccupied” as he strives to finish half of his book “for the agent to send to a publisher” (203). Ultimately, Marie suggests that only the publication and critical acceptance of *The Cardboard Giants* can sufficiently distance Paul from the madness contained in his writing.

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<sup>112</sup> After Marie tells Paul that his writing will not be regarded as a sign of his madness if he leaves it in Dr. Edwards’s office, Paul reveals that he has more writing hidden in his pants. Paul’s fear that his writing will be regarded as a sign of madness seems justified when he is almost recommitted for telling hospital staff that he is writing a book. Paul tells Marie, ““I’d like to finish it off and send the staff a copy. Well, I suppose you can’t blame them: half the guys in the hospital are writing books”” (CE 188).

<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Marie writes, “We had hardly mentioned his writing. It had started to fade from my mind, the writing on which I had pinned so much hope, as though the measure of hope is the extent of the despair. When there was little chance for us, I had lived by the fabulous hope that Paul’s writing would be a book; but as I saw him better, I began to have visions of him with a job at Wright or Bendix, an ordinary job making enough for us to live on” (139).

<sup>114</sup> Though neither Paul nor Marie mentions it in their autobiographies, Paul participated in the eighth annual writing contest of the New York Committee of the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project: “Speakers included Paul Hackett, who wrote the novel (sic) ‘Cardboard Giants’ under the auspices of the project while he was hospitalized.” See “G.I.’s Writing Contest,” *New York Times*, 5 Mar. 1954: 5.

<sup>115</sup> Marie’s concern about the negative effect of Paul’s writing on his mental health echoes Dr. Edwards’s warning to her that “turning some pages” of Paul’s writing “will be brutal” because his “defenses aren’t there” (CE 118). Marie quotes a similar passage from Sterling North’s review of *The Cardboard Giants*: “His disassociation is so vividly described that the reader feels his own world swaying a trifle and occasionally looks up from the swirling page to get his bearings” (237).

The final obstacle that the Hacketts must overcome to forge their textual union occurs when they learn that *The Cardboard Giants* will be published. Fearing that Paul's book will forever mark him as a former mental patient, Marie asks him, "'Why not just write it in your name but in novel form, with the names changed?'" (221-22).<sup>116</sup> Paul explains that he "'owes it to the other patients to help break down this ['damn fool'] attitude (222).<sup>117</sup> Though the Hacketts' argument ends in "a choked-up silence," it demonstrates to Paul and Marie that she "no longer look[s] upon Paul as someone sick" (222).<sup>118</sup> Interestingly, Marie's publication of "In Sickness and in Health" and *The Cliff's Edge* permits a further invasion of the Hacketts' privacy than does *The Cardboard Giants* by providing intimate details of their marriage and family life. But these texts also enable her to tell "the whole story" (141), and thus situate Paul's story firmly in the context of their family's continued development and expansion. This allows the Hacketts to demonstrate that Paul's cure is permanent and their children are not tainted by the stigma or hereditary effects of madness.<sup>119</sup> Marie concludes her text by situating Paul's writing in a wider context, citing critics whose interpretations of it not only correspond to her own, but also point to their marriage as an essential part of Paul's cure. In his review of *The Cardboard Giants*, for instance, Sterling North describes Paul as "a man saved from insanity by a loving wife, an intelligent psychiatrist and a compassionate chaplain" (237).

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<sup>116</sup> Marie voices a similar concern when she describes "a brutal article" on the lives of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. The article includes "the discouraging story" of Zelda's mental illness which gives her "no privacy, even in her sickness, printing pictures of her while she was ill" (CE 130).

<sup>117</sup> Paul's kinship with his fellow patients extends beyond the walls of the mental hospital as he forms a "Psychotics Club" that meets in the Hackett home on a weekly basis.

<sup>118</sup> Marie also includes Paul's interview on the Ben Grauer radio program *The Author Speaks* in which Paul explains why he published his book in his own name. Paul says, "'it was time someone stood up and said, 'I'm a former mental patient. So what?'" (243).

<sup>119</sup> Fittingly, Paul and Marie learn that his book will be published on their daughter Gina's birthday (219), which is soon followed by the first Communion of their oldest daughter Chris (227), and the birth of their daughter, Paula, the last of which occurs after Paul is officially discharged from the mental hospital (241). Marie writes, "After a long siege, Paul let me call her Paula, though he promptly nicknamed her 'Lucky.' I suppose, in a way, she was our vote of confidence in the future" (241).

He then argues that “[n]o one who reads the opening chapters of his book will doubt the diagnosis but no one who reads the closing will trust a pessimistic prognosis” (237).

Likewise, on the radio program *The Author Speaks*, Ben Grauer describes Paul’s text as “a story of unselfish love and above all of hope for all those in the struggle for mental health” (242).

## Chapter 4

“(Mad as You) – (Sanity a Trick of Agreement)”<sup>1</sup>

### Between You and Me: Allen Ginsberg’s and Carl Solomon’s Notes Toward Auto/biography

#### I. The Solomon-Ginsberg Exchange

Thinking he was dealing with a lunatic, Allen [Ginsberg] began recalling aloud all of his visionary experiences. The man listened, unimpressed.

“Oh, well, you’re new here,” he told Allen, a trace of cynicism in his voice. “Wait awhile and you’ll meet some of the other repentant mystics.”

The comment stunned Ginsberg and, as was his habit when he was nervous or cornered, he let literature fire his next volley. When the man asked him who he was, Allen said, “I’m Myshkin,” referring to the gentle but mentally disturbed prince in Dostoyevski’s *The Idiot*.

“I’m Kirilov,” the man shot back. In Dostoyevski’s *The Possessed*, Kirilov was a cynical, suicidal character unable to tolerate joy or love. (114)

–Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion*

I encountered what appeared to be a new patient, to whom I mumbled amiably, “I’M KIRILOV.” He mumbled in reply “I’M MYSHKIN.” (40)

–Carl Solomon, *Mishaps Perhaps*

Like Paul and Marie Hackett, Allen Ginsberg and Carl Solomon forged a textual union that signals the expansion of the geographical and temporal dimensions of madhouse literature by bridging the gap between the “inside” world of the mad subject and the “outside” world of the sane writer. Unlike the Hacketts’ collaborative composition of a cohesive narrative, however, Ginsberg’s and Solomon’s textual union offers the reader contradictory, even antagonistic, versions of their life stories. One such contradiction is apparent in the different versions of their initial exchange, quoted above, which took place when they were fellow patients at the Columbia Presbyterian

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Kaddish and Other Poems: 1958-1960*, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1961), 13. Through the chapter, I cite page numbers when referring to *Kaddish* and line numbers when referring to *Howl*.

Psychiatric Institute in 1949.<sup>2</sup> As Michael Schumacher suggests, “the exchange symbolized a crucial element in the sanity/insanity question that would become a major theme in Beat Generation writings.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, their initial encounter set in a motion a decades-long literary dialogue that consistently blurs the in/sanity binary. Before Ginsberg published elements of his exchange with Solomon in *Howl* (1956), they co-authored texts, adopted the roles of author and scribe, and broadened one another’s literary horizons while they were fellow patients in PI.<sup>4</sup> The publication of *Howl* marked a turning point in the Ginsberg-Solomon exchange in large part because critics and readers often mistakenly cast Solomon in the role of Ginsberg’s madman muse.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Ginsberg and Solomon attempted to redefine Solomon’s social identity in the decades that followed the poem’s publication by way of a literary dialogue that took shape within, between, and outside their respective texts, particularly in letters, poems, critical works, and short prose pieces. Apart from *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), the major texts that constitute this literary dialogue are Solomon’s *Mishaps Perhaps* (1966), *More Mishaps* (1968), and *Emergency Messages* (1989), and contributions by both authors in *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile* (1986).<sup>6</sup> In the last third of the chapter, I

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<sup>2</sup> In *Ginsberg: A Biography*, Barry Miles offers yet a version of Ginsberg and Solomon’s initial encounter that contains elements of both Solomon’s and Schumacher’s versions (117). From this point on, I will refer to the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute, which is now called New York State Psychiatric Institute, as “PI.” Respectively, Solomon and Ginsberg were institutionalized in PI from ca. late March to December 24, 1949, and from June 29, 1949 to February, 27, 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg*, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Solomon introduced Ginsberg to writers like Antonin Artaud, Isidore Isou, Henri Michaux, and Jean Genet. Ginsberg introduced Solomon to William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Jay Landesman. While working as an editor at Ace Books, Solomon helped publish Burroughs’ *Junkie* under the pseudonym William Lee. Also, Solomon published “Further Afterthoughts of a Shock Patient” under the pseudonym Carl Goy in the Spring 1951 issue of Landesman’s magazine *Neurotica*.

<sup>5</sup> This literary diagnosis of Solomon, which I explore in detail below, took place in large part because Ginsberg refers to Solomon by name several times in *Howl*, dedicates the poem to him, positions him behind the walls of the madhouse, and identifies him as “madder than I am” (94).

<sup>6</sup> In subsequent citations and footnotes, I abbreviate *Mishaps Perhaps* as *MP*, *More Mishaps* as *MM*, *Emergency Messages* as *EM*, and *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile* as *HO*.

explore the ways in which *Kaddish*, Ginsberg's auto/biographical portrait of his mother and himself, extends the literary dialogue that was first published in *Howl*.

Though critics and readers tend to overlook the reciprocity and complementarity of Ginsberg and Solomon's "I/you" bond, this union is particularly evident in Ginsberg's employment of names and pronouns in *Howl*. In fact, Ginsberg and Solomon—typically as "I" and "you"—almost always appear concurrently in the poem.<sup>7</sup> They first appear together in the poem's dedication ("for Carl Solomon") and opening line ("I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness [...]"), after which Ginsberg seems to distance himself from Solomon and the others whose lives he depicts. But the disappearance of Ginsberg's "I" ultimately enables him to identify and unite with Solomon and other members of the "[m]ad generation."<sup>8</sup> He can fully participate in his own story only after he disappears from the poem, merges with the communal "who," and unites with Solomon: "the 'I' who tells the story of madness moves from an observer to a participant. The narrator becomes less detached, more involved, more implicated in the tale he tells. The *he* evolves into a *we*."<sup>9</sup> The Ginsberg-Solomon "we" fully emerges in Part III of *Howl* after Ginsberg positions himself with Solomon behind the walls of the madhouse ("I'm with you in Rockland")<sup>10</sup> and uses first-person plural pronouns for the first time ("where we are great writers [...] [99]). However, like David Mitchell's reluctance to form an "I/you" bond with David Everett in *The World Next Door*, Ginsberg slowly and cautiously unites with Solomon and others.

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<sup>7</sup> In Part II of *Howl*, Ginsberg's "I" does not appear concurrently with Solomon.

<sup>8</sup> According to Ginsberg, the mad generation includes anyone who lived through the "decade 1945-55" (*HO* 142).

<sup>9</sup> Jonah Raskin, *American Scream*, 156. Even toward the end of *Howl*, Ginsberg seems to resist uniting with Solomon. In *American Scream*, Raskin argues that Ginsberg "turned himself into a diagnosing doctor and Carl into a patient under his observation, especially in the phrase, 'you're madder than I am'" (156).

<sup>10</sup> "I'm with you in Rockland" begins all but one of the nineteen lines of Part III (94-112). Ginsberg substituted "Rockland" for "Pilgrim" "for rhythmic euphony" (*HO* 130).

Though Ginsberg often appears to create distance between himself and Solomon in *Howl*, Solomon emerges as his co-author both in the poem and in their literary dialogue. Indeed, their identities as writer and subject began to blur for the first time shortly after their initial encounter in PI. Like the cooperative patients in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* who eagerly record one another's confessions in Nurse Ratched's log book, Ginsberg kept a "case file"<sup>11</sup> that contained Solomon's "surrealistic aphorisms" and wild anecdotes, some of which would inspire lines in *Howl*.<sup>12</sup> Solomon points to Ginsberg's use of his aphorisms and anecdotes in order to challenge critics and readers who describe Ginsberg as the author of *Howl* and him as a raving madman. In doing so, he positions himself as the author of the poem and Ginsberg as a potentially mad scribe: "I gave Allen an apocryphal history of my adventures and pseudo-intellectual deeds of daring. He meticulously took note of everything I said (I thought at the time that he suffered from 'the writer's disease,' imagined that he was a great writer.)."<sup>13</sup> After Solomon depicts

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<sup>11</sup> In *Investigative Poetry*, Edward Sanders writes that Ginsberg "was always, in the classic gum-shoe, or muse-sandal, manner, asking oodles of questions of his friends, clarifying anecdotes, keeping files on his friends, many of which anecdotes and data-files turning up later on in *Howl*. In fact, from an examination of the anecdotes in *Howl*, we may devolve one of the first rules of Investigative Poetry: Do not hesitate to open us a case file on a friend" (8). Likewise, in *American Scream* Raskin notes Ginsberg's desire to fictionalize his friends' lives (52, 54, and 87), including "the idea of writing a novel in which 'the hero is a madman'" after he was admitted to PI (92). Ginsberg continued to keep a case file on Solomon after the publication of *Howl*. For instance, he recorded Solomon's words and actions in his journal after visiting him in Pilgrim State hospital. See Allen Ginsberg, *Journals Mid-Fifties: 1954-1958* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), 322.

<sup>12</sup> For the most part, the degree to which Solomon influenced the composition of *Howl* is unclear. For instance, he told John Tytell that one of his "surrealistic aphorisms" that Ginsberg included in *Howl* was the phrase "pubic beards" (*EM* 33). However, the origin of this phrase is less than certain. Ginsberg contends that "pubic beards" came about "by a simple mechanical method of intensifying a line by unusual juxtaposition of things or concepts, 'doctoring' the verse" (*HO* 124). Ginsberg's "doctoring" is apparent if one looks closely at the development of this phrase in the manuscript drafts of *Howl*: it shifts from "beards" (13, 28) to "phallic beards" and finally to "pubic beards" (33).

<sup>13</sup> "Background to *Howl*: Memoirs of the Waugh Years," *MM* 51. Also see Bill Morgan and Nancy J. Peters, eds, *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2006). In his testimony at the *Howl* obscenity trial, Kenneth Rexroth, one of the central figures of the San Francisco Renaissance, emphasized that Solomon was a writer. Rexroth said that Solomon "is a poet; he actually exists, and at one time was considered to have considerably more talent than Allen Ginsberg himself" (166).

himself as the legitimate authority of the history that Ginsberg purports to relate in *Howl*, he asserts that Ginsberg's use of his apocryphal anecdotes "enshrined falsehood as truth and raving as common sense for future generations to ponder over and be misled" (*MM* 51). Ginsberg's portrayal of the events that directly preceded Solomon's institutionalization in PI provides an excellent example of both his use of the case file he kept on Solomon and the literary dialogue that followed the publication of *Howl*. This line marks the introduction of psychiatric terminology and procedures to the poem, and signals the beginning of a much more rigid interpretation of "madness" than was the case in the preceding lines:

who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently  
presented

themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with the shaven heads  
and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,  
and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity  
hydro-

therapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia (66-67)

In his comments on this passage, Solomon once again positions himself as an authority while suggesting that Ginsberg is an unreliable scribe who "garbles history completely."<sup>14</sup> After he undermines the accuracy of Ginsberg's version of these events, Solomon provides readers with autobiographical details to which they otherwise would not have access. For instance, though the subject of this passage is anonymous ("who") and plural ("themselves"), Solomon identifies himself as the person responsible for throwing the potato salad. Significantly, he also offers his own version of the incident,

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<sup>14</sup> Solomon made these comments in a letter to Ginsberg dated September 29, 1985 (*HO* 131).

which he describes as a paradoxical performance of sobriety and playfulness, a demonstration of the “black humor of dada” that he participated in during a lecture on Mallarmé and alienation while he was attending Brooklyn College (*HO* 131).<sup>15</sup>

Apart from providing Ginsberg with surrealistic aphorisms and apocryphal anecdotes, Solomon also inspired the composition of *Howl* by co-writing satirical letters with Ginsberg while they were patients at PI. In Part III of *Howl*, Ginsberg alludes to writing these letters with Solomon in lines that also suggest the collaborative nature of the poem’s composition: “I’m with you in Rockland/ where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter” (99).<sup>16</sup> The wordplay and nonsense that characterize these letters anticipate much of Ginsberg’s and Solomon’s later writings. In their letter to Malcolm de Chazal, for instance, they repeatedly pun on the word “goldfish” (*HO* 143) as a type of currency, food, and pet. After they ask Chazal to send them goldfish if he cannot send money, they extend this pun by linking goldfish to their confinement in the madhouse and their lack of recognition as writers. They assure Chazal that they “can live in goldfish bowls and thereby bring much revenue from Japanese tourists,” though what they truly seek is “a mere morsel of encouragement” from him “as [they] are dying of hunger” (*HO*

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<sup>15</sup> For Solomon’s detailed description of the potato salad incident, see *EM* 62. Also see Tom Collins, “Carl Solomon,” in *The Beats, Literary Bohemians in Postwar America*, Ann Charters, ed. *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 16. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983), 503. Ultimately, Solomon’s Dadaist act was mis/interpreted as a sign of madness for which he was institutionalized. Morgan writes, “Instead of seeing the wacky charm of [Solomon’s Dadaist throwing of potato salad], people began to question Solomon’s sanity. [...] He stole a peanut butter sandwich from the cafeteria and showed it to the school guard, who referred him to the school’s psychiatrist, who in turn recommended he enter a psychiatric hospital for evaluation” (118).

