

Versions of Madness in Southern Short Fiction:
Chopin, Faulkner, and O'Connor.

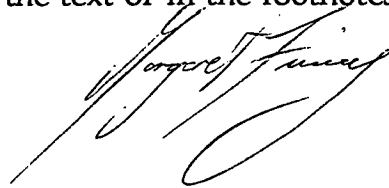
by

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other graduate diploma or higher degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text or in the footnotes.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Margaret Fanning". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the main text block.

Abstract

This thesis examines the idea that strong interconnections exist between the depiction of Southern America as a region and the use of concepts of 'madness' in the short fiction of Kate Chopin, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor. From a brief discussion of Poe, the 'father' of the short story, whose theories and works first establish the short narrative as an important literary form, and also demonstrate its particular effectiveness in exploring forms of mental distortion, this discussion moves to more extensive analysis of the works of Chopin, Faulkner, and O'Connor. Covering a period between the 1890s and the 1960s, and despite displaying differing perspectives on their region, these authors establish distinct interrelationships between the experience of the South, ideas of personal and social madness, and the unique ability of the short narrative to articulate these themes with the impact of concentrated totality.

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Introduction: Edgar Allan Poe and the The Tell-Tale Mind.

The moment when, together, the work of art and madness are born and fulfilled is the beginning of the time when the world finds itself arraigned by that work of art and responsible before it for what it is.¹

There has been much written on the themes, expressions, and techniques of what are variously termed the 'gothic' and the 'grotesque' in Southern American fiction. Similarly, the term 'madness' is frequently used in discussions and interpretations of Southern writing. These terms are, in many ways, interchangeable, as all refer to distortions, dysfunctions, and exaggerations of human experience, and all illustrate the aberrance or deformation such dysfunctions produce. Concepts of the gothic and the grotesque, however, apply to many aspects of writing, and, indeed, represent general genres in themselves. This study focusses on the specific use of ideas, themes and symbols drawn from these wider literary genres to illustrate the dark potential of mental distortion, or the mind 'in extremis'. In this discussion, therefore, the gothic and the grotesque serve to encode concepts of madness that reflect the historical, cultural and social dysfunctions, or extremes, inherent in Southern experience.

Edgar Allan Poe, described by Lewis Simpson as a 'dark diagnostician of cultural illness'², produces in his short stories some of the earliest articulations of the 'madness' of Southern experience. His establishment of the 'tale' as an important and vital form of literature is strongly connected to his life in, and knowledge of, the South,

¹ Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard, (1965: New York: Random House Inc, 1973), p. 289.

² Lewis P. Simpson, The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), p. 71.

proceeding from and legitimising uniquely Southern American traditions of storytelling. Over one hundred years later, Flannery O'Connor describes the background of oral narratives and folktales in which Poe's development of short fiction as a definitive form is grounded, identifying such storytelling as a distinctly Southern method of expressing and interpreting experience:

The Southerner knows he can do more justice to reality by telling a story than he can by discussing problems or proposing abstractions. We live in a complex region and you have to tell stories if you want to be anyway truthful about it.³

Poe's use of the short story as a powerful medium through which to explore aspects of madness, and to examine expressions of irrationality or insanity as a metaphor for wider social and historical structures, prefigures the development and extension of these themes in the works of many later Southern writers. Authors such as Kate Chopin, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor demonstrate close associations with Poe in their articulation of the relationships between Southern experience and forms of mental dysfunction or aberrance, and their use of the unique, unified and concentrated scope of the short story as a vehicle for such 'versions of madness'.

Poe, often described as the father of the short story, was specific in his aims for the 'tale'. In his well-known review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales he argues the case for the short story as 'the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose'⁴. The tale itself he defines as a 'short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal', with its impact and scope being due primarily to its short compass, or 'the immense force derivable from totality'. This ties in with Poe's belief that deep emotion or 'exultation of the soul' is by

³ C.Ross Mullins, 'Flannery O'Connor, An Interview' quoted in Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, eds, The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 240.

⁴ E.A.Poe, 'Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales', Graham's Magazine XX, (May 1842), 298 - 300, in R.L.Hough (ed) Literary Criticism of Edgar Allan Poe, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 134.

nature transitory, and that Art should attempt to match this through a combination of unity and brevity:

... in almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed in one sitting ... Extreme brevity will degenerate into epigrammatism; but the sin of extreme length is even more unpardonable. (p. 135)

Poe's argument then moves into a discussion of how this forceful totality may be achieved in the short story. The 'skilful literary artist' (p. 136), he states, must initially conceptualise a 'certain unique or single effect' to form the basis of the tale, rather than an event or series of incidents. Having established this central idea or atmosphere, actions, experiences and incidents should be used solely to extend the preconceived effect into a carefully crafted story. Poe is explicit about the fact that the art of the tale lies in total concentration on this single idea:

If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design, (p. 135)

and Poe's own use of this single unifying 'effect' may be seen in stories such as 'The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and 'The Black Cat'. The result of binding all the elements of such tales to a central idea is that the reader becomes entirely drawn into the work and experiences the author's intention 'unblemished, because undisturbed', receiving a sense of 'fullest satisfaction' at the art that has crafted the tale.

The tale may also be seen as having certain points of superiority over Poe's ideal literary form, the rhymed poem that 'might be perused in an hour' (p. 134). As the short story does not aspire to the elevated beauty of the poem, it may range across 'a table-land of far greater extent' (p. 136) unhampered by the constraints of rhythm and metre, and open to 'a vast variety of modes or inflections of thought and expression'. As Fred Chappell writes almost a hundred and fifty

years later, '... it can be voiced in almost any known mode: realism, naturalism, fantasy, allegory, parable, anecdote'⁵. As such, the tale is accessible to a far wider audience than the poem and affords the author a highly flexible medium with which to develop 'all points of thought or expression which have their basis in Truth'.

Poe's conception of the short story is, as Vincent Buranelli points out in his study of Poe, 'too narrow to do justice to all writers who have entered the field, but eminently adjusted to Poe's practice'⁶. Poe's short stories are outstanding examples of the success of his theories of unity and flexibility, ranging as they do from the satirical to the esoteric, to tales of horror and psychological disturbance. In all, Poe's aim is 'the immense force derivable from totality', often in the exploration of states of mind and the relationship between the rational and the perverse. In Symbolism and American Literature, Feidelson argues that Poe himself was caught between an extreme rationalism that may be seen in tales such as 'The Purloined Letter' and 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', and an equally extreme hostility to reason, and that his tales show both the 'wonders' that can be found beyond the restrictions of reason and the aberrance and deviance that is the only path to such creativity⁷. Certainly, many of Poe's stories, and unarguably the most successful and finely-structured, use the impact of the 'unique or single effect' to draw the reader into a mind poised between reason and irrationality, or to examine the nature of psychological imbalance.

Poe's exploration of the possibilities and dysfunctions of the mind covers many aspects of aberrance that are later explored by Chopin, Faulkner and O'Connor, and which range from the basic horror and negativity of madness to the hypersensitivity and creativity of consciousness unbounded by reason. At its most uncomplicated,

⁵ F.Chappell in Sudden Fiction: American Short-Short Stories, ed. R.Shapard and J.Thomas, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 227.

⁶ V.Buranelli, Edgar Allan Poe, (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1961), p. 67.

⁷ C.Feidelson Jnr, Symbolism and American Literature, (1953, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 37.

Poe's fascination with the mind is with its 'perverseness', or the inexplicable 'innate and primitive impulse'⁸ to do what is wrong or self-destructive. 'In theory, no reason can be more unreasonable,' he writes in 'The Imp of the Perverse', 'but, in fact, there is none more strong'. The narrator of 'The Imp of the Perverse' experiences such a breakdown of reason after executing a seemingly perfect murder, which Poe describes in precise, rational language that matches the murderer's own detached and 'scientific' actions:

But I need not vex you with impertinent details. I need not describe the easy artifices by which I substituted, in his bed-room candle-stand, a wax-light of my own making for the one which there I found. The next morning he was discovered dead in bed ... The idea of detection never once entered my brain. Of the remains of the fatal taper I had myself carefully disposed. I had left no shadow of a clue by which it would be possible to convict, or even to suspect, me of the crime. (CT, p. 283).

Paradoxically, it is the very success of the crime that ultimately 'haunts' and 'harasses' the murderer into a 'fit of perversity' in which all rational and social norms are broken. In a complete reversal of the 'thorough deliberation' with which the murder was planned, the narrator recognises with horror that his desire to confess is becoming irrepressible, and 'to think, in my situation, was to be lost' (p. 284). The calmness and precision of the deed itself gives way to a confusion of motion and noise as the murderer 'bounds' and 'rushes like a madman' through crowded streets until he is caught and the secret 'bursts' from him. Having broken his own and society's laws of rationality in the grip of this 'fit of perversity', the murderer then moves entirely beyond the bounds of consciousness, and thus reason, as he swoons.

The theme of perversity is, however, only one aspect of Poe's exploration of the mind, although it recurs in many of his tales - the

⁸ E.A.Poe, 'The Imp of the Perverse' in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, (New York: Random House Inc., 1975), p. 281. All subsequent references to tales are also from this volume, hereafter abbreviated to 'CT'.

narrator of 'The Black Cat' wounds and then hangs his pet 'because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence' (CT, p. 225); the narrator of 'Ligeia' weds a woman he loathes with a 'hatred belonging more to demon than to man' (p. 661) despite his continuing love for Ligeia; the convalescent walks for hours in the night rain following 'the man of the crowd'. Stories such as 'The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and 'William Wilson' develop more complex ideas of reason and irrationality that extend beyond perversity into the realms of obsession, neurosis, corruption and the supernatural as a projection of the disturbed mind.

'The Tell-Tale Heart', like 'The Imp of the Perverse', concerns a murderer whose mind betrays him against all the dictates of reason. 'The Tell-Tale Heart', however, uses Poe's ideas of totality to delve directly into the 'diseased' mind of obsession. Rather than the logical preamble that prefaces 'The Imp of the Perverse', 'The Tell-Tale Heart' leaps into an unsettling string of exclamations and questions that underline the narrator's instability and agitation even as he protests his sanity and calmness:

True! - nervous - very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am;
but why will you say that I am mad? ... I heard all things in the
heaven and in the earth, I heard many things in hell. How, then,
am I mad? Harken! and observe how healthily - how calmly I
can tell you the whole story. (p. 303).

In this tale, as Feidelson argues, we see the possibilities that lie beyond rationality in the narrator's 'sharpened' senses, the 'sagacity' and 'power' he feels over the old man, and the endless patience and stealth with which he creeps into the old man's room at night. The 'wise precautions' that the murderer takes to conceal the body and the confidence with which he leads the police around the house, both of which he mistakes for signs of sanity, are also the exaggerated machinations of madness, or of a mind unrestricted by reason.

For all its ingenuity, such insanity is, however, shown as being aberrant and horrifying. Although obsessed with deformity - the old man's blind, blue, 'vulture' eye - the narrator is blind to his own

mental deformity. As James Gargano argues, this is also part of Poe's carefully structured exploration of the insane mind:

... Poe presides with precision at the psychological drama he describes. He makes us understand that the voluble murderer has been tortured by the nightmarish terrors he attributes to his victim ... Poe assuredly knows what the narrator never suspects and what, by the controlled conditions of the tale, he is not meant to suspect - that the narrator is a victim of his own self-torturing obsessions. Poe so manipulates the action that the murder, instead of freeing the narrator, is shown to heighten his agony and intensify his delusions.⁹

As with the House of Usher, the events of the story take place in darkened, nightmarish rooms, the shutters 'close fastened, through fear', that mirror the black and enclosed mind of the madman, its creativity inverted and distorted into obsession. As in 'The Fall of the House of Usher', similarly, such symbolic dimensions add to the unity and wholeness of the tale by developing interrelationships that tie events, settings, characters and experiences closely together, creating a series of internal reflections and refractions within the self-contained world of the narrative. Poe clearly indicates that the narrator's fixation on the old man's abnormal 'evil eye' is, similarly, a projection and reflection of the narrator's own mental distortion and self-obsession, a fact that is made explicit by the murderer's inability to distinguish his own heartbeat from that of the old man throughout the tale. By seeking to 'rid myself of the eye forever', he is unconsciously attempting to purge his own deformity; however, as with Roderick Usher, Poe shows that once pushed beyond the bounds of reason, the mind cannot return - even though the old man is dead, the murderer continues to project the beating of his own 'tell-tale heart' onto the corpse beneath the floorboards and ultimately betrays himself:

Was it possible they heard it not? ... I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! - and now - again! - hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!

⁹ James W. Gargano, 'The Question of Poe's Narrators' in Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert Regan, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967), p. 167.

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! - tear up the planks! - here, here! - it is the beating of his hideous heart!" (p. 306).