<sup>16</sup> As I discuss later in the chapter, this line also refers to Solomon’s co-authorship of *Howl*. See Morgan and Peters, *Howl on Trial*, which includes a letter from Ginsberg to Lawrence Ferlinghetti during the *Howl* obscenity trial. Ginsberg writes, “I don’t want to plan on coming to US just to make another fucking recording of that fucking poem [*Howl*] (which I’m positive was written 2 years ago in limbo by somebody else not me, maybe Carl Solomon” (74).

143).<sup>17</sup> Ginsberg and Solomon's second letter, which is addressed to T.S. Eliot and written on behalf of all of the patients on their mental ward, undermines Eliot's status as the "[m]ost distinguished Number 1 poet of 1949" (*HO* 143). Tony Trigilio points out that this letter was "written when supposedly Eliot-inspired New Critical control of language and irony dominated North American English departments."<sup>18</sup> Ginsberg and Solomon twice indicate the fictitious nature of Eliot's precarious perch on the throne of poetry when they write, "Uneasy wears the crown that wears the head," after which they refer to themselves as "45 potential applicants, young legislators from various walks of society" (*HO* 143).<sup>19</sup> In accordance with the letter's multiple authorship, Ginsberg and Solomon "close with a royal 'we' that plays Eliot's authority for the fool."<sup>20</sup> Thus, even though these young legislators recognize Eliot as their "literary dictator," and pledge that they will "riot," "make bonfires," kill, and die for him (143), they conclude the letter by informing him that the "young poet" who is responsible for "the transcription of the meeting [...] will soon be bigger than you" (*HO* 144).

Ginsberg's composition of *Howl* was also inspired by Solomon's return to the mental hospital in 1955. The poem, Ginsberg explains, "was occasioned by [the] unexpected news of Carl Solomon's recent removal to Pilgrim State" (*HO* 130). Like the published poem, the first draft includes numerous anecdotes from the case files that Ginsberg kept

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<sup>17</sup> Ginsberg and Solomon conclude their letter, "Beyond a certain point there can be no *spoken* communication and all speech is useless" (*HO* 143). This line anticipates Solomon's comments on the uselessness of speech. In "A Plea for Zero," he writes, "Only by Artaud are we not deceived, / By the idea that language is merely gabble, / That one would do better to chew gum perpetually than to talk" (*MP* 18). Solomon also recognizes that adhering to this literary tradition is dangerous: "you are apt to be bound up in a straitjacket by the nearest psychiatrist" (*MP* 35). Also see *MP* 3, 16, *MM* 3, and 34.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Trigilio, "Strange Prophecies Anew": *Rereading Apocalypse in Blake, H.D., and Ginsberg*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> Ginsberg and Solomon also repeatedly allude to Percy Bysshe Shelley's assertion that "[p]oets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." See Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: The Authoritative Texts* (New York: Norton, 2002), 535.

<sup>20</sup> Trigilio, "Strange Prophecies Anew," 147.

on his friends. But Solomon occupies a different place in the poem than other members of the mad generation because Ginsberg names him, describes both of his institutionalizations, and repeatedly uses his anecdotes and aphorisms. In fact, after Ginsberg discovered that the first draft of the poem centered on Solomon, he composed a second section of the poem that was explicitly addressed to his friend.<sup>21</sup> In *Howl*, he attempted to communicate and unite with Solomon, who “had recently returned to a mental hospital 3,000 miles away on the East Coast” (*HO* 111), through the madhouse walls and across the country. The seemingly unbridgeable divide between Ginsberg and his friend initially made him feel “heart-struck at what seemed [Solomon’s] *hopeless* impasse” (*HO* 111, emphasis added), a line that echoes Ginsberg’s description of himself in the poem’s first draft. He refers to himself as “the last/ *hopeless* companion flown West” (*HO* 19, emphasis added). In his annotations to *Howl*, Ginsberg explains that this line is indicative of the guilt he experienced for ““abandoning Carl to Doom and Fate”” when he moved to California in 1954 (*HO* 132).

The first explicit manifestation of Ginsberg’s and Solomon’s “I/you” bond in *Howl* indicates that Ginsberg is threatened by Solomon’s institutionalization regardless of his geographical location:<sup>22</sup> “ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you’re really in the total animal soup of time” (72).<sup>23</sup> Though Ginsberg’s acknowledgment of his dependence on Solomon threatens to increase the distance between them and intensify his

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<sup>21</sup> Part II of the first draft of *Howl* ultimately became Part III of the published poem. For a detailed account of Solomon’s inspiration of *Howl*, see Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography*, 190 and 202.

<sup>22</sup> Ginsberg’s “I” appears only one other time between the opening line (“I saw”) and “I am not safe.” Notably, it appears in a line that suggests the conflation of Ginsberg, Solomon, and others who have been destroyed by madness: “who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity” (60).

<sup>23</sup> In his annotation to this line, Solomon asserts that “[i]t’s safer in the hospital than outside. Vide Neal Cassady’s fate. Allen and I are probably both physical cowards anyway which is why he addresses me in such terms” (*HO* 132). Neal Cassady (February 8, 1926 – February 4, 1968) died of undetermined causes at the age of forty-one in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico.

fear that he too might be reinstitutionalized,<sup>24</sup> his desire to sustain this perilous bond also compels him to write the poem. Immediately after their union, which occasions a shift in the poem from the past to the present tense, Ginsberg introduces his poetics: “and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipse the catalog the meter & the vibrating plane (73). As is often the case in *Howl*, Ginsberg simultaneously reaches out to Solomon in the madhouse and runs away from him into “the icy streets” where he can tell his story. Instead of distancing himself completely from Solomon, however, the first words of Ginsberg’s poetics (“and who”) reveal that he is also a member of the mad generation. In other words, immediately after he outs Solomon, Ginsberg blurs the line between author and subject by identifying himself as one of the poem’s “whos.” Notably, only two lines in Part I begin with the words “and who” rather than the anaphoric refrain “who.”<sup>25</sup> Both lines signal a shift in the poem between the seemingly distinct and isolated worlds inside and outside the madhouse. Like the transition from Solomon’s reinstitutionalization in Pilgrim State to the poetics of *Howl*, the only other line that begins “and who” appears when Ginsberg shifts from Solomon’s Dadaist antics to his institutionalization at PI: “and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia” (67).

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<sup>24</sup> In *American Scream*, Raskin includes an interview between himself and Dr. Philip Hicks, who was Ginsberg’s therapist when he wrote *Howl*, in which Hicks reveals that Ginsberg ““was afraid that he might be schizophrenic, too. He had this deep-seated fear of losing it, of becoming mentally ill. Carl Solomon was a close friend, and his institutionalization was alarming to Allen, too, which is part of the reason he came to Langley Porter for therapy. I told him that I didn’t think that he’d end up in a mental hospital like Carl or like Naomi”” (154).

<sup>25</sup> Apart from the poem’s first three lines, lines in *Howl* that begin with words other than “who” extend others that do. For instance, “who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos night after night/ with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls” (10-11). Also see lines 12, 17-18, 21, and 69-72.

Though Ginsberg clearly identifies Solomon as his inspiration, co-author, and counterpart, critics and readers often regard Ginsberg and Solomon as the “sane” author and his “mad” subject.<sup>26</sup> For instance, John Hollander diagnoses Solomon as a madman in his highly critical “Review of *Howl and Other Poems*.”<sup>27</sup> He contends that *Howl* “is a confession of the poet’s faith, done into some 112 paragraphlike lines, *in the ravings of a lunatic friend (to whom it is dedicated)*, and in the irregularities in the lives of those of his friends who populate his rather disturbed pantheon” (26, emphasis added). Though Ginsberg never explicitly cites Solomon’s words in *Howl*, Hollander clearly distinguishes Ginsberg as the poet-confessor and Solomon as the raving lunatic subject. He singles out Solomon as the only truly insane member of the “disturbed pantheon” that Ginsberg describes. Moreover, in what is an otherwise scathing review, he further distinguishes Ginsberg from Solomon and others: “Allen Ginsberg has a real talent and a marvelous ear [...] and even without knowing his profound and carefully organized earlier writing (unpublished in book form), one might suspect a good poet lurking behind the modish façade of a frantic and *talentlos* avant-garde” (27-28, emphasis in original). The division of Ginsberg and Solomon—into the “sane” poet and his “mad” subject—continued for decades after the publication of *Howl*. Though Bill Morgan offers a much more balanced and comprehensive portrait of Solomon than does Hollander, he writes that while Solomon was a mental patient in 1960 he “was still angry with Allen for using his name

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<sup>26</sup> See Morgan and Peters, *Howl on Trial*: during the *Howl* obscenity trial, defense attorney J.W. Ehrlich identified Solomon as the poem’s central figure. He argued that the mad generation is “seeking, seeking, seeking, always broken down, crying, everything is wrong with him, they do everything Solomon is doing, everything he ought not to do” (191). Similarly, David Kirk, a witness for the prosecution, argued that Ginsberg “celebrates the unfortunate life of [...] Solomon, who is a drifter of Dadaist persuasion” (170). This division of Ginsberg and Solomon into “sane” author and “mad” subject is similar to the way in which madhouse writers multiply themselves. See my discussion of this “I” multiplication in previous chapters.

<sup>27</sup> John Hollander, “Review of *Howl and Other Poems*” in Lewis Hyde, ed., *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1984). Hollander’s article was originally published in the Spring 1957 issue of *Partisan Review*.

so freely in *Howl*.” After Morgan suggests that Solomon was angry for an unreasonable amount of time (“*still angry*”), he disqualifies his complaints about being identified as the madman of *Howl* by suggesting that they are merely the product of his madness.<sup>28</sup>

Morgan claims that Solomon’s “*paranoid nature* encouraged him to believe that Allen had stolen his identity and completely ruined his life by parading his mental problems in public. No longer was he just plain, ordinary Carl Solomon, but instead Carl Solomon the madman to whom *Howl* was addressed.”<sup>29</sup>

Rather than characterize Solomon’s complaints as a sign of his “paranoid nature,” Ginsberg was still attempting to make amends for using his friend’s name in *Howl* thirty years after the poem’s publication. In “Reintroduction to Carl Solomon,” for instance, Ginsberg distinguishes between Solomon and “the mythical dedicatee” (*HO* 111) of *Howl* with whom readers frequently confuse him.<sup>30</sup> He claims that he initially regarded Solomon’s name as “a private reference” whose potential “celebrity” was limited to “a small circle of witty understanding readers” (*HO* 111). But Ginsberg’s removal of Lucien Carr’s name from the dedication page of *Howl and Other Poems* suggests that he anticipated that his friends’ lives might be negatively impacted if his poems gained a larger audience than this “small circle.” Ginsberg writes that subsequent to the international recognition that *Howl* achieved during the obscenity trial in late 1957, “the private mythology bandied about between Mr. Solomon and myself solidified as an

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<sup>28</sup> Also see Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, *Straight Hearts Delight: Love Poems and Selected Letters, 1947-1980* (San Francisco, CA: Gay Sunshine Press, 1980). In a letter to Peter Orlovsky dated April 1, 1958, Ginsberg writes that Solomon had been hospitalized again. According to Solomon’s mother, he was “worried about publicity & thought he would be interviewed on TV or something” (159).

<sup>29</sup> Bill Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself*, 318, emphasis added. Morgan also writes that Solomon “was sent to Bellevue [hospital] for observation” in 1952 after he suffered “another breakdown” that was characterized by “crazy outbursts” (150).

<sup>30</sup> Ginsberg compares those who confuse the mythical and real-life Solomons to readers of Jack Kerouac’s “*On the Road* [who] confuse the heroic fictional Dean Moriarty with his equally heroic prototype, Neal Cassady” (*HO* 111).

image notorious on a quasi-national scale. This had unexpected consequences: it put Mr. Solomon's actual person in the world with my stereotype—a poetic metaphor—as a large part of his social identity” (*HO* 111). After Ginsberg identifies Solomon as the co-author of the “private mythology” that became *Howl*, he thanks Solomon for “his sanity and generosity” and admits that he was “was mistaken in my diagnosis of his case (‘You’re madder than I am’).” Ginsberg then indicates that he, rather than Solomon, may have been mentally unstable, claiming that his friend’s “endurance, familial fidelity, and ultimate balance make my appeal seem hysterical, myself overwrought.” Ginsberg concludes his apology by expressing his desire that his reintroduction, as well as other writings of Ginsberg and Solomon, will prevent future misreadings of *Howl* by “sweep[ing] away Clouds of Ignorance” of those unable “to see dream humor,” and “for all those ill-affected by ‘Howl’ ’s text, redress the karmic balance” (*HO* 111).

Though Solomon wrote Ginsberg a letter in which he thanked him for “the sentiments expressed in ‘Howl’” more than a year after it was published, describing it as “an excellent piece of writing and just to my taste” (*HO* 161),<sup>31</sup> his attitude changed when the poem’s celebrity “caused his life to cast a shadow beyond its actuality.”<sup>32</sup> Though he was repeatedly identified as the madman of *Howl*, Solomon “reacted to the poem [...] ‘with the awareness that [he] was not famous.’” Nonetheless, his identity was overshadowed by his in/famous literary double whose public image continued to develop after the poem’s publication in ways that neither he nor Ginsberg could control. As he often does in his

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<sup>31</sup> Solomon’s letter is dated 12/29/57, more than two months after the conclusion of the *Howl* obscenity trial on 10/3/57. The reactions of the dedicatees of *Howl and Other Poems* varied. While “Neal Cassady didn’t seem to mind the fact that Allen mythologized his sex life” (Raskin 155), Kerouac disliked being “introduced as the guy *Howl* was dedicated to” because “now he couldn’t be famous on his own” (Miles 228).

<sup>32</sup> Ginsberg notes that Lucien Carr “preferred his name be dropped [as a dedicatee of *Howl and Other Poems*] lest it cause his life to cast a shadow beyond its actuality” (*HO* 136).

texts, Solomon responded to being “‘called mad rather than sane’” in *Howl* by suggesting that any madness that readers perceive in the poem might be their own. He asks, “‘What is mad? What is sane? Do you mean clinical, legal, or just what? Maybe I was sane in 1956 and ‘Howl’ was a poem appreciated only by the mad?’”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Solomon consistently emphasizes the “the less romantic aspect of ‘madness,’” which is “seldom if ever referred to in recondite avant-garde magazines who create rapscaillon heroes and legends by the dozen” (*EM* 71). For instance, he stresses the high cost, both economically and psychologically, of the various therapies one must undergo if one’s “intellectual needs and flamboyancies” are identified as signs of madness. Solomon tells the reader, “It’s expensive to be crazy, so please be considerate and think twice before you hang a ‘crazy label’ on someone not in the best circumstances money-wise” (*EM* 71).<sup>34</sup> He then provides an example of the damage inflicted on him by the “crazy label” in “The Lunatic and Modern Art.” He connects *Howl*, which he says was written for him, to his inability to get a college degree or a job. Solomon then claims that his “local fans,” which he gained after his “mild ‘PING-PONG OF THE ABYSS’ episode [that] occurred at the N.Y. Psychiatric Institute in 1949” (*MP* 35-36)<sup>35</sup> were so “intrigued” by his demand for a lobotomy that “they forced [him] into the absurd role of a lunatic-saint again” (*MP* 36).

Though he attempts to counter critics and readers who regard him as the madman of

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion*, 708. Solomon often employs diagnostic reversals such as this one in order to invite the reader to see things from his perspective. As I discuss below, he also uses second- and third-person pronouns in his texts, particularly “you” and “one,” to suggest a conflation of himself and the reader.

<sup>34</sup> Solomon also suggests the double meaning of the “cost” of being identified as a madman in the poem “Stringing Them Along,” in which he denies he is mad and puns on the words “prophet” and “profit” (*MP* 20).