'The Fall of the House of Usher' also explores neurosis and horror. In this tale Poe deliberately uses the gothic gloom, mystery and melancholy of the House of Usher and its 'black and lurid tarn' (p. 231) to create a physical equivalent of Roderick Usher's neurosis. Usher is, as has often been pointed out, his house; he is the sole heir of a line of sole heirs and the title of the 'House of Usher' is used by the peasantry to mean 'both the family and the family mansion' (p. 232). The house itself appears as a face with 'vacant and eye-like windows' to the approaching narrator, and the dark and foreboding description of the mansion which so 'unnerves' the narrator at the outset of the tale is implicitly linked with the similarly disturbing description of Usher's 'ghastly', 'pallid' and 'wild' appearance two pages on. The very exaggeration of such gothic settings and descriptions serves to underline Usher's hypersensitivity, in which normal perceptions become exaggerated to the point of irrationality:

He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of a certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him to horror. (p. 235).

In entering the House of Usher, the narrator enters Usher's nightmare world that straddles the fissure between sanity and insanity much as the house itself stands precariously between stability and collapse. He becomes, like the house and Usher's twin sister, a form of double or doppelgänger, this doubling highlighting Usher's mental dysfunction. His rational and detailed observations contrast markedly with Usher's violent oscillations between excitement and melancholy, and give a clear picture of 'the artistic mind in extremis'¹⁰. Usher, unlike the narrator of 'The Tell-Tale Heart', is fully aware of his

¹⁰ Feidelson, p. 41.

instability, and the surreal art and 'elaborate', 'singular' music he produces are bought at the price of obsessive horror at his condition.

The climax of the tale, in which Usher's twin and alter-ego Madeline returns from the grave to claim him, and which has been open to many and varied interpretations, must be seen at least in part to be a reflection of this horror. As in 'The Tell-Tale Heart', Poe moves beyond the gothic situations he creates and shows that despite the extraordinary creative possibilities of a mind untrammelled by reason, the ultimate result of irrationality is destruction. Usher's neurosis is made doubly unbearable by the fact that he recognises both 'the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne' (CT, p. 237), and the inevitable doom this implies. His attempts to 'alleviate his malady' through the rational company of the narrator fail. The death of his twin, Madeline, with whom he has always shared 'sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature' serves as a warning that heightens both his neurosis and his horror. The terror of the climax, with its suitably wild storm, mysterious noises, and bloodstained living corpse, maintains the tension that Poe has built up throughout the tale, simultaneously utilising gothic conventions and moving beyond them to a more complex and sophisticated level of symbolism. It is unimportant whether Madeline has actually fought her way out of the tomb alive, or whether the narrator has been infected by the atmosphere of the house to the extent that he shares Usher's delusions. The sheer horror of Usher's death is a symbolic reflection of Poe's understanding of the horror of a mind insane, and yet still rational enough to realise the implications of such insanity.

Poe's symbolic explorations of the unbalanced mind extend to similar parallels between the mental and the physical in tales such as 'The Black Cat' and 'William Wilson'. As Usher's mental state is inextricably linked to and reflected in his crumbling, gothic mansion, which 'rushes asunder' and collapses into the tarn at his death, so are the black cat and the 'second' William Wilson physical extensions of minds balanced uneasily between reason and irrationality. The black cat, traditionally associated with witchcraft and the supernatural, is a 'monster' only insofar as it reflects the narrator's 'perversity' and

growing violence in 'The Black Cat'. The narrator himself, however, becomes obsessed with the animal and its accusing, gallows-shaped blaze that so accurately predicts his potential for murder, and ultimately views it as a kind of incubus:

Alas! neither by day or by night knew I the blessing of rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone, and in the latter I started hourly from dreams of unutterable fear to find the hot breath of the *thing* upon my face, and its vast weight - an incarnate nightmare that I had no power to shake off - incumbent upon my heart! (pp. 227 - 8).

In blaming the cat as the cause of his torment, the narrator fails to recognise it as his suppressed conscience and guilt. As in 'The Tell-Tale Heart', he believes he is free when the animal disappears, yet he has in reality only imprisoned under a further level of disguise - the wall he builds to cover the corpse of his wife. Once again the murderer is betrayed by a voice from the grave - this time not the beating of a dead heart, but by the physical manifestation of his crimes, the black cat.

In 'William Wilson', similarly, the narrator is haunted by a doppelgänger that shadows him from his schooldays through the darkened, enclosed rooms that represent the corrupt and restricted nature of his mind. Again, the incidents

... are so arranged as to trace the 'development' of Wilson's wickedness and moral blindness. Moreover, Poe's conscious artistic purpose is evident in the effective functioning of many details of symbolism and setting. 'Bright rays' from a lamp enable Wilson to see his nemesis 'vividly' at Dr Bransby's; at the critical appearance of his double at Eton, Wilson's perception is obscured by a 'faint light'; and, in the scene dealing with Wilson's exposure at Oxford, the darkness becomes almost total and the intruder's presence is 'felt' rather than seen ... this gradual extinction of light serves to point up the darkening of the narrator's vision.¹¹

It is only at the end of the tale that the narrator is confronted with the fact that the mysterious double is his own conscience, and that in killing the second William Wilson he has 'utterly ... murdered

¹¹ Gargano, p. 168.

[him]self'. The corrupt mind splits Wilson between his deeds and his conscience, creating its own reality in the physical world and allowing a merging of the natural and the supernatural that once again moves beyond the traditionally 'gothic' conventions of horror into areas of obsession and neurosis. Poe's use of the doppelgänger - the 'significant other' - as a physical manifestation of mental disjunction prefigures ideas of the 'otherness' of madness that are developed and expanded in the works of Chopin, Faulkner and O'Connor, and which explore madness as a dialectic through which society comes to terms with the disturbing or threatening 'others' within it. This sociological, cultural and historical view of madness takes a different standpoint from that of Freudian psychoanalysis, exploring concepts of mental dysfunction in terms of the dominant 'self' and the nondominant, subcultural 'other' rather than examining the nature, development and individual stages of psychosis itself.

As Poe's tales demonstrate, expressions of 'madness' are diverse and multifarious, ranging from the contradictory perversity of an 'innate and primitive impulse' to do what is self-destructive, to the obsession of 'The Black Cat', the haunting doppelgänger of 'William Wilson', and the simultaneous horror and wonder of Roderick Usher's neurotic, inverted creative energy. This diversity points to the inherent difficulties in defining 'madness' itself, which lie not so much in establishing what it 'is not', as in what Michel Foucault describes in Madness and Civilisation as the ambiguity of 'madness in its positive truth'¹². Madness is, by conventional definition, what is 'in-sane', 'not rational' or 'un-conventional', however, as Poe shows, it can also be characterised by more 'positive' elements, such as the heightened sensitivity of the narrator of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and Roderick Usher's 'singular' creativity, although these qualities are also, ultimately, associated with destruction.

One aspect of what these characters suggest, with their 'supernormal' abilities, is a plane of experience beyond that constrained by reason, and in which extraordinary creativity, sensitivity or

¹² Michel Foucault, p. xii.

awareness is possible. This concept of the 'positive truth' of madness reappears in various forms in the works of Chopin, Faulkner and O'Connor, in which characters who are not bound by what their society, conditions, or history dictate as 'normal' or 'sane' are shown as acutely aware of the true nature of events, experiences and people. Edna Pontellier's inexplicable, 'irrational' feelings of depression in Chopin's novella The Awakening, for example, are depicted as a sensitive response to the restrictive and narrowly-defined roles her society prescribes for women. Faulkner's idiot and insane narrators, Benjy Compson and Darl, 'see' through the facades erected by those around them to the reality beneath, while O'Connor's freakish, grotesque and distorted characters are the recipients of the alarming grace of God, often through the agency of prophets and fanatics who are themselves presented as 'mad'.

Poe's hypersensitive characters also imply, however, that in reaction with the 'sane' or rational world such creativity and vision is frequently destructive. Roderick Usher, for example, maintains sufficient sanity to judge his extraordinary creativity as 'in-sane', and thus a mark of his doom, while William Wilson's total divorce from the voice of 'reason' - his conscience - results in a final catastrophic confrontation in which he 'murders himself'. Similarly, in Faulkner's work, the alien 'otherness' of madness acts as a catalyst for disruption and distortion of the 'sane' world, as characters marked out by irrationality or aberrance incite 'insane', chaotic or 'un-reasonable' behaviour - such as the brutal murder of an innocent Negro man in the short story 'Dry September' - in those considered to be normal.

On another level, these damaging connections between the extraordinary and the ordinary world lead towards further definitions of what constitutes 'madness'. In contrast to the positive or creative potential of a mind unrestrained by reason, there exists a madness that acts as a mirror of dislocation and extremity. On its most basic level, such madness results from some trauma which prevents an individual - or a society - from reacting to stimuli in an appropriate or logical way. The forms such trauma takes, however, may not necessarily be obvious, and, similarly, what may seem to be appropriate behaviour on

the part of an individual may be deemed inappropriate and illogical by others. As society encodes the beliefs, opinions, myths and culture of its dominant group as 'normality', those who belong to nondominant groups, or who find such social structures oppressive, threatening or damaging, may act in a way that appears justifiable to them personally, but which is deemed insane by their society. Proceeding from this are ideas of individual 'madness' reflecting not only personal dysfunctions, but also disjunctions on a wider social, historical or cultural scale that result in conditions of extremity for the individual, and can lead to behaviour that appears grotesque, aberrant or exaggerated - a sociological rather than Freudian perspective.

What, then, is the significance of Poe's focus on madness and irrationality in his short stories? The very fact that he is best known for his tales of terror and the unbalanced mind attests to the power of these themes as carriers of meaning, and as potent sources of fascination. Certainly, themes of horror, obsession and neurosis, and other manifestations of 'the irrational state of mind, terrified at itself, yet oddly prolific'¹³ pervade his work, and are developed in varying styles and on varying levels of complexity. His explorations of these themes take what is valuable from gothic convention, such as established forms of setting and character that are instantly recognisable to his readers, and extend the gothic tale itself into a more sophisticated examination of the potential horrors of the mind.

On a structural level, Poe's theoretical goals for the short story - its focus on a 'single effect', its unity, the advantages and impact of totality - are ideally suited to the exploration of the irrational or obsessed mind. Much of the force of Poe's tales, and those of later writers such as Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty, lies in their ability to give a chillingly brief insight into a disturbed consciousness. Within the limited space of 'the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal'¹⁴ the particular horror of madness or irrationality maintains its force. In stories like 'The Black

¹³ Feidelson, p. 39.

¹⁴ Hough, p. 135.

Cat', 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher' the disturbed consciousness is both the theme and the subject, its bizarre viewpoint colouring actions, events and experiences, and its point of crisis providing the climax of the tale. In a longer work such totality is impossible. Similarly, much of the fascination of the disturbed mind lies in its ability to surprise, to present unexpected perspectives to the audience. As Poe recognises, the extended development of themes, characters and symbols required by a more extensive work, by its very nature diffuses the 'surprise' that is the impact of madness and irrationality. The advantages of scope and development inherent in longer works are therefore irrelevant when the effect that is sought depends on concentrated unity and force, as it does in tales such as 'The Tell-Tale Heart'.

Much has been written about Poe's own psychological traits and how these are reflected in his work, some critics claiming Poe was a deranged and repressed genius, others arguing his bursts of neurosis and alcoholism were rare aberrations in an otherwise 'sane' life, yet others, such as Feidelson, holding that his personality was at war between 'extreme rationalism and extreme hostility to reason'¹⁵. Undoubtedly, Poe did experience at least periods of mental disturbance, and his fascination with the irrational mind - its possibilities and its horror - mirror this. As Buranelli argues:

The relevance of his pathological psychology to his work seems evident. Considering what he saw for himself, there is no enigma in his interest in madness, neurasthenia, death, fantasy and the dissolution of personality. He was compelled by circumstance to recognise their grim existential import when otherwise he might have treated them in the romantic gothic fashion as merely good material for a particular type of story ...¹⁶

To see Poe's short stories solely as a personal reflection of a disturbed mind, however, is to underestimate the wider significance of his fascination with neurosis and irrationality.

¹⁵ Feidelson, p. 37.

¹⁶ Buranelli, p. 37.

On a broader level, Poe's short stories demonstrate his perceptions of his society, and this is particularly relevant in his representations of madness and irrationality. Much as the unnatural, inward-looking minds of characters such as Roderick Usher are mirrored by the dark, decaying and obscure world around them, so too do Poe's tales reflect aspects of the society in which he lived. Feidelson argues that Poe 'was not, like Emerson and Whitman, primarily in conflict with a rationalistic society; he was at war with himself'¹⁷; however, the recurring concentration on tension between the rational and the irrational in Poe's stories points beyond the merely personal to a dislocation in this 'rationalistic society' itself. As Faulkner does in his stories of Yoknapatawpha County, Poe shows that the corruptions and distortions beneath the surface of America's new and developing society are all the more grotesque and damaging because they are hidden beneath an idealised view of American life. The sheer distance between ideal and reality adds to its horror. In Poe's time, although America was no longer seen as the symbolic 'New Eden' of the first settlers, it was still romanticised as a land of unqualified reason, opportunity, truth and justice. Poe's prevalent use of madness and aberration points symbolically to the fact that this utopian American society had, in reality, been tainted and 'betrayed' by war, greed, exploitation and suffering. This was particularly true of the South, seen as a romantic, exotic area replete with belles, gallant officers and gracious plantations, with little or no recognition of its more disturbing problems.