<sup>35</sup> Solomon’s “mild ‘PING-PONG OF THE ABYSS’ episode” in PI echoes a line from Part III of *Howl*. Ginsberg writes, “I’m with you in Rockland/ where you scream in a straightjacket that you’re losing the game of actual pingpong of the abyss” (104). Solomon’s reference to his ping-pong episode also recalls the first two lines after the poem enters the madhouse: “and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia/ who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table, resting briefly in catatonia” (67-68).

*Howl* by insisting that he is “a writer and not a paranoiac [...] [s]omehow the legend of [his] ‘INFIRMITY’ built up, is still building up, it is by this time documented by the Dept. of Mental Hygiene records, fingerprints and photographs” (*MP* 36).

Solomon often echoes and reverses the terms of *Howl* in an attempt to distinguish himself from his literary double.<sup>36</sup> For instance, at the beginning of “The Mad Generation and God,” whose title recalls the all-inclusive protagonist of Ginsberg’s poem, Solomon declares, “Preposterous they should talk to me of being demented” (*MM* 3). In addition, he echoes the “who” of *Howl* by employing the anaphoric phrase “I who” in order to suggest that the “ravings” that Hollander and others attribute to him are more descriptive of the reader’s mental state than his own.<sup>37</sup> Solomon describes himself as “I, who am in the first place the most saintly and idealistic of anybody in this raving world at the present time.” He then uses “I who” to distinguish himself as a writer rather than a madman: “I who am literature, I who am a poet [...] I who am quiet and self-contented.”<sup>38</sup> The “I who” refrain disappears immediately after Solomon defines himself as a sane poet. He is defined from the outside in the following line by a “you” that could refer to Ginsberg or others from whose “paranoid asses” Solomon attempts to escape. He writes, “– am sworn at by you, am uprooted by you, etcetered by you because I do not conform

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<sup>36</sup> In *Naked Angels*, John Tytell describes Solomon’s *Mishaps Perhaps* and *More Mishaps* as texts that “are comprised of staccato routines, strange anecdotes, and pithy essays, all reflecting Solomon’s self-imposed and quixotic role of the world’s intellectual antagonist” (96).

<sup>37</sup> A comma appears between “I” and “who” the first time these words appear. Afterward, Solomon writes “I who” without a comma.

<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the title of Solomon’s autobiographical poem “Life is” (*MM* 21) functions as an anaphoric refrain. In this poem, Solomon alludes to the composition of madhouse texts such as his and Ginsberg’s: “Life is enumerating the suicides and psychoses of this one and that one” (5). He also appears to describe the deterioration of his relationship with Ginsberg after the publication of *Howl*: “Life is anger, anger at those real or imagined who have become rich and successful and gone away and left you groveling in your despair” (6). Finally, Solomon recalls lines from *Howl* that refer to his and Ginsberg’s institutionalization at PI: “Life is Monopoly and Scrabble and Tennis and *Pingpong* and moving on to a new destination” (9, emphasis added).

to your imagined stereotype of me” (*MM* 3).<sup>39</sup> Like Solomon, Claude Pelieu<sup>40</sup> playfully engages with the terms of *Howl*: for Carl Solomon in “Flash for Carl Solomon,” his introduction to *Mishaps Perhaps*. After representing Solomon as an author by quoting him twice,<sup>41</sup> Pelieu echoes the anaphoric “who” section of Part I of Ginsberg’s poem. He refers to Solomon as “he who endured the torture of the damned, he who wrote very little because he was therapeutically betrayed, he who bore the Kosher-Catholico-Communist Conspiracy” (*MP* 1-2). Pelieu then suggests that Solomon’s friendship with Ginsberg was also a casualty of the conspiracy he describes: “You were forced to give everything up Carl, even the fraternal Allen who imprisoned the wind” (2).

Like Ginsberg’s disappearing “I” in *Howl*, Solomon’s texts include brief anti-autobiographical pieces whose gaps and contradictions frustrate the reader’s attempts to define him or to distinguish fact from fiction. In a piece entitled “Further Afterthoughts of a Shock Patient,” he positions himself as an author who resides outside of the mental hospital. Solomon narrates a tale that is defined by various types of misinterpretation and misdirection with which he constantly blurs the line between his story and those of others. For instance, his attempts to evade his wife’s sexual advances<sup>42</sup> and translate Arthur Rimbaud are constantly interrupted by, among other things that shift the focus of the story out of the home and away from himself, an absurd dispute between hashishins and deaf-mutes that was triggered by the latter group’s misinterpretation of the French

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<sup>39</sup> As I mentioned earlier, Ginsberg acknowledged that the publication of *Howl* “put Mr. Solomon’s actual person in the world with my stereotype—a poetic metaphor—as a large part of his social identity” (*HO* 111).

<sup>40</sup> Claude Pelieu (1934-2002) was a French expatriate writer and painter who translated and published the works of several Beat writers, including Solomon, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Bob Kaufman.

<sup>41</sup> Pelieu emphasizes the following quotes from *Mishaps Perhaps* by capitalizing them: “GO ANYWHERE YOU’LL ALWAYS BE A TOURIST” and “IT IS BETTER TO CHEW GUM CONSTANTLY THAN TALK” (1).

<sup>42</sup> For other passages in which Solomon discusses marriage, see *MP* 55, *EM* 59 and 60.

phrase “COMME TOUJOURS” (as always) (47). As his wife “tosses in bed violently, waiting for [him] to retire,” Solomon deliberately mistranslates Rimbaud, who “rants on the screech, ‘JE est UN Autre’” (I is an other). Solomon writes, “Refusing to be taken in by an infant of nineteen, I translate. ‘You’re another.’ She tosses” (*MP* 47). Fact and fiction continue to blur as his thoughts about the increasingly long breasts of the heroes of Bataan<sup>43</sup> interfere with his translation: “‘DEREGLEMENTS DES SEXES,’ my text seems to read” (*MP* 48).<sup>44</sup> Solomon also refuses to reveal details about his life in a one-page anti-autobiography entitled “The Education of Carl Goy: Dementia Praecox in the Arts.” In the table of contents, which constitutes half of this brief text, Solomon positions himself in relation to madness, Ginsberg, and *Howl*. It includes, “Chapter Three Madness,” “Chapter Four Encounter with Allen Ginsberg Marital bliss period as literature,” and “Chapter Five Downfall -- / the hero of HOWL” (59). In the few lines that Solomon provides of the first and only chapter of this text, he eschews chronology<sup>45</sup> and suggests that his life story is best left unwritten. He offers the reader seemingly random details about his life, including his parents’ first names, the year he first smoked a cigarette, and a short list that describes his interest in art, sports, and literature (*MP* 59-60).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Fact and fiction continue to blur in Solomon’s text as he associates “[t]he dugs of the heroes of Bataan” (47) with “the dugs of the sissy seer, Tiserias” from T.S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland.” Then, he asks, “Rimbaud, both hero and seer, ever overweening – did HE wear a brassière?” (48).

<sup>44</sup> Solomon is punning on Rimbaud’s goal to “arrive at the unknown through a derangement of all my senses” (*dérèglement de tous les sens*).

<sup>45</sup> For Solomon’s comments on the lack of chronology in *Mishaps Perhaps*, see *EM* 39.

<sup>46</sup> Like “The Education of Carl Goy,” Solomon’s “A Book” is a two-page, single chapter anti-autobiographical piece in which he calls into question the importance of writing, including his own, in the opening lines. He says that he intends “to add one more book to the millions already in print. As millions of baffled minds have spoken before me, I too shall speak” (*MM* 48). Though he promises he will take the reader “[f]rom the gutter [...] to the office building, and from there to the galley of a ship at sea, and from there to a padded cell” (48), he only offers brief comments on the narcissism of his generation before concluding, “My God! How boring it is to write a book!” (49). Ultimately, Solomon decides that “[a] literary life is not the point. Just simply to live, that is the point” (49).

## II. The Universalization of Ginsberg's "I"

Though Ginsberg ultimately forms an "I/you" bond with Solomon in *Howl* and suggests that he was madder than his friend when he composed the poem, his desire to distance himself from his fellow mental patients can be traced back to "Dead Man's Institution," a poem that he wrote approximately one month before he was admitted to PI.<sup>47</sup> The poem's isolated perspective is similar to David Mitchell's blind "I/eye" in *The World Next Door*: Ginsberg observes his surroundings from such a distance that he seems absent from the institution to which he has just been admitted as a patient. He is simultaneously "surrounded" by and alienated from "hundreds" (3) of patients whom he describes as "weeping,/ decaying" (3-4), "[o]ld, crippled, dumb" (8), "heavy" (9), and "dirty" (10). While the minds of these patients seem trapped in their wretched pasts, their bodies have become an extension of the madhouse whose "enormous ward" (2), "gray aisles" (7), and "[e]mpty corridors" (15) are devoid of vitality and community.<sup>48</sup> In *Naked Angels*, John Tytell writes, "Everyone in the poem is impassive; everything in it is static; there is no interrelationship anywhere [...] The view of the world implied by such a poem is dismal, a miasma of quiescent disappointment and stagnant despair" (229). A

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<sup>47</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice*, 484-85. Ginsberg wrote "Dead Man's Institution" on May 23, 1949, a month after he was arrested on April 22, 1949. He was admitted to PI on June 29, 1949, a month after he wrote the poem. Ginsberg would first publish "Dead Man's Institution" in *Empty Mirror* (1961) as "A Meaningless Institution." In *Collected Poems: 1947-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), he reveals that this poem was inspired by a dream that he had in Paterson in the fall of 1948 (15).

<sup>48</sup> While this early poem's madhouse setting stands in direct contrast to the geographical diversity of the "who" section of *Howl*, Ginsberg also implies that the members of the mad generation are trapped in the past and lack a place where they can achieve a sense of identity and community. In *Naked Angels*, Tytell argues that "A Meaningless Institution," like several other poems in *Empty Mirror*, "reflect[s] terrible entrapment in mechanical situations revealing men devoid of humanity, like those 'cowering in unshaven rooms in underwear' in 'Howl'" (229). In her discussion of the Book of Lamentations and *Howl*, Ostriker writes, "identity not only is collective but requires rootedness in place. [...] the connection of place and people has been ruptured—by starvation literal and figurative, by conquest and exile: place does not *sustain* what should be its people" (112, emphasis in original). See Alicia Ostriker, "The Poet as Jew: 'Howl' Revisited," in *The Poem That Changed America*, ed. Jason Shinder (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

passive witness in this institution of the living dead, Ginsberg situates his “I/eye” as far away from his fellow patients as possible: “I sat on my bunk, three tiers up/ next to the ceiling” (5-6). His distance, passivity, and cooperation with the madhouse engender a poem whose content is determined by an institutional perspective that is both absent and omnipresent. The poem’s passive verbs signal Ginsberg’s isolated perspective and suggest that he too is becoming an extension of the madhouse: e.g. “I was given my bedding” (1) and “I waited/ for an official guide to come/ and give me instructions” (11-13).

Ginsberg’s isolated perspective in the opening line of *Howl* (“I saw”) is similar to his perch on the top bunk in “Dead Man’s Institution” because it appears to distance him from the mad generation. Likewise, the disappearance of his “I” into the anonymous third-person plural “who” in the next line reflects his desire to separate himself from the mad generation, which is also suggested by the fact that he composed the poem only after there was sufficient distance, both temporal and geographical, between himself and “the madtowns of the East” (69). While there is merit in both of these readings, these distancing techniques are also necessary because *Howl* centers on Ginsberg’s life story more than Solomon’s or anyone else’s. Among other things, the poem contains references to Ginsberg’s expulsion from Columbia College, drug use, Blake vision, homosexuality, and the types of therapy that he underwent in PI.<sup>49</sup> The anonymity of the “who” section thwarts the reader’s attempts to interpret the poem as autobiographical. Indeed, the disappearance of Ginsberg’s “I” enabled him to reveal things about himself that he would

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<sup>49</sup> Ginsberg almost never discussed his institutionalization publicly. He commented briefly and ambiguously on his time in PI during a February 29, 1988, interview with John Lofton. See Allen Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews 1958-1996* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 469-74. Also, in his annotations to *Howl*, Ginsberg reveals that he “received hydrotherapy, psychotherapy, occupational therapy (oil painting) and played Ping-Pong with Carl Solomon at N.Y. State Psychiatric Clinic” (*HO* 131).

have otherwise concealed. It allowed him to “write what [he] wanted to without fear, let [his] imagination go, open secrecy, and scribble magic lines from [his] real head—sum up [his] life—write for [his] own soul’s ear and a few other golden ears.”<sup>50</sup> Ginsberg’s “open secrecy” is facilitated by his ability to occupy a simultaneously detached and intimate relation to the mad generation, a paradoxical stance that he maintains through a “mixture of empathy and shrewdness” (*HO* 124).

A close look at the manuscript drafts of *Howl*, particularly Ginsberg’s careful revision of personal pronouns, suggest that his decision to distance himself from the madness he describes was motivated by an awareness that the poem’s audience might be larger and less understanding than his small circle of friends. One of Ginsberg’s most significant revisions of *Howl* is his removal of a line that describes the incident that led to his arrest and institutionalization in PI. This incident anticipates the ways in which Ginsberg would later conceal his identity in *Howl*. In late April, 1949, Ginsberg feared that writings of his that contained multiple references to his sexuality and drug use would be discovered if the police raided his apartment in search of stolen property. His attempt to move these writings to a safe location in a stolen car driven by his friend Jack Melody ended in disaster. Melody crashed the car on Utopia Boulevard in Queens, New York, while attempting to outrun the police. After Ginsberg and his friends were arrested, the incident made newspaper headlines in New York, including on the front page of the *New York Times*. Immediately after he was arrested, Ginsberg distanced himself from his friends by telling “the police that he was a copy boy for a news service who had ‘tied-in’ with the gang [...] to obtain ‘realism’ he needed to write a story.”<sup>51</sup> The first draft of *Howl*

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<sup>50</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2000), 229.

<sup>51</sup> Schumacher, *Dharma Lion*, 112.

includes an explicit reference to this incident: “who flew [...] out of cars in one shoe upside down on Utopia Bulvard (sic) with the hyena sirens wailing in the void” (*HO* 17).<sup>52</sup> Unlike the other incidents in the “who” section of the poem, all of which can be attributed to anonymous members of the mad generation, the car crash was a matter of public record and thus would have revealed that Ginsberg was one of the “lunatics” whose “ravings” the poem records.

Ginsberg also eliminated first-person pronouns in *Howl* to conceal facts about his sexuality, institutionalization, and his mother’s struggle with madness. Anne Hartman contends that “[t]he degree to which *Howl* is a poem about ‘opening secrecy’ becomes evident in the poet’s use of ellipses; in earlier poems, ellipses are used to stand-in for same-sex desire, but in *Howl* they represent his mother’s insanity rather than sex between men, which is no longer censored.”<sup>53</sup> While it is true that Ginsberg employs an ellipse, in the form of asterisks, to conceal his mother’s desperate state in the madhouse (“with mother finally \*\*\*\*\*” [71]), he also uses a variety of figurative ellipses like the anonymous “who” to distance himself from madness and homosexuality. This distance enables him to include lines such as, “who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy” (36). In his annotations to the poem, Ginsberg identifies this line as “crucial” to his composition of *Howl* because it enabled him “to write thenceforth what he actually thought, from his own experience.” He could no longer think of the manuscript “as ‘poetry’ or ‘publishable’ in any way that would reach

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<sup>52</sup> Ginsberg explains that this line describes “an unfortunate car crash 1948 (sic): the crash actually occurred in 1949] on Utopia Blvd, Queens, New York, which resulted in arrest of author, Herbert Huncke and friends. Stolen car was filled with stolen loot from second-story jobs, as well as several years’ journals, address books, letters from William Burroughs, etc., being transported for safekeeping with author’s brother prior departure from N.Y.C.” (*HO* 129).

<sup>53</sup> Anne Hartman, “Confessional Counterpublics in Frank O’Hara and Allen Ginsberg,” 51.

the eyes of his family” (*HO* 126). Ginsberg’s erasure of his “I” ultimately helped him regard *Howl* as a publishable poem. This erasure is most apparent in his multiple revisions of Part II.<sup>54</sup> The fifth draft, which is the longest and most revelatory draft with respect to Ginsberg’s sexuality, madness, and writing, includes lines such as, “moloch for whom I sit lonely at the typewriter moloch in whom I am a homosexual moloch in whom I am guilty” and “moloch in whom I am mad” (*HO* 65). Later, Ginsberg refers to his sexuality, madness, and institutionalization at PI: “Moloch in whom I am a hysterical fairy [...] moloch in whom I make insane prophecies,” and “moloch in which I go to the hospital to be analyzed” (66). The “I” begins to disappear from lines that touch upon madness and homosexuality in subsequent drafts of Part II. While the sixth and ninth drafts still contain lines like “I am mad” and “Moloch in whom I am crazy,” by the twelfth draft Ginsberg’s “I” has disappeared completely from lines like these. Consequently, the following pronoun-less lines appear in the published poem: “Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!” (86).