Poe's use of madness and irrationality, therefore, may be seen in some ways as a symbolic reflection of the disjunction and tension he saw, or felt unconsciously, in a society idealised as just and 'rationalistic'. His exploration of the creative possibilities that lie beyond the bounds of rationality illustrates the limitations of logic, science and reason unqualified by imagination, art and beauty. The destruction that inevitably goes hand in hand with such creativity in his tales, however, simultaneously shows the dangers of instability and irrationality whether they be on a mental or social level. The

¹⁷ Feidelson, p. 37.

examination of what is abnormal or destructive in society through the parallel of the disturbed mind is a theme that is continually developed by Southern writers after Poe. His exploration of the 'gothic' areas of the mind and the aberrant behaviour they produce sets the scene for later Southern writers such as Kate Chopin, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor, and his development of the short story leads the way for its establishment as an important literary genre among Southern writers in particular. Although 'the blame for fathering this form can't be placed on Poe alone'¹⁸, Poe's contribution to American literature in general, and to the short story and the articulation of the Southern American mentality in particular, cannot be underestimated.

The powerful impact of Poe's development of the short story and its unique effectiveness in expressing 'versions of madness' is particularly evident in the works of Chopin, Faulkner and O'Connor. In a gallery of Southern writers who have, as O'Connor describes it, 'a penchant for writing about freaks'¹⁹, and in comparison to figures such as Andrew Lytle, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers, these three authors demonstrate both a distinctive concentration on the aspects, expressions and significance of madness, and also profoundly different areas of focus in their treatment of madness itself, and in the examination of the relationships between madness and Southern experience. These writers also clearly work towards an elaboration of the idea of madness not as a clinical term, but as a figure for the observation and interpretation of human behaviour. To this end, Poe, Chopin and Faulkner draw from and develop traditions of the gothic, illustrating the shadowy, mysterious, and nightmarish aspects of the disordered mind, while both Faulkner and, in particular, O'Connor also utilise the exaggeration and freakishness of the grotesque to reflect specifically mental distortion, endowing these more general literary genres with particular relevance in the context of the mind and its darker possibilities. At the same time, the wide diversity of perspective

¹⁸ Charles Johnson in Sudden Fiction, p. 232.

¹⁹ Flannery O'Connor, 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction' in Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works, selected and notated by Sally Fitzgerald, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Inc, 1988), p. 817.

these writers display emphasises the inherent ambiguities not only of madness itself, but also of Southern society, history, culture and myth in relation to the human condition. In engaging with these themes Kate Chopin, William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor in particular stand out among Southern writers in their development of Poe's approaches to the short story, and demonstrate that, as Foucault describes it,

... through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to reveal there its non-sense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages within itself the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness that interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.²⁰

²⁰ Foucault, p. 288.

Kate Chopin: Beyond Regionalism.

Story-writing - at least with me - is the spontaneous expression of impressions gathered goodness knows where.¹

Kate Chopin, writing in the 1890s, demonstrates the extension and development of Poe's 'tales' in Southern writing. Producing short fiction almost exclusively - she, like Poe, wrote only two novella-length works - Chopin also explores concepts of Southernness and the implications of belonging to Southern society in stories that range from cameos such as 'Old Aunt Peggy' and 'A Little Free-Mulatto' to her most well-known novella, The Awakening. In 'reimagining and remaking [the South] in the act of seeing and describing it'² Chopin, again like Poe, utilises literary forms and conventions such as folklore, mythology and the gothic, investing them with a more sophisticated level of symbolism and meaning. In Chopin's case these conventions are used particularly to examine aspects of marginalisation in her society and to explore the states of mind that result from disjunctions between the individual and their community.

The Southern framework of Chopin's writing is pronounced, and has led to much of her work being viewed as simply 'regionalist' or 'local colourist', particularly by early critics. Many of Chopin's first works are, indeed, examples of the 'regional writing' popular in post-war America - a genre that reflected the new feeling of fragmentation and division in the country through its emphasis on difference - and

¹ Kate Chopin, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, ed. Per Seyersted, (1969: Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), p. 722. Hereafter abbreviated as 'CW'.

² Richard Gray, Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. xii.

focus on 'the miniature, the quaint and the sentimental'³ aspects of Southern life and society. These works, however, as Helen Taylor points out in her introduction to Kate Chopin Portraits,

... gave Chopin the necessary apprenticeship and boost to her confidence which led her to explore bolder, more sensitive themes, culminating in the rich mixture, in The Awakening, of psychological realism, incisive characterisation, and local colour in its most sophisticated form.⁴

Equally importantly, they display what Per Seyersted terms Chopin's 'intense curiosity about life'⁵. Despite the demands of a large family and a position in society that involved many social 'duties', Chopin maintained a close observation of the community around her, both on the Chopin family's cotton plantations at Cloutierville, in St Louis, and in New Orleans, where she, like Edna Pontellier in The Awakening, developed the habit of walking in order to catch what she saw as 'so many rare little glimpses of life'⁶ apparent around the city.

Chopin's marked awareness of these 'rare little glimpses of life' results in a perceptive attention to detail in her work. Stories such as 'Athénaïse', 'Love on the Bon-Dieu', 'At the 'Cadian Ball' and the well-known 'Désirée's Baby' demonstrate her ability to create an evocative sense of place and atmosphere in even the most economic narrative. A few lines in 'Désirée's Baby', for example, provide a tableau of wealthy plantation life that is opulent and sensually immediate in its description of heat, languid stillness and exotic richness:

She sat in her room, one hot afternoon, in her *peignoir*, listlessly drawing through her fingers the strands of her long, silky brown hair that hung about her shoulders. The baby, half naked, lay asleep upon her own great mahogany bed, that was like a

³ Helen Taylor, introduction © 1979, Kate Chopin Portraits, (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1979), p. xi.

⁴ Taylor, p. xii.

⁵ Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, (1969: Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 41.