Though Ginsberg appears to distance himself from the mad generation in Part I of *Howl*, upon closer examination the gap that divides them proves illusory. Instead of disappearing from the text, he multiplies himself into the poem’s author and one of its subjects in order to universalize his “I” and madness. In fact, the isolation suggested by the first words of the poem is immediately negated by Ginsberg’s inclusion of himself in the community he describes. Schumacher writes, “Although he used the first-person singular twice in the first draft of the eighty-seven-line poem (*‘I saw the best minds of my generation ...’*), Ginsberg’s sympathetic treatment of the details of his friends’ lives

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<sup>54</sup> There are eighteen drafts of Part II. Unlike Ginsberg, Solomon often openly discusses his sexuality in his texts. See *MP* 22, 23, 58-59, and *EM* 16. Solomon also describes Ginsberg’s first sexual encounter with a man (*EM* 136).

placed him squarely in their midst, rather than off to the side as an impartial observer” (202, emphasis in original).<sup>55</sup> Alicia Ostriker furthers Schumacher’s point when she argues that the poem’s shift from “I” to “who” signifies Ginsberg’s “voice dissolv[ing] into what is seen. The ‘I’ releases itself or is released into its surge of emphatic madness. In Blakean terms, Ginsberg becomes what he beholds.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, after Ginsberg’s “I” dissolves into the communal “who,” first-person pronouns always appear in a communal context. When the “I” first reappears in the poem’s first draft, Ginsberg signals the ambiguous nature of perspective and identity by shifting between first-, second-, and third-person pronouns and employing the uncertain terms “if” and “or”: “who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out the Present” (15).<sup>57</sup> The roles of author and subject are reversed in this line as the “I” who “saw” the destruction of his generation resurfaces as one of the subjects of the “who.” This reversal is also suggested by the repetition of the words “to find out,” which might apply to “I,” “you,” “he,” or “who.” The next and last time a first-person pronoun appears in the first draft, Solomon, Ginsberg, and the other members of the mad generation are depicted as dependent on one another: “ah, Carl, while you are not safe *none of us* are safe—for now you’re really in the trouble of all Time” (19, emphasis added).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Though Schumacher’s point about Ginsberg’s communalization in *Howl* is valid, there are actually three first-person singular and one first-person plural pronouns in the first draft of *Howl*.

<sup>56</sup> “The Poet as Jew: ‘Howl’ Revisited,” 111.

<sup>57</sup> In the published poem, Ginsberg replaced “the Present” with “Eternity” (60).

<sup>58</sup> In the published poem, Ginsberg replaced “none of us” with “I” and “trouble of all Time” with “total animal soup of time” (72).

The first sustained appearance of first-person pronouns in *Howl* occurs in a passage in Part II that provides a synopsis of the poem.<sup>59</sup> The beginning of this passage recalls the isolated “I [who] saw [...] angelheaded hipsters” (1) and composed *Howl* at a distance: “Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream Angels!” (86).<sup>60</sup> The “I” immediately disappears when the poem’s subject matter shifts to madness and sexuality—“Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!” (86)—which recalls the disappearance of Ginsberg’s “I” into the communal “who” at the beginning of *Howl*. The absence of pronouns in these lines is particularly conspicuous because those that directly precede and follow them are the only ones in Part II in which the “I” appears. When Ginsberg’s “I” reappears, he is a passive witness to his own victimization: possessed and disembodied by Moloch, he is too afraid to transcend the self and form a communal bond with others: “Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy!” (87). Ginsberg’s union with Solomon and other members of the mad generation requires that he relinquishes the limited perspective of Moloch. At the conclusion of this passage, he finally frees himself: “Moloch whom I abandon!” Ginsberg’s “I” disappears immediately thereafter, and he summons others to free

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<sup>59</sup> Part II is Ginsberg’s invective against the seemingly indomitable Moloch, “the Canaanite fire god, whose worship was marked by parents’ (sic) burning their children as propitiatory sacrifice.” Ginsberg compares this sacrifice to the “reinstitution of peacetime draft, 1948” in postwar America, and to William Blake’s Urizen, whose “abstract calipers limit the infinite universe to his egoic horizon” (*HO* 139). He also writes that “Part II describes and rejects the Moloch of society which confounds and suppresses individual experience and forces the individual to consider himself mad if he does not reject his own deepest senses” (*HO* 154).

<sup>60</sup> Ginsberg uses the word “angel(s)” in a variety of ways in *Howl*, including “Mohammedan angels” (5), “visionary indian angels” (25), “the blond & naked angel” (39), “the archangel of the soul” (74), “the madman bum and angel” (76), “angelic bombs” (111), “Everyman’s an angel!” (115), “holy the hideous human angels!” (118), “Who digs Los Angeles IS Los Angeles!” (123), and “holy the Angel in Moloch” (124).

themselves and join him in celebration: “Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of the sky!” (87).<sup>61</sup>

The line between author and subject blurs shortly after Ginsberg’s “I” disappears again in Part II.<sup>62</sup> He extols the “[b]reakthroughs” and “[e]piphanies” that enable the “[m]ad generation” (92) to recognize that they were blinded and destroyed by the false “[v]isions” (90) and “[d]reams” (91) of Moloch: “They broke their backs lifting Moloch to Heaven!” (89). As Ginsberg shifts from first- to third-person pronouns, he begins to echo and elaborate on lines from Part I. His isolated perspective (“*I saw* the best minds”) transforms into the mad generation’s communal perspective: “*They saw* it all! the wild eyes! the holy yells!” (93, emphasis added). No longer blind and passive victims, the mad generation can become participants in their own life stories. Like Ginsberg, who “ran through the icy streets” to compose *Howl*, “[t]hey bade farewell! They jumped off the roof! to solitude! Waving! carrying flowers! Down to the river! into the street!” (93). Thus, the communal perspective of the liberated “who” can counter the mechanical consciousness of “Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows” (84) and “whose ear is a smoking tomb!” (83). Ginsberg’s union with the mad generation is fully realized in “Footnote to *Howl*,” which offers a formal parallel and thematic reversal of Part II. The final passage in Part II (“Real *holy* laughter in the river!” and “the *holy* yells!” [93, emphasis added]) anticipates the anaphoric refrain of nearly every line in the celebratory “Footnote,” in which Ginsberg explicitly identifies himself as one of the members of the mad generation: “Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy Kerouac holy

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<sup>61</sup> In his annotation to “Moloch whom I abandon,” Ginsberg says that “[t]his verse seems to objectify a decision uncovered in the act of composition and is the crux of the poem” (*HO* 142).

<sup>62</sup> As I discuss below, this distinction between author and subject disappears entirely in Part III and “Footnote to *Howl*.”

Huncke holy Burroughs holy Cassady holy the unknown buggered and suffering beggars  
 holy the hideous human angels!” (118).<sup>63</sup>

### III. *Howl* Comes to the Steps of the Madhouse

The Pilgrim era defies description even in retrospect and even in the wake of subsequent amazing vistas and adventures. We formed friendships, were herded into the many buildings; we were generally jovial and glad to get regular food again; we were eager to know what was going on in a world which seemed to be shaken to its roots with the death of Stalin, the Castro Revolution in Cuba, pot paranoia, red scare, the Algerian War, Dien Bien Phu, and peripheral Armageddon expectation. (16-17)

–Carl Solomon, *Emergency Messages*

After the plural subject of *Howl* appears “on the granite steps of the madhouse” (66), the distance between Ginsberg and those whose lives he describes seems to increase. Up until this point in the poem, Ginsberg consistently undermines the language of madness. For instance, he situates “hysterical” in the middle of two other adjectives (“starving hysterical naked”) that suggest that the bodies, rather than “the best minds,” of his generation have been destroyed by madness. He also employs the word “crazy” in an ambiguous way: “who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull” (7). “Crazy” can be read as a noun, in which case the poem’s subject was expelled “for crazy,” or as an adjective that, along with “obscene,” qualifies the noun “odes.” Ginsberg also writes, “who thought they were *only mad* when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural ecstasy” (26, emphasis added). But the moment the “whos” enter the madhouse, they are subjected to and disciplined by psychiatric terms

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<sup>63</sup> Ginsberg blurs the author and subject throughout *Howl*. This fusion is particularly evident in a passage that is dominated by different forms of communication as the communal “who” moves from the city to the madhouse: “who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,/ a lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon/ yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars” (16-18).

and procedures that are designed to wipe them out.<sup>64</sup> As Lillian Feder suggests, “in ‘Howl’ madness is not only the voice of poetry; it is also a reduction to silence: the rebels are given ‘the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia,’ and they rest ‘briefly in catatonia [67].’”<sup>65</sup> The madhouse silences the “yacketayakking” (18) of the “platonic conversationalists” (17), obliterates their memories, and thus engenders a “mind [that is] endlessly adapting whatever remains of its desires to the confines of the internalized asylum.”<sup>66</sup> Like the passive inmates of “Dead Man’s Institution,” the “whos” become an expression of the madhouse after they return “to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns of the East” (69). They are isolated in the madhouse and doomed by the past: “bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon” (70).

Even though Ginsberg acknowledges his dependence on Solomon toward the end of Part I (“while you are not safe I am not safe”), at the beginning of Part III his employment of the language of madness suggests that the gap between them cannot be bridged completely: “Carl Solomon! I am with you in Rockland/ where you’re madder than I am” (94).<sup>67</sup> In the early drafts of Part III, Ginsberg indicates that Solomon’s condition is even more desperate than he suggests in the published poem. He tells

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<sup>64</sup> See my discussion of Esther Greenwood being “wiped out” by electroshock therapy in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* in Chapter One, 36-39.

<sup>65</sup> Lillian Feder, *Madness in Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980), 265. Ginsberg explains that “[t]he incident of the Ping-Pong table is described by Solomon as a ‘big burst [of] anti-authoritarian rage on arrival at P.I. by me’” (*HO* 131).

<sup>66</sup> Feder, *Madness in Literature*, 266.

<sup>67</sup> The form of Part III is a dialogic coupling of “statement” and “response” lines. Apart from “Carl Solomon!” in the first line, each of the nineteen statement lines begins, “I’m with you in Rockland.” With the exception of the final line in the section, each response line begins with the word “where.” Ginsberg refers to the statement lines as a “fixed base” and the response lines as “reply strophe[s]” (*HO* 154).

Solomon that he only has himself to blame for his institutionalization: it is “where you wanted to be.”<sup>68</sup> Worse yet, Ginsberg informs Solomon that his case is hopeless: Rockland is “where you’ll stay for the rest of your life.”<sup>69</sup> In a November 7, 1973, interview with John Tytell, Solomon echoes the opening line of Part III of *Howl* (“you’re madder than I am”). He explains that following his release from Pilgrim State, “I thought that [Ginsberg and others had] rejected me because *I was madder than they were*. I thought that they were neurotics and I was psychotic, an outsider” (33, emphasis added). Similarly, in “Poetry Reading” Solomon suggests that Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky, whom he refers to as Alfred Goonsberg, Lothorio Furso, and Pietro Orloff, thought he was madder than they were. After he describes an argument between himself and Ginsberg, he writes, “I didn’t want to flip completely over this question, since I would have proved them right once again” (*EM* 173). As is typical of Solomon, however, he frustrates the reader’s attempts to define Ginsberg or him as mad by offering contradictory accounts of their madness. Early in *Mishaps Perhaps*, for example, he writes, “Ginsberg isn’t mad [...] And I’m not either” (16). But toward the end of the book, he asserts, “Ginsberg is nuts and everybody is secretly nuts,” after which he presents the reader with a direct challenge: “Why do you want to read this? So I’m some type of schizophrenic who lies on the floor of a ward” (54).

Though it appears that Ginsberg distances himself from Solomon by referring to him as “madder than” he is, another possible reading of this line indicates that Solomon is only madder than Ginsberg because of where they are positioned in relation to the

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<sup>68</sup> See *HO* 89. In the first draft, “where you’re madder than I am” is the sixth, rather than the first, response line.

<sup>69</sup> This is the second line in the third draft of Part III (*HO* 91) and the tenth line in the first draft. In the first draft, Ginsberg writes, “you may stay,” after which he crosses out the word “may” (*HO* 89).

madhouse. As Felman suggests, “the possibility of the subject is not defined by what he says, nor by what he talks about, but by the place—unknown to him—from which he speaks.”<sup>70</sup> It becomes clear that Solomon’s madness is a function of his geography when one emphasizes the first word of the line “*where* you’re madder than I am.” Similar to the “who” in Part I, the pronoun “where” serves as the anaphoric refrain of all but one response line in Part III. Only the final line of this section, in which Ginsberg dreams of Solomon’s escape from the madhouse, breaks this pattern: “in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night” (112). In fact, Ginsberg removed lines from earlier drafts that do not suggest that Solomon’s madness is contextual, including the previously cited “where you wanted to be” and “where you’ll stay for the rest of your life” (*HO* 91). He also indicates that Solomon’s status as a mental patient shapes his perspective and the way in which he is perceived by those inside and outside the madhouse.<sup>71</sup> He is isolated from his loved ones, diagnosed and stigmatized as a madman, constantly surveilled by hospital staff, and forced to conform to the rules of the institution: thus, Rockland is “where you *must* feel strange” (95, emphasis added).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 50.

<sup>71</sup> Ginsberg also suggests that Solomon’s madness is determined by his own perspective. In his letter to Eberhart, Ginsberg writes that Part III of *Howl* is “a litany of active acceptance of the suffering of soul of C. Solomon, saying in effect I am *still* your amigo tho (sic) you are in trouble and think yourself in a void” (*HO* 152, emphasis in original). He also indicates that Solomon’s “madness” is a type of “rebellion against Moloch” (*HO* 154).

<sup>72</sup> In “*Strange Prophecies Anew*,” Trigilio suggests that despite Ginsberg’s claim that Solomon is madder than him, “neither is mad in the context of the narration. [...] Ginsberg’s emphasis on the absurd power inequities in Solomon’s incarceration indicate that *Howl* satirizes, and therein revises, the trope of divine madness by which it is authorized” (146).

Ginsberg composed *Howl* when definitions of in/sanity were becoming increasingly rigid and the population of mental hospitals in the U.S. had reached its peak.<sup>73</sup> As David Mitchell suggests in *The World Next Door*, the nation had become “a larger insane asylum, with an atomic bomb for shock treatment” (298). It is in this context that Ginsberg describes an America whose “madtowns” (69) are composed of “armed” (105) and “invincible madhouses” (88) that subject and discipline those who reside inside and outside of their walls.<sup>74</sup> He indicates that the status of those who are labeled in/sane is contingent and reversible. In fact, his assertion that Solomon’s madness is a function of geography suggests that Solomon will no longer be madder than him after he is released, and that both he and Solomon are somewhat “mad” even when they are outside the madhouse. As I discussed earlier, Solomon frequently blurs the worlds outside and inside the madhouse in his texts, referring to the former as “an asylum” and “outer madhouse” and the latter as “a super asylum” and “outer void” (*MP* 9). He says that these two worlds are so alike that there is a “definite letdown” after being released: “you feel upon leaving the Insane Asylum as though you are entering the Sane Asylum” (9).<sup>75</sup> Indeed, in “How I Have Found Reason in an Irrational World,” Solomon writes that he had to enter Pilgrim State “to escape contamination by the lunatics outside,” who continued to visit him in the hospital “chattering of mad revolutions, violence [and] universal dadaism” (*MM* 53). Like his comment that any madness readers perceive in *Howl* might be their own,

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<sup>73</sup> For instance, the American Psychiatric Association published the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1952.

<sup>74</sup> In *American Scream*, Raskin notes that Ginsberg first conceived of America as “a nation of madhouses” when he was a patient at PI (92). In *Spontaneous Mind*, Ginsberg explains that “the best minds” that were “destroyed by madness” included “[p]eople who survived and became prosperous in a basically aggressive, warlike society” and “[t]hose who freaked out and couldn’t make it, or were traumatized, or artists who starved, or what not, they couldn’t make it, either” (469).

<sup>75</sup> As noted earlier, Solomon claims that one’s social class often determines whether one resides inside or outside the madhouse (*EM* 71).

Solomon contrasts his sanity to his friends' raving: "I would smile at them calmly—really beatifically—[and] tell them there was only something wrong with the tip of my nose and go on brushing my teeth" (53).