⁶ Kate Chopin, The Awakening and Selected Stories, ed. Sandra m. Gilbert, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 165.

sumptuous throne, with its satin-lined half-canopy. One of La Blanche's little quadroon boys - half naked too - stood fanning the child slowly with a fan of peacock feathers.⁷

Similarly, her skilful reproduction of Creole, Cajun and Negro speech-patterns not only reflects her sensitivity to the subtleties of race and culture, but adds to the depth of her characters and their interactions. In 'Athénaïse', the differences of culture, ideology and social position between Athénaïse, a young Cajun bride from the country, and her Creole admirer, Gouvernail, are epitomised in their conversation, in which Athénaïse's musical, 'organic' dialect indicates her passionate and natural character, while Gouvernail, the New Orleans man of letters, uses diction that is far more formal, genteel and correct, suggesting his 'superior' social standing:

... Athénaïse lifted her voice again: 'Mr. Gouvernail, did you remark that young man sitting on the opposite side from us, coming in, with a grey coat an' a blue ban' aroun' his hat? ... Don't you think he looked something, - not very much, of co'se, - but don't you think he had a little faux-air of Montéclin?'

'I think he looked strikingly like Montéclin,' assented Gouvernail, with the one idea of prolonging the conversation. 'I meant to call your attention to the resemblance, and something drove it out of my head.'

'The same with me,' returned Athénaïse. 'Ah, my dear Montéclin! I wonder w'at he is doing now?' (CW, p. 448)

Chopin's awareness of speech-patterns and dialect adds to the reality of her characters. Werner Berthoff describes them as

... real physical presences; invariably they strike us as having actual body, breath, color, and temperature, above and beyond the demands of quaint regionalist literature and despite what he terms the 'constraints' of 'current magazine conventions'⁸.

⁷ Kate Chopin, CW, p. 242.

⁸ Warner Berthoff, *The Ferment of Realism: American Literature 1884 - 1919*, (1965: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 89.

Several aspects and implications of this sensitivity to 'Southernness' are important in Chopin's examination of interactions between the individual and the social group, and her exploration of the 'madness' or disorientated states of mind that may result from disjunctions in this relationship. In her early stories, Chopin differs from Poe in that she views her society as being sufficiently flexible, in some circumstances, to accommodate 'madness', rather than forcing the disturbed mind into isolation. Whereas Poe's use of insanity focuses closely on the horrifying alienation of madness, Chopin extends her exploration of the irrational consciousness to include not only the tragic and the marginalised, but also the possibility of acceptance and rehabilitation within the community. Stories such as 'Beyond the Bayou', 'After the Winter' and 'The Bênitous' Slave' portray adaptability and accommodation on the part of both individuals and their society that may be seen as arising directly from the diversity of what Seyersted describes as a 'picturesque and cosmopolitan' social conglomerate of 'Creoles and Cajuns, Negroes and mulattoes, Germans, Italians, Irish and Americans.'⁹

In this multifaceted society, wide differences of opinion, belief and behaviour existed side by side, not only in cities such as New Orleans, but also in smaller communities. To alienate the 'different' in such communities would lead to social breakdown and rule out the positive possibilities of diversity such as cultural richness or the opportunity to share technical skills. By necessity and for its own benefit, therefore, Southern society developed a tolerance of the unusual or the unfamiliar. The recognition of this in works such as 'Beyond the Bayou', 'After the Winter' and 'The Bênitous' Slave' ties in with what Taylor sees as the optimism of Chopin's writing - an optimism that is, arguably, at its most evident only in her early stories of small, rural communities:

Chopin's work resounds with metaphors of epiphany - awakening, discovery, the breaking of light, the delight of a spontaneous laugh, the finding of self after a long period of sleep or darkness.

⁹ Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*, p. 41.

Many of her short stories conclude hopefully, joyfully, triumphantly.¹⁰

To see only this optimism is to underestimate Chopin's understanding of the darker side of madness and irrationality, against which such 'metaphors of epiphany' stand out with heightened impact and symbolic significance.

In both 'Beyond the Bayou' and 'After the Winter' Chopin uses the landscape as a symbolic as well as a physical parallel to the journeys her central characters make from madness to sanity. La Folle, 'the madwoman', in 'Beyond the Bayou' and M'sieur Michel in 'After the Winter' must both move from isolation to some form of community before they achieve their 'epiphany' or rebirth - La Folle from her lonely cabin on a spit between the bayou and the forest, M'sieur Michel from 'the hill far off that was in black shadow against the sky' (CW, p. 188). Neither has been alienated by their society; rather, their isolation is self-imposed and accepted. In La Folle's case:

People at Bellissime had grown used to her and her way, and they thought nothing of it. Even when 'Old Mis' died, they did not wonder that La Folle had not crossed the bayou, but had stood upon her side of it, wailing and lamenting. (p. 175)

Once the individual has made the decision to return to a more normal social setting, however, the community, or a representative of the community such as Joe Duplan in 'After the Winter', reacts with support and an implicit understanding of the mental distance traversed in this physical journey.

The physical setting in these stories also acts in a way that reflects Poe's ideas of unity and totality. By framing the action in a landscape that, like Poe's dark and gothic mansions, symbolically reflects the themes of the narrative, Chopin achieves a concentrated and enclosed focus on the central characters and their experience. La Folle's madness - her mental isolation - is mirrored in her solitary existence on the 'point of land' that juts into the 'crescent' of the bayou, which itself symbolises the barrier her 'mania' sets up between her and

¹⁰ Taylor, pp. xv - xvi.

the sane world. In a similar way, images established within the first few paragraphs of 'Beyond the Bayou' develop and reverberate as the tale progresses, creating parallels, leitmotifs and symbols not only in terms of the physical setting but also in terms of actions and experiences that give the narrative unity and concentrated totality. In Poe's terms, every word written is directly or indirectly intended to develop the 'certain unique and single effect'¹¹ that forms the basis of the tale, in this case, the movement from madness to sanity.