In Part III of *Howl*, Ginsberg reveals the degree to which the poem is a product of his textual union with Solomon. Unlike Part II, where Ginsberg's "I" appears independently of other pronouns, Part III resumes the pattern established in Part I where "I" is always accompanied by "you." As Ostriker suggests, the distance between Ginsberg and Solomon closes "[o]nly in Part III, with the intimate and affectionate address to a friend [...] and the refrain 'I'm with you in Rockland,' does the poem at last imagine a possibility of coherent identity, an 'I' in relatively stable relation to a 'you.'"<sup>76</sup> Ginsberg and Solomon's textual union is most apparent in the first-person plural pronoun "we," which first appears in a line that signals their composition of *Howl* in Rockland and their letters to Chazal and Eliot in PI: "I'm with you in Rockland/ where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter" (99). Their union engenders a third space beyond the increasingly similar in/sane asylums where Solomon's escape becomes possible. It is within this third space that he is able to assert his subjectivity and become an active participant in his own life story. Ginsberg and Solomon compose a text that demonstrates the limitations of the madhouse's authority: they co-author a "private mythology" (*HO* 111) that only they can fully comprehend. Thus, Solomon can "laugh at [the poem's] invisible humor" (96) because it consists of his and Ginsberg's inside jokes about, among other things, Solomon's work as an editor at Ace Books (97), surrealistic phrases like

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<sup>76</sup> Ostriker, "The Poet as Jew: 'Howl' Revisited," 112. Ostriker also suggests that "[i]n the 'Footnote,' personal identity is again transcended: no 'I' interrupts the absurd utterance of ecstasy" (112). Though Ginsberg does not use the pronoun "I" in the "Footnote," he does name himself—"Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon [...]" (118)—and use a first-person pronoun—"my mother" (119).

“catatonic piano” (105) and “superhuman tomb” (108), and literary allusions to the works of Artaud (101) and Apollinaire (102).<sup>77</sup> Solomon’s union with Ginsberg enables him to become an author for whom the world becomes a text. Thus, he begins to blur the line that separates those who reside on either side of the walls of the madhouse: Rockland is “where [Solomon] pun[s] on the bodies of [his] nurses the harpies of the Bronx” (103).<sup>78</sup>

Solomon’s escape from Rockland and his “I/you” bond with Ginsberg are also evident in the increasing length of the response lines in Part III.<sup>79</sup> While the refrain “I’m with you in Rockland” that begins each dialogic pairing seems to position Ginsberg and Solomon in the madhouse, its meaning is continually altered by the ever-increasing momentum and camaraderie articulated in the response lines. The first five response lines, the longest of which is eight words long, signal Solomon’s confinement in Rockland and his means of escape. As I have suggested, Ginsberg and Solomon seem furthest apart in the opening lines “where [Solomon] is madder than” (94) Ginsberg and “must feel strange” (95). However, the respective blurring of identities, nonsense, and camaraderie suggested in the next three lines begin to suggest that the poem is a site in which Solomon can reclaim his agency and plot his escape from Rockland: he “imitates the shade of [Ginsberg’s] mother” (96), “murder[s]” his “twelve secretaries” (97), and “laugh[s] at this invisible humour” (98). As the response lines increase in length, Solomon transforms from a helpless victim of the “invincible madhouse” (88) to an agent who actively brings about

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<sup>77</sup> See Ginsberg’s annotations to these lines, *HO* 144.

<sup>78</sup> In his annotation to this line, Ginsberg reveals that “harpies of the Bronx” refers to “Solomon’s and [his] mother and aunts [who] had lived in the Bronx” (*HO* 144).

<sup>79</sup> Though Ginsberg’s assertion that each response line “is longer than the previous” one (*HO* 154) is not entirely accurate, these lines do steadily increase in length from the beginning of the section until the penultimate line.

his rebirth and freedom.<sup>80</sup> The fullest expression of Ginsberg and Solomon's bond occurs directly after the only line in Part III that does not include personal pronouns.

Reminiscent of their letter to Eliot, Ginsberg signals the unity of the voices of the inmates in Rockland: "where there are twentyfive thousand mad comrades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale" (109).<sup>81</sup> In the following line, first-person plural pronouns reappear and are sustained for the first time in the poem, thus signaling the disappearance of Ginsberg's "I" and Solomon's "you": "where we hug and kiss the United States under our bedsheets" (110). This "we" represents a complicated coupling, like that of lovers whose individual identities, voices, and bodies have faded away.

Ultimately, "[t]he envisioned freeing of Carl Solomon from Rockland takes place in the longest line of Part III, appropriately, since long lines in 'Howl' imply a desire to break free from boundaries."<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the longest and penultimate line of this section is a fifty-three word line climax in which the "imaginary walls [of Rockland] collapse" and Ginsberg, Solomon, and "skinny legions run outside" together to celebrate their freedom: "O victory forget your underwear we're free" (111).

The virtual lack of punctuation in Part III of *Howl* also increases the momentum of the poem, facilitating Ginsberg and Solomon's union as well as Solomon's escape from the madhouse. The lack of punctuation differentiates this section of the poem from the always end-stopped lines of Parts I, II and "Footnote to Howl." In fact, the tone of each section of *Howl* is determined in part by the punctuation marks that dominate them. For

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<sup>80</sup> Ginsberg signals Solomon's agency when he writes, "where you accuse your doctors of insanity and plot the Hebrew socialist revolution against the fascist national Golgotha" (107), and "where you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb" (108).

<sup>81</sup> Ginsberg writes that Pilgrim State hospital "hous[ed] over 25,000 [patients], the largest such mental hospital in the world" (*HO* 130). Similarly, in "America," another poem in *Howl and Other Poems*, he writes, "It occurs to me that I am America" (45), and then lists "twenty-five-thousand mental institutions" among his "national resources" (50).

<sup>82</sup> Eliot Katz, "Radical Eyes: Political Poetics and 'Howl,'" in *The Poem That Changed America*, 204.

instance, all but one line in Part II, including phrases and individual words, ends with an exclamation point.<sup>83</sup> One of these exclamation points seems to spill over into the first line of Part III: “Carl Solomon!” (94). “Footnote to Howl” combines the exclamatory end stops of Part II and the lack of internal punctuation marks where one would expect to find them of Part III in lines that signal the interdependence of identity. For instance, Ginsberg blurs the line between author, subject, and audience when he writes, “The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the hearers are holy the ecstasy is holy!” (117).<sup>84</sup> He also suggests the contingent nature of identity in the next and longest line of the “Footnote.” Ginsberg names Solomon again and refers to himself by name while identifying several members of the mad generation for the first time in the poem: “Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy Kerouac holy Huncke holy Burroughs holy Cassady holy the unknown buggered and suffering beggars holy the hideous human angels” (118).<sup>85</sup> The absence of punctuation where one might expect to find it also signals the interdependence of identity in other pivotal lines in *Howl*. Examples include the lack of commas in lines in which Ginsberg announces his bond with Solomon (“while you are not safe I am not safe”), and suggests that psychiatric procedures are all equally ineffective (“insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational

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<sup>83</sup> While there are more than one hundred commas in Part I, commas appear in only one line in the poem’s final three sections. In Part II, he writes, “Pavements, trees, radios, tons!” (89). Of the five periods in the poem, each of which appear in Part I, one concludes Part I and four appear within abbreviations: “N.C.” (43) and “A.M.” (71). Part I is the only section that lacks exclamation points. The repetition of this punctuation mark in Part II produces a pounding rhythm that reflects Ginsberg’s struggle to break free from the mechanical consciousness of Moloch. He uses exclamation points throughout the “Footnote” to increase the intensity of the mad generation’s celebration after their defeat of Moloch. The poem’s only question mark appears in the first line of Part II: “What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?” (79).

<sup>84</sup> Ginsberg suggests that the audience of *Howl* collaborates in the composition of the poem. In his annotations to the poem, he reveals that “the voice” and “the hearers” refer to the audience at the Six Gallery reading of *Howl* on October 7, 1955 (*HO* 146).

<sup>85</sup> Also see *Howl*, 123-25.

therapy pingpong & amnesia”).<sup>86</sup> The lack of internal punctuation is particularly notable in response lines toward the end of Part III. The first such line reflects Solomon’s active rejection of the mental institution and Ginsberg’s universalization of Solomon’s condition: “where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse” (105).<sup>87</sup> The lack of internal punctuation occurs six times when Ginsberg’s “I” and Solomon’s “you” merge into the pronoun “we” in the next two response lines.

The final response line of Part III signals that Ginsberg and Solomon are no longer limited by the madhouse by breaking two patterns established in this section. It does not begin with the word “where” and it is less than half as long as the preceding line: “in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night” (112). In addition, unlike the other sections of *Howl*, the final line in Part III does not conclude with a punctuation mark. The absence of punctuation after Solomon unites with Ginsberg thousands of miles away from the madhouse suggests the open-endedness of *Howl*. But this open-endedness, which is apparent in the communal celebration in the “Footnote,” also has a dark side. In a nightmare epilogue to *Howl* entitled ““O Carl! A Dream: 1963” (HO 119), Ginsberg’s dreams of Solomon’s escape from Rockland are inverted. Indeed, his dreams and their inversion parallel the conflicting readings of *Howl* that I have discussed throughout this chapter in which Ginsberg and Solomon are regarded as co-authors or identified as the “sane” author and “mad” subject of the poem. The later, “rueful dream” (HO 111)

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<sup>86</sup> Ginsberg’s inclusion of “pingpong and amnesia” at the end of this list of therapies suggests that these therapies are equally ineffective. Also see *Howl*, 40.

<sup>87</sup> Solomon continues to demonstrate his agency after Ginsberg depicts shock treatment as useless. Reminiscent of Solomon’s diagnostic reversal that I discussed above, Ginsberg writes, “you accuse your doctors of insanity and plot the Hebrew socialist revolution against the fascist national Golgotha” (107).

describes Ginsberg's visit to Solomon in Pilgrim State during which their relation is determined by the madhouse. Ginsberg appears to merge with hospital staff after he attributes Solomon's grotesque, swollen body to the doctors who gave him insulin shock treatments (*HO* 119).<sup>88</sup> He confesses that he too is responsible for the distortion of Solomon's physical body and public image that motivates much of their literary dialogue:

'Carl I did do wrong to you, I made you an object, a thing, an image—I didn't mean that, I loved you—I did discover finally what it is I—we—were seeking then in Psychiatric Institute, what it is we felt we thought we wanted all along—I made a mistake Carl. Forgive me, I have the answer now—' [...] 'It's this image, the Mind, the reporters, the interviews, the fame, the image—it was our identity we were seeking wasn't it, our own identity?'

'Yes, yes,' he says, but I see the anguish in his eyes—the reporters are waiting downstairs for me, to interview me again, now I see our chance to break thru our Names and Forms in public—I was all wrong to conspire with *Time* to create this Beatnik myself and to throw out into world a howl of Carl Solomon which fixed him in my idea of him a name a madness a hospital a mass public image surrounding him confusing him furthermore— (*HO* 119, emphasis in original)

Unlike the dreams that conclude Part III of *Howl*, in this nightmare vision Ginsberg and Solomon are confined by their individual identities and trapped in the madhouse. Rather than being Ginsberg's co-author and equal, Solomon seems completely dependent on

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<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in "Report from the Asylum: Afterthoughts of a Shock Patient," Solomon comments on the ways in which insulin shock has distorted his body: "I had gained sixty pounds, and upon consulting a mirror, I was confronted with the dual inability to recognize myself or to remember what I had looked like prior to treatment" (*MP* 40-41). He also describes Ginsberg as an agent of the mental hospital in "Pilgrim State Hospital": "Shock treatment is prepared. One wakes dazed. / Allen comes, he says, 'Don't argue with them, do as they say'" (*MP* 6). Ginsberg gives his mother similar advice in *Kaddish*. After Naomi asks him to take her home from the mental hospital, he tells her, "'No, you're crazy Mama,—Trust the Drs'" (19).

him. It is Ginsberg who decides, as Solomon seems confused and angry, that they must fend off reporters who are trying to “‘cast the image again’” (119). Though Ginsberg suggests that they can avoid being regarded as the sane poet and lunatic friend of *Howl*, he seems intent on putting words into Solomon’s mouth. Ginsberg “tak[es] control of the situation” and orders Solomon to “do it *now*, let’s together make a break, escape the Names, escape our minds, escape their minds, escape the words, break through ourselves, Cut *out!* Cut out!” (119, emphasis in original).

Rather than ally himself with the institution, Solomon contrasts the ignorance of doctors regarding the effectiveness of insulin shock therapy with “[t]he testimony [...] of an eye-witness, one who has undergone insulin shock treatment and has slept through fifty comas” (*MP* 37). Indeed, much like Paul and Marie Hackett, he undermines the opinions of psychiatric experts by quoting the “definitive work on shock therapy,” whose authors admit that “the curative agent in shock-treatment ‘REMAINS A MYSTERY SHROUDED IN A MYSTERY’” (36-37).<sup>89</sup> Solomon describes the comas that insulin shock produces as nightmares in which the identities of patients blur. After he declares that one who experiences these comas “cannot help being a confirmed democrat” (37), he maintains that shock patients share “concrete miracles” that occur “in the atmosphere of the insulin ward,” such as the transference of literary knowledge (40) and “crab-lice” on sheets that are sterilized on a daily basis (39). Though the communal perspective that Solomon experiences in these comas provided him with “the very concrete void [he had]

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<sup>89</sup> Solomon cites “[Paul H.] Hoch and [L.B.] Kalinowski’s *Shock Therapy*” in his footnote (*MP* 37). The book’s actual title is *Shock Treatments, Psychosurgery, & Other Somatic Procedures in Psychiatry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, Grune & Stratton, 1952).

sought,”<sup>90</sup> he writes, “These collective phantasies in which we dreamed each others’ dreams contributed to the terror” of “the insulin void” (40). Indeed, Solomon and Ginsberg’s initial exchange, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, indicates that all mental patients can experience the “collective phantasies” of the insulin coma. Though Ginsberg did not undergo insulin shock in PI, Solomon pulled him into this communal nightmare shortly after he emerged from a coma: “I encountered what appeared to be a new patient, to whom I mumbled amiably, ‘I’M KIRILOV.’ He mumbled in reply ‘I’M MYSHKIN.’ The cadence of the surreal was never challenged; not one of us would dare assume responsibility for a breach of the unity which each hallucination required” (40).

#### IV. “Where You are the Shade of My Mother”

Ginsberg includes references to the lives of Carl Solomon and his mother, Naomi Ginsberg (née Levy), several times in the anonymous “who” section of *Howl*. He also explicitly refers to them three times each in the poem—he uses Solomon’s name and calls Naomi “mother.” As I have suggested above, Solomon emerges as the dedicatee, addressee, and main subject of *Howl*. Though Naomi is, on the contrary, almost absent from the poem, her story functions as a shadow text that haunts and shapes *Howl*. Instead of removing Naomi from the poem entirely, Ginsberg blurs her identity with his and Solomon’s. This fusion is suggested by the appearance of dashes immediately after *Howl* enters the madhouse. These dashes connect stanzas in which Ginsberg first names Naomi (“with mother finally \*\*\*\*\*” [71]), Solomon and himself (“ah, Carl, while you are not

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<sup>90</sup> Similarly, as I have discussed in Chapter One, in Mary Jane Ward’s *The Snake Pit* Virginia Cunningham “had longed to make her mind blank” to escape from social and economic pressures in Juniper Hill, but she quickly “learned that having a blank mind while awake is a terrifying experience” (63).

safe I am not safe”).<sup>91</sup> In his annotations to the poem, Ginsberg explains that he used asterisks in the “final draft to introduce [an] appropriate element of uncertainty” (*HO* 131). His revision of this line is also indicative of his desire to distance himself from “mad” Naomi. Instead of “with mother finally \*\*\*\*\*,” the first draft reads, “with his own mother finally fucked” (*HO* 19, 58).<sup>92</sup> To some extent, Naomi’s story emerges from obscurity in *Kaddish* (1961), Ginsberg’s auto/biographical portrait of his mother and himself that expands upon *Howl*.<sup>93</sup> Though he provides details of his mother’s life in *Kaddish* that are lacking in *Howl*, Ginsberg consistently conceals and undermines his revelations. As he attempts to retrace Naomi’s steps, and echo, record, and rewrite her words in *Kaddish*, Ginsberg suggests that much of her life story has been forgotten, misinterpreted, or lies beyond his or anyone else’s limited perspective.