'Beyond the Bayou' opens with images of blood and violence. As a child, La Folle witnesses 'skirmishing' and 'sharpshooting' in the woods around her mother's cabin, and is frightened 'literally "out of her senses" ' by the sight of a bloody and powder-blackened youth staggering through the door with 'his pursuers close at his heels' (CW, p. 175). The leitmotiv of red and black that is set up by this incident recurs as La Folle makes her momentous journey across the bayou to the plantation community, carrying a wounded child. Chopin underlines the importance of this journey, the crux of the story, by emphasising not only La Folle's 'extreme terror' at this 'unknown and terrifying world' beyond the bayou, but also the shock and surprise her appearance causes at Bellissime:

Children, old men, old women, young ones with infants in their arms, flocked to doors and windows to see this awe-inspiring spectacle. Most of them shuddered with superstitious dread at what it might portend ... Some of the more daring gathered about her, and followed at her heels, only to fall back with new terror when she turned her distorted face upon them. (p. 178)

As she staggers into the village, La Folle's eyes are 'bloodshot', there is a 'white foam on her black lips', and as she faints in exhaustion and fear 'the world that had looked red ... suddenly turned black'. An explicit reference to 'that day she had seen powder and blood' closes the first half of the story symmetrically, recalling the incident that drove her 'out of her senses' in the dramatic and equally violent experience

¹¹ E.A.Poe, 'Hawthorne's Twice-told Tales' in R.L.Hough, ed, Literary Criticism of Edgar Allan Poe, p. 136.

that marks her return to sanity, a link that is further reinforced by the fact that the wounded child, Chéri, is the young son of the youth who ran bleeding and blackened out of the woods in La Folle's childhood.

In the final part of 'Beyond the Bayou', 'metaphors of epiphany' replace images of madness and terror as La Folle wakes from a stupor near death to greet her new life 'calmly, as if no tempest had shaken and threatened her existence but yesterday' (p. 179). Lightness, tranquillity and symbols of rebirth and freshness abound as the 'whiteness' of sanity illuminates what had previously been a 'black', restricted world distorted by 'morbid and insane dread' (p. 177). La Folle walks out into a 'cool gray' Sunday morning dressed in virginal blue and white, crosses the bayou 'as if she had done it all her life', and passes

... a field where the white, bursting cotton, with the dew upon it,
gleamed for acres and acres like frosted silver in the early dawn.
(p. 179)

No longer confined physically or mentally by her obsessive 'mania', La Folle's consciousness is open to new impressions and experiences that stimulate 'memories from a time far gone'. She is content, now, to remain within the community of Bellissime, sitting on Chéri's verandah, waiting for the child to awaken and gazing at the 'new' world beyond the bayou with 'wonder and deep content' (p. 180).

A similar emphasis on rebirth and epiphany occurs in 'After the Winter'. Once again, Chopin utilises the limited scope of the short story to focus on a single significant experience. Symbolism, imagery, language, action and the use of other characters are carefully structured to concentrate on the central character, M'sieur Michel, and his state of mind. This focussed unity ensures that the crisis of the narrative, in which he turns painfully from isolation and introversion to renewed interaction with the community, achieves 'the immense force derivable from totality'¹². As in 'Beyond the Bayou', the physical setting is used to mirror M'sieur Michel's mental state: he lives 'apart from humanity, alone with his hounds' (CW, p. 181), in a 'low,

¹² Hough, p. 135.

forbidding' 'kennel' of a cabin on a hill in which furniture and utensils are 'as rude as a savage would have fashioned them' (p. 184). Although not morbidly 'insane' as La Folle is, his violent desire for isolation is akin to her obsessive dread of crossing the bayou:

He was something of a savage, feeling that the solitude belonged to him. Of late there had been forming within his soul a sentiment toward man, keener than indifference, bitter as hate. He was coming to dread even that brief intercourse with others into which his traffic forced him ... he wanted to live alone and unmolested.
(p. 184)

Overcome by anger and defiance when 'his' wildflowers are plundered by children for Easter celebrations, M'sieur Michel storms into the church intent on confronting the village people and voicing 'the hate that oppressed him' (p. 185). The positions of confronter and confronted are reversed, however, when he is faced with the gathered worshippers. Chopin piles up symbolic images of beauty, love, acceptance and rebirth that begin to gain resonance and meaning as he sees 'his' wildflowers incorporated into the village wreaths of lilies, roses and geraniums, and finds the heartfelt singing, in which each voice gives its individual contribution to the whole, stirs up unexpected turmoil within him. The powerful sense of community and love of God present in the congregation reawakens 'the driving want for human sympathy and companionship ... in his soul' (p. 186), and, in much the same way as it is La Folle's love for Chéri that ultimately forces her to cross the bayou, this love and communal spirit drive M'sieur Michel down from his hovel in the hills to the land he abandoned twenty-five years before. Looking at his property in the moonlight, he experiences a desire for rebirth and renewal that mirrors the Easter ceremony itself:

... the scent of the newplowed earth that had been from the first keenly perceptible, began to intoxicate him. He wanted to dig into it; turn it over. He wanted to scatter the seed again as he had done long ago, and watch the new, green life spring up as if at his bidding. (p. 187)

In 'Beyond the Bayou' the community offers care and support to La Folle once she has completed her critical journey across the bayou. Chéri's father, Doctor Bonfils and others visit her in her deathlike stupor, an 'old black mammy' stays at her bedside 'concocting a tisane of fragrant herbs' (p. 179), and Chéri's mother dissembles her surprise 'quickly and cleverly' (p. 180) on seeing La Folle in Bellissime the next morning, inviting her back to see the child when he awakens. Similarly, when M'sieur Michel has come down from isolation in the hills to 'refresh his spirit' (p. 187) with the sight of his land, he is greeted by an old friend, Joe Duplan, who represents the village community, and who has not only attempted to see and speak with M'sieur Michel in his self-imposed seclusion, but who has also cared for the land and the house in anticipation of his return. Duplan offers M'sieur Michel the encouragement and friendship needed to persuade him to return to the land, and the 'infinite peace' this decision provides highlights the 'madness' of M'sieur Michel's previous life, a contrast conveyed emblematically by the final symbolic view of the hills and the valley, light and darkness: 'all the land was radiant except the hill far off that was in black shadow against the sky' (p. 186).

'The Bênitous' Slave' also suggests an acceptance of 'madness'. More of an anecdote than a short story, this narrative also demonstrates characteristics of 'local colourist' writing that are absent from Chopin's later, more subtle examinations of the relationships between Southern society and personal experience. Uncle Oswald is more of a stereotype than a person, and his unfortunate attempts to escape from his protector, Monsieur, come close to slapstick. The traditional 'happy ending' demanded by such simple folktales also places the story in the 'regionalist' or 'local colourist' genre, focussing as it does on the sentimental and picturesque aspects of Uncle Oswald's experience. "The Bênitous' Slave' is important, however, in that it presents madness or irrationality arising directly from a uniquely Southern institution - slavery.