Ginsberg’s bond with Naomi exhibits an intimacy and interdependence that surpasses the union achieved by Ginsberg and Solomon in *Howl*. Their textual union, which most often occurs in the moment of the poem’s composition, undermines binary opposites such as living/dead, in/sane, and inside/outside the madhouse. In fact, the perspectives and identities of mother and son are often so intertwined that they cannot be distinguished from one another: they become, to borrow Tony Trigilio’s words, “the combined Naomi-

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<sup>91</sup> These dashes anticipate Ginsberg’s poetic method in *Kaddish*, in which he achieved a “completely free composition, the long line breaking up within itself into short staccato breath units—notations of one spontaneous phrase after another linked within the line by dashes mostly: the long line now perhaps a variable stanzaic unit, measuring groups of related ideas, grouping them—a method of notation.” See Allen Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose*, 231. Naomi’s and Solomon’s identities are also linked in Part III of *Howl*: “I’m with you in Rockland/ where you imitate the shade of my mother” (96).

<sup>92</sup> Ginsberg refers to Naomi most explicitly in the “Footnote,” which he dedicated to her. He writes, “Holy my mother in the insane asylum!” (119). Similar to *Kaddish*, Ginsberg uses the “Footnote” to reach out to his mother “who died in the madhouse” in order to tell her that he “loved her anyway & that even in worst conditions life is holy” (*HO* 163).

<sup>93</sup> Ginsberg finished composing *Kaddish* in 1959, three years after Naomi’s death. He felt compelled to compose the poem because the Kaddish or Jewish prayer of mourning was not recited at her funeral. In *I Celebrate Myself*, Bill Morgan notes that Ginsberg’s first draft of the poem began with “the words, ‘Kaddish or the Sea Poem, irregular lines each perfect. Now all is changed for me, as all is changed for thee, Naomi’” (221).

Allen protagonist [who] walk[s] over the sunny pavement in *Kaddish*.<sup>94</sup> In reference to Ginsberg's incorporation of the late 1958 walk in New York City in *Kaddish* that inspired him to write the poem, Trigilio argues that the "collapse of past memory and future desire into present lived experience is represented by Ginsberg's superimposition of his walk onto a memory recalled from stories of his mother's walks through the city as a child" (153).<sup>95</sup> Though mother and son are often indistinguishable in *Kaddish*, the poem also conveys the ambivalence that Ginsberg felt toward his mother's madness. Like the mixture of empathy and shrewdness that characterize the tone of *Howl*, *Kaddish* is shaped by Ginsberg's contrary desires to become a part of his mother and remain apart from her. As James Breslin contends, both *Howl* and *Kaddish* "derive from deep, long-standing private conflicts in Ginsberg—conflicts that ultimately stem from his ambivalent attachment to his mother, his difficulties in asserting a separate, independent personality."<sup>96</sup> Ginsberg's ambivalent relationship with Naomi is perhaps most evident in his use of pronouns. Unlike *Howl*, first-person pronouns, especially Ginsberg's "I," are almost always present in *Kaddish*. Instead of disappearing into the poem, Ginsberg unites with and distances himself from Naomi's struggle with madness by alternately referring to her with second- and third-person pronouns. These pronominal shifts not only reflect

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<sup>94</sup> Trigilio, "Strange Prophecies Anew," 133.

<sup>95</sup> For a detailed description of Ginsberg's walk and composition of *Kaddish*, see Schumacher, *Dharma Lion*, 299-303. The reversibility of Ginsberg and Naomi's "I/you" bond is apparent from the poem's opening line: "Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets & eyes, while I walk on the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village" (7). Ginsberg also writes that Naomi's past "leaps about me, as I go out and walk the street, look back over my shoulder" (8). He continues to retrace his mother's steps and mirror her actions throughout the poem. For example, he writes, "as I walk toward the Lower East Side — where you walked 50 years ago" (8). Later, Ginsberg follows Naomi into the madhouse: "On what wards — I walked there later, oft" (18). Other examples of Ginsberg and Naomi's "I/you" bond include, "you knew and I know" (8), "(mad as you) — (sanity a trick of agreement)," "I shuddered — [...] you shuddered" (13), and Naomi's "grimace nerve shudder at Involuntary (as shudder when I piss)" (23).

<sup>96</sup> James Breslin, "The Origins of 'Howl' and 'Kaddish,'" 84.

his in/ability to identify and unite with his mother, but they also structure *Kaddish*.<sup>97</sup> He typically employs third-person pronouns in *Kaddish*, which often appear alongside the language of madness, when Naomi becomes an “other” with whom he can no longer communicate; it is at these points that Ginsberg seems most like an agent of the mental institution. On the other hand, second- and first-person plural pronouns, and the lack of pronouns altogether, often signal the union of mother and son even when they seem most alienated from one another.

Naomi haunts Ginsberg’s dreams and poetry before his initial encounter with Solomon in PI. In fact, the only mental patient that he describes in “Dead Man’s Institution” evokes her presence. From his perch on the top bunk, Ginsberg observes that “[a] heavy girl/ in a dirty dress/ stared at me” (9-11).<sup>98</sup> Though Ginsberg attempts to distance himself from his “mad” mother in his poetry, she is the source of his compassion for the “weeping,/ decaying men and women” (3-4) inside and outside the madhouse. While Solomon is the dedicatee, co-author, and a central figure in *Howl*, Naomi’s struggle with madness inspired the poem’s composition more profoundly than Solomon’s. In 1960, Ginsberg acknowledged that she was the main inspiration behind the poem: “I realized after I wrote [*Howl*] that it was addressed to her. [...] Because the emotion that comes

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<sup>97</sup> *Kaddish* consists of six parts, each of which contains first-person pronouns. Second- and third-person pronouns, on the other hand, only appear together in the Narrative section. Apart from first-person pronouns, the Proem contains only second-person pronouns; the Narrative, which comprises the majority of the poem, begins with second-person pronouns and alternates between second- and third-person pronouns, though it is dominated by the latter; the Hymmn only has second-person pronouns; Part III (the Lament) only has third-person pronouns; Part IV (the Litany) only has second-person pronouns; Part V (the Fugue) only has one third-person pronoun.

<sup>98</sup> Ginsberg often says that Naomi stares at him in *Kaddish*. For instance, before she returns to the madhouse for the last time, he writes, “I pushed her against the door and shouted ‘DON’T KICK ELANOR!’ — she stared at me — Contempt — die — disbelief her sons are so naive, so dumb —” (26). Soon after, he writes that Naomi “star[es] at my eyes, betrayed” (27). Ginsberg and Naomi cannot communicate when he visits her in the madhouse. Instead, “Naomi stares” (29) and “stares” (30). Ginsberg also refers to Naomi as “fat” several times in “*Kaddish*,” including “[m]etrasol made her fat” (20). Also see 13, 18, 22, 24, and 34.

from it is built on my mother, not anything as superficial as a later acquaintance, such as Carl.”<sup>99</sup> Ginsberg obscured Naomi’s identity in *Howl* by using Solomon’s “return to the asylum as occasion of a masque on [his] feelings toward [his] mother” (*HO* 111).

Ginsberg’s revelation that Naomi, rather than Solomon, was the fundamental inspiration of *Howl* sheds light on his claim that Solomon “imitate[s] the shade of [his] mother” (96). Solomon occupied Naomi’s place in *Howl* in order to shield or shade her struggle with madness from the scrutiny of readers. While Ginsberg’s indirect portrayal of Naomi protected her, it ultimately caused Solomon’s “life to cast a shadow beyond its actuality” (*HO* 136). After Naomi’s death, on the other hand, Ginsberg attempts to protect Solomon by revealing that she was the main inspiration of *Howl*.

In contrast to *Howl*, Ginsberg openly identifies Naomi as the inspiration of his poetry in *Kaddish*. In fact, he reveals that Naomi inspired *Howl* toward the end of the Narrative section:

Another year, I left N.Y. — on West Coast in Berkeley cottage dreamed of her  
soul — that, thru life, in what form it stood in that body, ashen or manic, gone  
beyond joy —

near its death — with eyes — was my own love in its form, the Naomi, my  
mother on earth still — sent her long letter — & wrote hymns to the mad —

Work of the merciful Lord of Poetry. (30-31)

Ginsberg’s reunion with Naomi recalls his dreams of Solomon’s escape from the madhouse via a “sea-journey” across America to “the door of [his] cottage in the Western night.”<sup>100</sup> In *Kaddish*, however, he simultaneously imagines uniting with his mother and

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<sup>99</sup> Alfred Aronowitz, “Portrait of a Beat,” in *Kerouac and Friends: A Beat Generation Album*, 104.

<sup>100</sup> *Howl*, 112.

distancing himself from her dying and “mad” body: “*that* body,” which is “near its death” and “ashen or manic.” In order to “escape that fatal Mama” (26-27), Ginsberg writes a letter to “the Naomi, my mother.” He also composes *Howl*, his “hymns to the mad,” which she inspires and haunts. But Ginsberg found it nearly impossible to communicate with or write explicitly about Naomi during her lifetime. Only after she had “die[d] ungodly in an armed madhouse”<sup>101</sup> could he address her as his muse in *Kaddish* and “talk to [her] — as [he] didn’t when [she] had a mouth” (11). Fittingly, Ginsberg’s most explicit references to Naomi as the inspiration of his poetry come toward the end of *Kaddish*. For instance, he describes his final visit to his moribund mother in the madhouse shortly before the passage cited above. He writes, “O glorious muse that bore me from the womb, gave suck first mystic life & taught me talk and music, from whose pained head I first took Vision” (29). After Ginsberg locates Naomi’s madness in her “pained head,” he describes her as the embodiment of poetry: “Tortured and beaten in the skull — What mad hallucinations of the damned that drive me out of my own skull to seek Eternity *till I find Peace for Thee, O Poetry* — and for all humankind call on the Origin” (29, emphasis added).<sup>102</sup> Ginsberg’s universalization of madness (“mad hallucinations of *the* damned” and “tortured and beaten in *the* skull”) enables him to transcend his identity (“drive me out of *my own* skull”) and unite with Naomi.<sup>103</sup> Their

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>102</sup> Ginsberg uses the apostrophic “O” several times in *Kaddish* to refer to Naomi. Apart from “O glorious muse” and “O Poetry,” he writes, “O strange Naomi!” (27), “O Russian faced, woman on the grass” (29), “O beautiful Garbo of my Karma” (30), and he repeats “O mother” three times at the beginning of the Litany (34).

<sup>103</sup> Ginsberg also suggests that one’s auto/biography can be regarded as universal or archetypal. He realized that he needed to include in *Kaddish* “the whole secret family-self tale,” which consisted of “memories which no one else could know” (“How *Kaddish* Happened,” *Deliberate Prose*, 233). Even though his memories “would seem odd to others,” they would seem “*family* odd, that is to say, familiar—everybody has crazy cousins and aunts and brothers” (233, emphasis in original). Thus, very specific details about his

union is also evident in this passage, as Breslin suggests, because “the modifying phrase ‘tortured and beaten in the skull’ floats free of any precise referent, allowing it to refer to both Naomi and Allen, joined in suffering, in those moments when they ‘lose their head.’ Her suffering, it appears, is also his.”<sup>104</sup>

Naomi’s inspiration of *Kaddish* is also apparent in a passage in which Ginsberg depicts her final attempt to reside outside of the madhouse. As is often the case in the poem, he employs the language of madness in a way that simultaneously signals his dis/union with Naomi. In the middle of revealing that “she got crazier” and “then went half mad,” Ginsberg writes, “I was in the bughouse that year 8 months — my own visions unmentioned in this here lament” (25). Instead of describing his experiences in PI, Ginsberg presents the reader with Naomi’s version of the world outside the madhouse in the only passage in *Kaddish* that echoes the anaphoric “who” of *Howl*:

Who enrolled for painting classes at night in Bronx Adult High School —  
 walked alone under Van Cortlandt Elevated line to class — paints Naomiisms —  
 Humans sitting on the grass in some Camp No-Worry summers yore — saints  
 with droopy faces and long-ill-fitting pants, from hospital —  
 Brides in front of Lower East Side with short grooms — lost El trains running  
 over the Babylonian apartment rooftops in the Bronx —  
 Sad paintings — but she expressed herself. Her mandolin gone, all strings  
 broke in her head, she tried. Toward Beauty? or some old life Message? (25-26)

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mother were “[p]ossibly subjective archetypes, but archetype is archetype, and properly articulated subjective archetype is universal” (233-34).

<sup>104</sup> Breslin, “The Origins of ‘Howl’ and ‘Kaddish,’” 101-2.

Naomi's paintings of this earlier mad generation of weary saints and disillusioned brides might be regarded as precursors to *Howl* and *Kaddish*.<sup>105</sup> Even though Ginsberg's depiction of Naomi's life in *Howl* anticipates *Kaddish* in a number of ways, her situation seems progressively worse in the earlier poem.<sup>106</sup> In *Kaddish*, Ginsberg constantly shifts between "sane" and "mad" versions of Naomi. His ambiguous interpretation of the significance of her compositions ("Toward Beauty? or some old life Message?") corresponds to the uncertainty of his perspective throughout the poem. This uncertainty is apparent throughout the Lament and Litany, for instance, both of which echo the passage above: "only to have seen her paint crude pictures of Elevateds over the rooftops of the Bronx" (33) and "with your eyes going to painting class in the Bronx" (35).<sup>107</sup> Ginsberg's suggestion that Naomi composes "beauty" or "some old life message" is indicative of the way he repeatedly situates her beyond madness, either in an idealized past or after her death. Though he describes Naomi as old and dying—"the hand dripping down toward death"—during his final visit to her in the madhouse, he also calls her his muse and refers to her as a young and "holy mother," a "Communist beauty" whose "world is born anew"

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<sup>105</sup> Solomon reveals that one of Ginsberg's earliest madhouse texts is a painting of "a striking Golgotha" in PI during Occupational Therapy (*EM* 172).

<sup>106</sup> In the anonymous "who" section of *Howl*, Ginsberg describes Naomi as a child full of hope upon her arrival to New York (48), a mother who cooks for her children (52), a woman who fears that the mental hospital is surveilling her at all times (65), and a mother who must return to the madhouse because she is "finally \*\*\*\*\*" (71). Ginsberg identifies lines in *Howl* that approximate his description of Naomi's arrival to New York and her cooking in *Kaddish* (*HO* 133). See *Kaddish*, 20-21 and 34-35. He also explains that the *Howl* line "who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left with their insanity & their hands & a hung jury" (65) refers to Naomi's certainty "circa 1943 that doctors had planted 'three big sticks' down her back during insulin and electroshock treatments as antennae to receive radio broadcasts from the ceiling—voices sent by President Roosevelt that alternately praised her as a 'great woman' or mocked her as a 'radical' and 'bad girl'" (*HO* 130). In *Kaddish* Ginsberg repeatedly refers to Naomi's "3 big sticks" (14, 21, 27, and 33) and "radio[s]" (21, 25, 26, and 27).

<sup>107</sup> Ginsberg's uncertain perspective is particularly evident in the anaphoric refrains of the Lament and Litany. The first half of the Lament is characterized by the refrain "only to have," which is followed by the terms "not forgotten," "seen," "known," and "come" (33). The Litany begins, "O mother / what have I left out/ O mother/ what have I forgotten" (34), after which Ginsberg lists various things that shaped Naomi's perspective that he did not experience.

(29). Also, immediately after he describes death as “the mother of the universe” (30), he introduces a series of photographs that offer a much more positive interpretation of “Camp No-Worry” than Naomi’s paintings. In these photographs, Naomi and her “saints with droopy faces and long-ill-fitting pants, from hospital” become “O beautiful Garbo of my Karma — all photographs from 1920 Camp Nicht-Gedeiget<sup>108</sup> *here unchanged* — with all the teachers from Newark” (30, emphasis added).<sup>109</sup>

Ginsberg repeatedly suggests that that an essential part of Naomi’s story always remains unaccounted for in *Kaddish* due the uncertainty of his perspective, an uncertainty that is particularly evident in the poem’s sixty-two question marks.<sup>110</sup> After Edward Sanders notes that Ginsberg’s poems contain a total of forty-seven question marks prior to the publication of *Howl*, he argues that there are no question marks in *Howl* because it “is, in a way, the long declarative/ throb-answer to/ hundreds of questions he had already asked.”<sup>111</sup> While the ellipses that Ginsberg places throughout *Howl* suggest a degree of uncertainty and the anaphoric “who” can be regarded as an interrogative, the poem’s overall tone is decidedly declarative. Moreover, though Ginsberg does, in fact, ask a single question in *Howl*, it differs from the ones he poses in *Kaddish* because he answers

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<sup>108</sup> Camp Nicht-Gedeiget is Yiddish for “No-Worry.”

<sup>109</sup> Ginsberg also references one of these photographs in “To My Mother: An Homage” in *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice*. As in *Kaddish*, he addresses Naomi directly: “Do you remember maidenhood? The picture/ Taken in the summer camp, you sitting/ Carefree on the grass, of summer singing.” Though Ginsberg describes Naomi as “carefree,” he also says that her “singing” is “tragic,” “sad” and “indeterminate/ Of origin or sorrow” (417).

<sup>110</sup> Even though Ginsberg’s uncertain perspective is evident throughout *Kaddish*, all sixty-two question marks appear in the Proem and Narrative sections. Though Schumacher suggests in *Dharma Lion* that Ginsberg “included all the major events, no matter how painful to confront” in the Narrative section of *Kaddish* (300), Ginsberg repeatedly emphasizes the limited nature of his perspective. For instance, at the beginning of the Narrative section, he indicates that he will provide a detailed yet ambiguous account of his mother’s struggle with madness: “Over and over — refrain — of the Hospitals — *still haven’t written your history — leave it abstract*” (13, emphasis added).

<sup>111</sup> Edward Sanders, *The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg*, 22.

it immediately.<sup>112</sup> In contrast to *Howl*, the tone of *Kaddish* is fundamentally interrogative. Ginsberg repeatedly asks Naomi indirect and direct questions that only she can answer. He also employs question marks to express his uncertainty regarding her madness and its effects on his family, to suggest his misgivings about becoming an agent of the madhouse, and to acknowledge that which he does and does not know. Apart from employing a series of question marks to signal the limitations of his perspective in regard to the significance of Naomi's paintings—whether they gesture “[t]oward Beauty? or some old life message?”—Ginsberg infuses Naomi's past with possibility by repeatedly using the word “toward.” After he describes her as a little girl “eating the first poisonous tomatoes of America — frightened on the dock” shortly after her arrival to the United States from Russia, he writes,

then struggling in the crowds of Orchard Street toward what? — toward  
Newark —  
toward candy store, first home-made sodas of the century, hand-churned ice  
cream in backroom on musty brownfloor boards —  
Toward education marriage nervous breakdown, operation, teaching school,  
and learning to be mad, in a dream — what is this life? (8).

Ginsberg also repeatedly uses the conjunction “or” in *Kaddish* to emphasize the uncertainty of his perspective. He uses “or” forty-nine times in the poem to compose a comprehensive yet inconclusive portrait of his mother *and* to distance himself from and

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<sup>112</sup> Even though, as I mentioned above, Part II begins with the poem's only question (“What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?” [79]), Ginsberg provides an emphatic answer in the very next line: “Moloch!” (80).

unite with Naomi simultaneously.<sup>113</sup> Ginsberg also uses “or” repeatedly in *Howl* to suggest that members of the mad generation may or may not have performed the actions he describes: “who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup” (28). Also, as I have suggested above, he uses “or” to blur the identities of individuals, including his own, in *Howl*: “who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity” (60).<sup>114</sup> Due to Ginsberg’s employment of “or” in *Kaddish*, the reader encounters multiple, often contradictory, versions of Naomi’s life story without being able to determine which of them, if any, represents her actual experiences. For instance, immediately after “abandoning” (15) Naomi in Lakewood, New Jersey, Ginsberg expresses his uncertain perspective and his deep-seated fear of uniting with his mother. He wonders, “Would she hide in her room and come out cheerful for breakfast? or lock her door and stare thru the window for sidestreet spies? Listen at keyholes for Hitlerian invisible gas? Dream in a chair — or mock me, by — in front of a mirror, alone?” (15). After he attempts to distance himself from Naomi, Ginsberg imagines her far from madness in an idealized past or after her death: “Would she were safe in her coffin — or back at Normal School in Newark” (15). Then, he mentions her “[f]irst nervous breakdown was 1919 [...] something bad — never said what,” and recalls a photograph of his mother in which she is “smiling” and “playing lullabies” while he “in infancy saw trees — or back teaching school” (15).

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<sup>113</sup> With the exception of “her brothers dead in Riverside or Russia” (33), the conjunction “or” only appears in the Proem and Narrative sections of *Kaddish*.

<sup>114</sup> The conjunction “or” appears fourteen times in Part I of *Howl*. Ginsberg uses it several times in a line that refers to a number of his friends and Naomi. The last part of the line describes Naomi’s last residence outside the madhouse, an idealized Naomi, and her final resting place in the cemetery (“to Woodlawn to the daisychain or grave” [64]), all of which anticipate Ginsberg’s depiction of Naomi in *Kaddish*. See Ginsberg’s annotation to this line, *HO* 134.

Ginsberg used Solomon's institutionalization in Pilgrim State, where he and Naomi were patients at the same time, "as occasion for a masque on [his] feelings toward [his] mother, in itself an ambiguous situation since [he] had signed the papers giving permission for her lobotomy" (*HO* 111).<sup>115</sup> Apart from introducing an "appropriate element of uncertainty" (131), the asterisks Ginsberg employs in *Howl* ("finally \*\*\*\*\*") represent his removal of Naomi's story from the poem, including his authorization of the institution's removal of part of her mind. In the first draft of *Howl*, Ginsberg indirectly refers to Naomi's lobotomy. He writes, "blood on their hands, all fingers & tears/ self-delivered to truth's final lobotomy" (*HO* 19). Unlike the final draft of *Howl*, *Kaddish* includes multiple references to Naomi's lobotomy. Like much of the poem, however, these passages are characterized by uncertain language and a lack of specific referents. Thus, Ginsberg is able to tell Naomi's story and distance himself from both her and the institution on whose behalf he often acted. He first refers to Naomi's lobotomy while describing her as a passive victim who has been "broken" and "fed to the ground — but mad [...] cut in the head, leaf stript, hid in an egg crate hospital" (10). The words "but mad" suggest two readings: that it was necessary to "br[eak]," "cut," and "hid[e]" Naomi in the madhouse because she was mad, or that she did not deserve to be treated this way because she was "only mad." The second interpretation echoes *Howl* ("who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural ecstasy" [26]). Naomi fails to prevent her cold-blooded and thoughtless doctors from performing the lobotomy. After

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<sup>115</sup> Ginsberg authorized his mother's lobotomy in the fall of 1947, less than two years before he was admitted to PI as a mental patient. Doctors at Pilgrim informed him that Naomi was in danger of suffering a fatal stroke if they did not perform this operation. Ben Lee points out that Ginsberg was "shaken" when he heard that Solomon was institutionalized at "Pilgrim State Hospital, where Ginsberg's mother was also a mental patient and where in 1947 she had been lobotomized with her son's written consent" (384). Also see Raskin, *American Scream*, 115-16.

she “fought the knife — lost” (10), Naomi was “[c]ut down by an idiot Snowman’s icy — even in the Spring — strange ghost thought — some death — Sharp icicle in his hand [...] heart of electric irons” (11). Even though Ginsberg does not reveal that he authorized his mother’s lobotomy in *Kaddish*, in the following stanza he implies that he is indirectly responsible for her suffering. He includes himself among “[a]ll the accumulations of life, that wear us out — clocks, bodies, consciousness, shoes, breasts — *begotten sons* — your Communism — ‘Paranoia’ into hospitals” (11, emphasis added).<sup>116</sup> Ginsberg’s first explicit reference to Naomi’s lobotomy in *Kaddish* appears toward the end of the poem. During his final visit to her in the madhouse, Ginsberg realizes that “[s]he’s had a stroke” (29). Naomi is “lame now — wrinkles — a scar on her head, the lobotomy — ruin, the [one stiff] hand dipping downwards toward death” (29).

Ginsberg’s decision to authorize Naomi’s lobotomy haunted him for decades after her death.<sup>117</sup> His guilt is particularly apparent in “Black Shroud,”<sup>118</sup> the nightmare epilogue to *Kaddish*. Like “‘O Carl!’ A Dream: 1963,” Ginsberg appears to merge with Naomi and madhouse staff in “Black Shroud,” a poem whose opening lines echo a scene in *Kaddish* in which Ginsberg describes an incident during his childhood when Naomi was violently ill:

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<sup>116</sup> Ginsberg suggests throughout *Kaddish* that his birth and that of his older brother Eugene contributed to Naomi’s madness. He consistently depicts “sane” Naomi, both during her lifetime and after her death, as a maiden, and “mad” Naomi as a wife and mother. Naomi’s first breakdown occurred in 1919 after she was engaged to marry Louis Ginsberg. Ginsberg refers to the first year of marriage, 1920, three times. Their first child, Eugene, was born on June 3, 1921.

<sup>117</sup> After Bill Morgan describes Naomi’s paranoia—e.g. “wires,” “sticks,” and “poison bugs”—as “images common among mad people who felt controlled by unknown forces and voices inside their heads,” he notes that Ginsberg “felt that by authorizing the lobotomy he had surrendered her to these secret controllers” (155). Ginsberg also suggests throughout *Kaddish* that the operation altered Naomi’s perspective. Toward the end of the poem, he writes that Naomi has “eyes of lobotomy” (35).

<sup>118</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *White Shroud: Poems, 1980-85* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 69-70. For an excellent discussion of “Black Shroud,” see Trigilio’s *Allen Ginsberg’s Buddhist Poetics*, 172-78.

One night — sudden attack — her noise in the bathroom — like croaking up  
 her soul — convulsions and red vomit coming out of her mouth — diarrhea water  
 exploding from her behind — on all fours in front of the toilet — urine running  
 between her legs — left retching on the tile floor smeared with her black feces —  
 unfainted — (22)<sup>119</sup>

Compare this to the opening stanza of “Black Shroud”:

Kunming Hotel,<sup>120</sup> I vomited greasy chicken sandwiched  
 in moldy bread, on my knees before the white toilet  
 retching, a wave of nausea, bowels and bladder loose  
 black on the bathroom floor like my mother groaning  
 in Paterson 1937. I went back to bed (1-5)

The majority of “Black Shroud” relates the dream that Ginsberg has after falling asleep again. The poem’s setting abruptly shifts from Ginsberg’s hotel room in China to an apartment that he shares with Naomi. The line that separates the madhouse and the family home blurs after she joins him in the bathroom. Ginsberg writes that “rigor mortis/ convulsed her living body while she screamed/ *at the doctor and apartment house we inhabited*” (10-12, emphasis added). The conflation of mental hospital and family home is furthered by Ginsberg’s suggestion that Naomi is “tortured” by an “electric current” (13), which evokes the shock treatments that she endured in the madhouse. Due to his mother’s apparent suffering, he quickly seeks “some professional advice” (14) and is informed that her condition “require[s] quick action” (15). Similarly, Ginsberg portrays

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<sup>119</sup> Ginsberg also describes a similar bathroom scene during which Naomi attempted to commit suicide: “Once locked herself in with razor or iodine — could hear her cough in tears at sink — Lou broke through glass green-painted door, we pulled her out to the bedroom” (22).

<sup>120</sup> This hotel is located in Kunming, China. Ginsberg stayed here when he was the guest of the Chinese Writer’s Union in 1984.

himself as an agent of the madhouse several times in the Narrative section of *Kaddish*. For instance, after he calls the “secret police” at the madhouse, an ambulance arrives to take Naomi away for the last time. He writes, “Nor will forget, the doorknock, at your fright of spies, — Law advancing, on my honor — Eternity entering the room — you running into the bathroom, undressed, hiding in protest from the last heroic fate —/ staring at my eyes, betrayed — the final cops of madness rescuing me” (27).<sup>121</sup>

Reminiscent of the “idiot Snowman” with his “[s]harp icicle in his hand” and his “heart of electric irons,” Ginsberg’s betrays Naomi in “Black Shroud” by lobotomizing her in a cold-blooded, almost unconscious, manner: he “behead[s] her silently with swift/ dispatch” (16-17). Though he has decapitated his mother without pausing to think, Ginsberg expresses doubt regarding his decision as soon as he “look[s] at/ the Medusa head” (24-25) and “beh[olds] no mad/ drawn-cheek wild-eyed or blood-splotched wrinkled forehead” (27-28). Instead, Naomi’s “tranquil” gaze makes him realize that he was mistaken to follow “the doctor’s rules” (33). Like Ginsberg’s suggestion that he, rather than Solomon, may have been mentally unstable, his inability to determine whether or not the madness that he attributed to his mother was the product of his misperception makes him question if he is the one who is mad. He writes, “wonder/ why I’d covered her so early with black shroud./ Had I been insane myself and hasty?” (38-40).

Like Solomon’s escape from the madhouse in Part III of *Howl*, “White Shroud,” which Ginsberg referred to as the dream epilogue of *Kaddish*, expresses his desire to unite with his mother in a domestic setting.<sup>122</sup> At the beginning of the poem, he describes

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<sup>121</sup> Ginsberg suggests that Naomi thinks of him as an agent of the mental institution. He writes, she “look[s] in the mirror to see if the Insanity was Me or a carful of police” (28).

<sup>122</sup> Ginsberg composed “White Shroud” approximately a year before he wrote “Black Shroud.” In a letter written to Berenice Abbot ca. January 18, 1984, he writes, “I had a dream, a sort of epilogue 25 years later

a dream journey in which he is “summoned from [his] bed/ To the Great City of the Dead/ Where [he has] no house or home” (1-3). Like Solomon, who is “madder than” Ginsberg when he is a patient in “Rockland,” Ginsberg’s homelessness ultimately compels him to announce, “my mother [is] saner than I” (9). Ginsberg then describes a “shopping bag lady” (67) about whom he possesses intimate knowledge. Before he recognizes that she is his mother, he reveals that “[p]assersby ignored her buildingside hovel many years” (71) and “[s]ometimes she disappeared into state hospital back wards” (73). He is “horrified a little” (76) by her and worried that no one would “take care of such a woman,/ familiar, half-neglected on her street” (76-77). After he examines her closely, he writes, “I recognized she was my mother, Naomi” (83). During their conversation, Naomi echoes her complaint in *Kaddish* that her family wants to “shut [her] up”<sup>123</sup> in the madhouse because she is ““a great woman”” (26). She tells him, ““I’m living alone,/ you all abandoned me, I’m a great woman, I came here/ by myself, I wanted to live, now I’m too old to take care/ of myself, I don’t care, what are you doing here?”” (87-90).<sup>124</sup> Ginsberg decides that he will finally be able to live with and take care of his mother if he lives next to “her cave” in an “unpainted basement storeroom” (95, 96). Finally, he would “have a home, with Naomi, at long last,/ at long long last, my search was ended in this pleasant way” (107-8). When Ginsberg awakens from his dream, he returns “to living Poesy” (125) where he is able to unite with his mother in the moment of the poem’s composition.

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to a long poem I once wrote, *Kaddish*.” See *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2008), 414.

<sup>123</sup> Similarly, after Ginsberg takes Naomi to Lakewood, he writes, “I shut her up by now — big house REST HOME ROOMS — gave the landlady her money for the week — carried up the iron valise — sat on bed waiting for escape” (14).

<sup>124</sup> Ginsberg quotes Naomi throughout the Narrative section of *Kaddish*. Her words almost always indicate that her madness is a product of her inability to communicate with him and others. For example, see 14, 19, 21, 25, and 26-28.

Ginsberg and Naomi's textual union in *Kaddish* is most apparent at the conclusion of the Narrative section. Ginsberg includes a letter from Naomi that he received "2 days after her death." In reality, this posthumous message, which I have quoted in its entirety below, contains fragments of two letters that Naomi sent to Ginsberg and his brother Eugene:

‘The key is in the window, the key is in the sunlight at the window — I have the key — Get married Allen don't take drugs<sup>125</sup> — the key is in the bars, in the sunlight in the window.

Love,  
  
your mother'

which is Naomi — (31)

Naomi's reference to Ginsberg's personal life ("Get married Allen don't take drugs") echoes a letter she wrote to him days before she died. After repeatedly asking him to find a job and get married, she writes, "I hope you are not taking drugs as suggested by your poetry [*Howl*]" (*HO* 156). In her letter to Eugene, Naomi explains that she possesses a "key" that will allow her to escape from the madhouse: "God's informers come to my bed, and God himself I saw in the sky. The sunshine showed too, a key on the side of the window for me to get out."<sup>126</sup> This "key" becomes much more than a means for Naomi to escape from the madhouse. In fact, Ginsberg uses it to unite with his mother and compose *Kaddish*. Their textual union is particularly apparent in his multiple revisions of her letter

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<sup>125</sup> In *Family Business*, Michael Schumacher writes, "Allen sent his mother a copy of *Howl and Other Poems*, and Naomi's response was probably the last letter she would write. She died on June 9, 1956, and the [letter she wrote to Allen] was postmarked the day of her funeral. Her heartbreaking letter was one of the most powerful letters Allen would ever receive, and it was largely the inspiration for his determination to write a proper eulogy—or *Kaddish*—for his mother" (49).

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself*, 220. In *Naked Angels*, Tytell argues that this letter, "which Allen rewrote himself, revives the spirit of millenarian optimism that Naomi epitomizes throughout the poem, a pathetically disoriented yet actively striving figure" (238).

in the poem. The “key” first appears in the Proem after Ginsberg suggests that Naomi’s past is full of possibility. She finally moves “[t]oward the Key in the window — and the great Key lays its head of light on top of Manhattan, and over the floor, and lays down on the sidewalk — in a single vast beam” (8). Ginsberg and Naomi are united in this beam by poetry which “shines on old hospitals — as on my yard” (31). In the Lament, Ginsberg expresses his desire “to have seen her painting” and “writing a last letter — and her image in the sunlight at the window” (33). Like his description of Naomi’s paintings and photographs of Camp No-Worry, Ginsberg offers multiple versions of her letter: “‘The key is in the sunlight at the window in the bars the key is in the sunlight’” (33). This key ultimately inspires Ginsberg’s poetry: he takes the key that Naomi leaves behind and forms a bond with her in *Kaddish* that was impossible to sustain while she was alive. He tells her “that the key should be left behind [...] to the living — that can take/ that slice of light in hand — and turn the door — and look back see/ Creation glistening backwards to the same grave, size of universe, size of the tick of the hospital’s clock on the archway over the white door” (33).<sup>127</sup>

Ginsberg forms all-inclusive textual unions in *Howl* and *Kaddish* that virtually dissolve the boundaries between in/sane, self/other, and inside/outside the madhouse. Yet the types of bonds that he forms with Solomon in *Howl* and Naomi in *Kaddish* are different from one another. Though Ginsberg eventually identifies Solomon as the co-author of *Howl*, he scarcely acknowledges Solomon’s collaboration in the poem itself. In addition, Ginsberg’s and Solomon’s texts signal the contradictory nature of their literary

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<sup>127</sup> The living who can “look back see,” recalls the beginning of *Kaddish* where Ginsberg describes himself composing the poem while “looking back on the mind itself that saw an American city” (7).

dialogue long after the publication of *Howl*. In *Kaddish*, on the other hand, miscommunication, and antagonism define Ginsberg's textual union with Naomi. Whereas, to borrow Ed Sanders's words, *Howl* offers a "declarative throb-answer"<sup>128</sup> on which Solomon and others members of the mad generation depend for their stories and sanity, Ginsberg must follow in his mother's footsteps, rely on her perspective, attempt to see through her eyes, and use her words in order to tell her story. As a result, his tone in *Kaddish* is ambiguous and interrogative. Whether they are dependent or interdependent in nature, textual unions continue to be important to madhouse literature in the era of deinstitutionalization. Even though madhouses have largely been replaced by psychiatric drugs and prison cells, writing opens up a third space where writers can form bonds with others and thus avoid being isolated and defined as "mad." The bonds they form with (former) mental patients or permanent outpatients who take psychiatric drugs can help them invent new rhetorical and poetic strategies to escape from the madhouse that America has become.

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<sup>128</sup> Sanders, *The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg*, 22.

## Conclusion

And I stopped writing altogether. I became a bookseller and am still tranquilized. Claude [Pelieu] is wrong to see tranquilizers as a punishment inflicted on one or as a castration of one's rebelliousness. I refer to Mark Vonnegut's book on schizophrenia called *The Eden Express*. Tranquilizers are supposed to be the only treatment devised in the mental health field in the last 25 years and Vonnegut points out that they are the unromantic present-day solution to what he feels to be a strictly bio-chemical (not a philosophical, political, or literary) problem. He writes from personal experience, as I do. Where does this leave, say, Artaud's Van Gogh essay<sup>1</sup> and where does it leave all the surrealist writing on 'madness?' It leaves them in the pre-tranquilizer era of mental health history. (156-57)

–Carl Solomon, *Emergency Messages*

My primary inspiration for writing about madhouse literature is a close friend of mine who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder after being institutionalized more than a decade ago. His experience in and out of the madhouse evokes all of the major themes of my dissertation, including the multiplication of his "I" and the constant blurring of the worlds inside and outside the madhouse. It is impossible to present a coherent and comprehensive account of his story, however, because most of his memories were wiped out by his manic episode, the psychiatric drugs he was forced to take, the passage of time, or some combination of these things. What he has told me about the weeks that preceded his institutionalization (a period his doctors refer to as "hypomania") is that the world seemed infinitely more full of beauty and vitality than he had ever imagined was possible. Social and sexual inhibitions were loosened; sleep was unnecessary; numbers conveyed hidden meanings; money was something to share rather than possess; impromptu songs and histories flowed out his mouth; he danced and laughed in ecstasy like a child. Though he did not appear to be "a threat to himself or others," those closest to him recognized that he was not acting like himself and decided to have him committed

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<sup>1</sup> Solomon is referring to Antonin Artaud's "Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society" (1947). See Antonin Artaud, *Artaud Anthology* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1965), 135-63.

to a psychiatric ward of a hospital. After he was strapped down to a gurney and placed in an ambulance, he remembers wanting to console the medic, whose eyes seemed full of compassionate tears. He also remembers talking to what he presumed were hidden cameras at the hospital, writing a letter of complaint to the hospital board, and (like it happened yesterday) being injected with a sedative while he was held down by nurses and attendants. Following this initial struggle, the mental ward routine was a monotonous and terrifying nightmare that he shared with his fellow patients. He swallowed his meds in liquid and pill form and listened to staff as they explained to him that he suffers from a biochemical imbalance.

My friend would need to take Lithium for the rest of his life, they said, like a diabetic needs to take insulin. *“I (and Allen Ginsberg, with whom I’ve been in rather steady contact) have been ex-mental patients for nearly forty years now.”*<sup>2</sup> He repeatedly posed the same question to psychiatric professions and loved ones directly before and months after he was released from the mental institution, but he never got the answer he was looking for. “Do I seem normal to you?” always prompted the response, “Not quite.” He was taking more than a dozen pills a day, including Lithium, Lorazepam, and Haloperidol, drugs designed to stabilize mood swings, slow brain activity, and prevent delusional thinking. He couldn’t tell if his less than normal behavior was a side effect of these drugs or a product of his bipolar disorder. Consequently, it was impossible to bridge the divide between his former self and this new medicated one who was not quite normal. He also couldn’t tell if he would live a shorter life as a result of these drugs or if they were causing permanent brain damage, which is something that autopsies and studies have suggested for decades.

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<sup>2</sup> Carl Solomon, *EM* 10.

The end of “the pre-tranquilizer era of mental health history” to which all of the writers I discuss belong signals the beginning of an era that is defined by the deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals and the increased use of psychiatric drugs to discipline (former) mental patients and others. One might imagine that the closure of these institutions across the country would signal their eventual disappearance. Instead, they continued to shape the perspectives of (former) patients and the general public through a widespread internalization of psychiatric discourse and the expansion of community psychiatric services throughout the country. A study of madhouse literature in this era might consider how the use of psychiatric drugs and the popularization of their related discourses multiply the “I.” These issues might be explored in the texts of the writers I discuss, each of whom published madhouse texts in both eras.<sup>3</sup> Also, we might ask if Solomon truly regards tranquilizers as a solution to the madness that he almost always denies,<sup>4</sup> or if his opinion reflects a decision to echo the opinions of the psychiatric professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc.) whom he depends on to remain out of the madhouse. After all, Solomon also writes that he is haunted by “ghastly memories [that] blend into the present mood and form one’s fabric of awareness” (*EM* 10). The degree to which people need psychiatric medication to remain “stable” or “balanced” (i.e., sane) is almost always unclear. These drugs have become such an integral part of their identity that it is nearly impossible for them to distinguish between

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from several texts that constitute Ginsberg and Solomon’s decades-long literary dialogue, these texts include Fritz Peters’s *Blind Flight* (1966), Mary Jane Ward’s *Counterclockwise* (1969) and *The Other Caroline* (1970), and Paul Hackett’s *The Faded Elegance* (1970).

<sup>4</sup> As I have suggested in Chapter Four, Solomon often contradicts himself in his texts. He declares, for instance, that “Ginsberg isn’t mad” (*MP* 16) and “Ginsberg is nuts” (54). In fact, the contradictory nature of his texts is apparent in a line that undermines the rest of the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Solomon suggests why he might have “stopped writing altogether.” In “A Plea for Zero,” he writes, “Only by Artaud are we not deceived, / By the idea that language is merely gabble, / That one would do better to chew gum perpetually than to talk” (18).

the mental disorder from which they ostensibly suffer, the side effects of their psychiatric drugs, and the withdrawal symptoms that they may experience if they stop taking them. People who take psychiatric drugs often mistakenly regard their side effects as behavior typical of someone who has a psychiatric disorder. Likewise, as Robert Whitaker notes, “Although the public may think that ‘crazy’ people are likely to behave in violent ways, this was not true of mental patients prior to the introduction of neuroleptics” in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup>

Years removed from his institutionalization, it seemed that almost no one believed they were completely mentally healthy. “*What had changed, and changed quite suddenly, was the consciousness of not being mad.*”<sup>6</sup> He had to go to a community psychiatric clinic on a bi-weekly basis as a condition of his madhouse parole and to qualify for Medicare, Medicaid, disability checks, and food stamps. The shame that he experienced in the waiting room weighed heavily on him. It was a place where you found a reason to avert your eyes. If people spoke, and they rarely did, it was owing to some emergency like running out of cigarettes, which just about everyone smoked. They took the edge off the shakiness and unease that you felt as a side effect of the meds; they also gave you a good excuse to go outside before you met your psychiatrist or social worker. He was lucky enough to befriend some fellow bi-polars later. They provided him with camaraderie and put a humorous spin on what seemed an otherwise hopeless situation. Sometimes his bond with one of them was the only thing that could convince him to take the meds that people assured him were saving his life. Anyway, everyone else seemed to be taking them, so why shouldn't he?

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Whitaker, *Mad in America*, 186.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, 460.

Over the past several decades, the distinction between the inside and outside the madhouse has almost disappeared. Scientific and popular psychiatric discourses are more central to U.S. culture than ever before. The preventative measures that once defined the mental hygiene movement have become an integral part of everyday life. Mental patients have largely been replaced by an extremely fragmented community of millions of medicated outpatients. In this culture of perpetual judgment, television talk shows and advertisements suggest that anyone can quickly and accurately diagnose mental disorders. Apart from a skeptical but constant faith that pharmaceutical companies will discover new and improved remedies for mental health problems, this disjointed community is defined by a familiarity with the large number of madhouse texts that have appeared since the 1960s, including self-help books, novels, movies, and autobiographies, all of which enable individuals to direct an educated psychiatric gaze on themselves and others. Long gone are the days when TV commercials for medications were limited to those for over-the-counter drugs in which, for instance, a soap opera actor famously tells the viewing audience, "I'm not a doctor but I play one on TV," before recommending Vicks Formula 44 cough syrup. Over the past two decades, direct-to-consumer marketing of psychiatric drugs has become increasingly common.<sup>7</sup> Thirty-second TV ads for drugs designed to treat a growing number of psychological disorders of adults and children feature cartoons, testimonials of satisfied customers, and the repeated use of the second-person "you." They offer misleading claims while outlining a drug's possible benefits and risks. And while these ads ask consumers to talk to their doctors, they are essentially encouraging people to diagnose themselves. Thus, a Zolof

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<sup>7</sup> See Nadeem H. Bhanji et al., "Direct-to-Consumer Marketing: An Attitude Survey of Psychiatric Physicians," *Primary Psychiatry*. 15.11 (2008): 68.

commercial for anti-anxiety disorder ends with the telling line, “When you know more about what’s wrong, you can make it right.” This community of outpatients’ internalization of psychiatric discourse turns them into agents of their own subjection and it allows psychiatric professionals to disappear almost completely from the scene.

The first thing he remembers after biting a cop is waking up in the madhouse. He was strapped to a wheelchair. “*Badge on his blue shirt. P-O-L-I-C-E. Police? Handcuffs. Criminal?*”<sup>8</sup> My friend was institutionalized for the second time less than a year after he was released from the madhouse. The violent behavior he exhibited was completely out of character. It may have been a manifestation of an acute manic episode. Perhaps it was caused by withdrawal symptoms that he experienced after he abruptly stopped taking lithium. It might have been a combination of these things, but it is impossible to tell. The only thing he knows for sure is that he could have woken up in a jail cell.

Not long before the police handcuffed my friend and brought him back to the madhouse, he gave me a copy of H. Bruce Franklin’s *Prison Literature in America*, a book that situates the prison near the center of U.S. economic, political, and cultural history. Franklin’s exploration of the tradition of prison literature in the U.S. from the slave narrative to contemporary prison writing broadened my notion of what type of texts might be included in the American literary canon. Its mark on this dissertation is apparent in my discussion of the communal perspective and the madhouse and its occupants as a text’s main character.<sup>9</sup> Even though madness and criminality frequently co-occurred in individuals’ lives prior to their institutionalization, criminal behavior perpetrated by those considered “mad” in the early Cold War placed them in a different category than their

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<sup>8</sup> Peters, *The World Next Door*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> See Franklin’s discussion of Malcolm Braly’s development of a “multiple point of view” (198) in *On the Yard*, 198-206.

“sane” counterparts. Instead of going to jail after his display of public nudity and his argument with his mother during his visit home, David Mitchell was twice handcuffed by police and brought to the madhouse; Paul and Marie Hackett used his status as a madman to exonerate him from all responsibility for his past crimes; Ginsberg avoided going to prison after his arrest for burglary by pleading that he was psychologically disabled; finally, Solomon’s Dadaist antics, including his theft of a peanut butter sandwich, led to his institutionalization. After the deinstitutionalization of the madhouse, the madman and the criminal began to converge. As madhouses closed their doors, prisons were being built across the country to keep up with an unparalleled race to incarcerate millions of Americans. Meanwhile, the criminal justice system had become the default destination for those who have been labeled “mad.” In fact, today’s prisons house as many “mad” inmates as did mental hospitals when their population peaked in 1955. A study of contemporary madhouse and prison literature would need to take into account texts written by these “mad” prisoners and the legal and psychiatric discourses that shape them. One might look, for instance, at recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings that have granted prison officials the power to force inmates to take psychiatric drugs if they are deemed dangerous to themselves or others.<sup>10</sup>

He has never attempted to write his story for fear that it would be regarded as the product of a madman. “*And I stopped writing altogether.*”<sup>11</sup> While my friend was in the madhouse, he had numerous conversations with visitors that revealed gaps in his memory. His friends and family have provided him with several incomplete versions of his institutionalizations over the years, but he can remember very little of what they

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<sup>10</sup> See *Washington v. Harper*, *Riggins v. Nevada*, and *Sell v. United States*.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Solomon, *EM*, 156.

describe. But even if he could access these memories through hypnosis or some other means, he probably would not write a detailed account of his manic episodes, months in the madhouse, or years of aftercare. His refusal to write is partly related to the unprecedented number of madhouse texts that have been published in last fifty years. He feels that his story of bi-polar disorder would either corroborate a standardized account that would define him in terms of an irreversible biochemical imbalance, or it would deviate from this account and he would be regarded as delusional or unbalanced.

The madhouse writers I discuss throughout the dissertation suggest that it is possible to write about one's experience with madness without surrendering one's authority. They employ rhetorical and poetic strategies to evade rigid categories of identity and the demands linguistic and literary conventions, project madness outside of themselves by multiplying and communalizing their "I's," and refuse to illuminate fully their life stories by interweaving gaps throughout their texts. Even though their refusal to write comprehensive accounts of madness produces texts that resist interpretation, these texts still invite readers who are familiar with generic and institutional norms to fill in the blanks. In contrast, some madhouse writers compose texts in which they rarely refer to the model of mental illness, constantly reject it, or refuse to mention it at all. Wood identifies one such text in her discussion of Zelda Fitzgerald's autobiographical novel *Save Me the Waltz*. Wood argues that the "bodily experience" of the novel's protagonist, Alabama Beggs, "is substituted for a suppressed story of mental illness."<sup>12</sup> John Wieners also resists emptying his experiences of madness and institutionalization of their meaning and nuance. His refusal to write explicitly about these experiences is particularly evident in *Asylum Poems*, which he composed in 1969 shortly after being institutionalized. In fact,

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<sup>12</sup> Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 149.

the title of this collection of poems contains its only explicit reference to the madhouse or madness. We should look for genres and forms that allow writers to veil their experiences of madness, psychiatric drugs, and incarceration, whether in the madhouse or prison. We should ask if other writers situate madness, the madhouse, the medicated self, the prison and their related discourses in the silence behind their stories yet still announce, like Wieners, “I am one of them. I am witness/ not to Whitman’s vision, but instead the/ poorhouses, the mad city asylums and re-/lief worklines. Yes I am witness not to God’s goodness, but his better or less scorn” (55-59).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> John Wieners, “Children of the Working Class,” in *Selected Poems, 1958-1984*, 176.

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