Uncle Oswald, a former slave, refuses to believe he no longer belongs to the Bênitou family even though

... it must have been fifty years since the Bênitous owned him. He had belonged to others since, and had later been freed. Beside, there was not a Bênitou left in the parish now, except for one rather delicate woman, who lived with her little daughter ... The family had dispersed, and almost vanished, and the plantation as well had lost its identity. (p. 189)

His misguided attempts to return to 'those Bênitous' result in disaster - he falls into the bayou, becomes lost and exhausted in the woods, wanders onto the railway lines - and ultimately Monsieur, who keeps the old man 'out of pure kindness' decides Uncle Oswald must be institutionalised for his own safety. Waiting for the train, however, a little girl with 'dark, kind eyes' carefully picks up the cane the dozing Negro has let fall and tells him her name is Susanne Bênitou. Instantly,

... the old negro stumbled to his feet. Without a moment's hesitancy he followed the little one out through the gate, down the street, and around the corner. (p. 190)

All ends happily: Susanne and her 'rather delicate' mother gain a devoted servant, and Monsieur no longer has to send the slave he has kept out of kindness and generosity to an institution. Uncle Oswald remains within the community, cherishing a family that requires and appreciates his service, rather than being isolated and confined due to his disturbed perception of reality.

Despite the essentially 'benign' nature of Uncle Oswald's madness, arising as it does from an excess of loyalty and devotion, it proceeds from a serious disjunction between the individual and society, reflecting some of the implications of slavery for the individual. The concept of disjunction between the individual and society based on race, or on other cultural differences, is extended and developed with increasing sophistication and complexity in later works such as 'Désirée's Baby', 'La Belle Zoraïde' and The Awakening. These later works demonstrate the influence of Chopin's wide-ranging reading. The combination of her own vigorous intellect and the cosmopolitan nature of the New Orleans literati resulted in her cultivating an intense interest in Maupassant, together with other French realists, George Sand and Madame de Staël, Darwin, Huxley,

and Spencer. Chopin's later stories treat themes from her early works in light of these extensive and eclectic sources, producing a rich network of connections and interrelationships. The idea of madness stemming from the social institution of slavery, for example, treated in a form reminiscent of simple folktale in 'Uncle Oswald', is closely related to her examination of the limitations Southern society places on women. In both areas she explores the lack of freedom, the restriction of expression, and the failure to appreciate the dignity and individuality of others that results from such social institutions. As in Poe's writing, the personal manifestations of these areas of stress and dislocation in society are madness, irrationality or similar 'disturbed' states of mind, which can take the form of true psychological trauma, such as La Folle's madness in 'Beyond the Bayou' or Zoraïde's retreat from sanity in 'La Belle Zoraïde', or, in contrast, may be the name society gives to behaviour that is unexpected or unconventional and which threatens accepted social mores.

In 'Désirée's Baby', Chopin examines the implications of blind racial pride, a subject she also satirises in a sketch called 'A Little Free-Mulatto'. The little free-mulatto of the title, Aurélia, is forbidden by her parents to play with the white children on the plantation, as they are racially and socially superior to her, or with the Negro children, as they are below her. Deprived of company she fades 'like a flower that wants the sun' (p. 202) until her concerned father moves the family to a community of free-mulattoes and the child is finally permitted to play with others of her own race. 'Désirée's Baby', moving away from the general optimism of Chopin's earlier work, explores the subject on a far more subtle and tragic level. As Seyersted claims:

In this her best-known tale, there is a suggestion of Cable's indignation over the fate of those of mixed blood, but in its taut compression and restrained intensity it is more like a story by Maupassant, and the surprise ending, though somewhat contrived, has a bitter, piercing quality that could not have been surpassed by the master himself.¹³

¹³ Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 94.

Désirée, a foundling brought up by a wealthy Creole family, marries another rich Creole, Armand, who is devoted to her. Their child, however, shows faint signs of negro blood. Armand's instantaneous and ruthless rejection of his wife is irrational and inhuman, demonstrating the disproportionate and distorting emphasis he places on racial purity. He 'no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name' (CW, p. 244), and, despite the fact that her skin is whiter than his own, withdraws from almost all human contact with her, as if she, rather than he, has become monstrous. Overcome with grief, Désirée walks with her child into 'the deep, sluggish bayou' and 'did not come back again'. In a final ironic twist, Chopin shows this horrifying distortion of racial pride to be tragically misplaced, as Armand, burning his wife's possessions one by one, comes across a fragment of an old letter from his mother to his father expressing her thanks that,

... our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery.
(p. 245)

In 'La Belle Zoraïde', Chopin is more explicit in expressing the 'madness' of a racial pride that is exaggerated to the point at which it overrides basic human emotions, such as Armand's initial devotion to his wife, and freedoms, such as Zoraïde's right to marry whom she chooses or to keep her child. Although Seyersted describes 'La Belle Zoraïde' as 'more a plea for woman's right to choose her husband than a direct condemnation of slavery'¹⁴, the two themes are closely and subtly interwoven both in this narrative and in other stories. In 'Athénaïse', for example, the institution of marriage is implicitly compared to the institution of slavery when Cazeau, accompanying his unwilling young wife home to their cabin after she has fled to her family, stops under an oak tree where, as a boy, he rested with his father while bringing home a runaway slave. In *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier realises she cannot countenance a procession of lovers to satisfy her newly-aroused sensuality, or even abandon her marriage for

¹⁴ Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*, p. 94.

the independence she craves, as this would 'trample'¹⁵ on her children's lives. Before her long, naked, implicitly suicidal walk into the sea she envisions her sons as,

... antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days.
(The Awakening, p. 175)

'Athénaïse', 'La Belle Zoraïde', The Awakening and other stories depict central characters reacting to extreme circumstances with behaviour that is seen by their society as 'mad', irrational or, at least, unconventional. Chopin plays on this tension to create the poignant, understated humour of 'A Pair of Silk Stockings', in which Mrs Sommers goes against the role that society dictates and, rather than spending her windfall of fifteen dollars on her impoverished family like a 'good' mother and wife, uses it to indulge herself in a day of shopping, dining, films and cable car rides. Zoraïde's reaction is far more extreme. Confronted by a world in which all she loves and values is taken away from her, and her logical, rational arguments for personal freedom are ignored, her passion for her lover, Mézor, and love for her child become inverted into a pathological and all-consuming obsession with her lost baby.

Appropriately for this story of madness and manipulation, Chopin uses the technique of the 'enfolded tale' popular with many gothic writers, in which one story or version of reality exists within, and alters the perspective on, another. As Day argues in his study of gothic fiction,

... objective and subjective become a double spectacle: a display of violence and horror but also a display of storytelling. The disintegration and chaos of the fantasy coexist with the order created by the act of storytelling.¹⁶

The restrained and almost romantic tone established by the framing narrative in 'La Belle Zoraïde' belies the events of the tale itself; it is 'a

¹⁵ Kate Chopin, The Awakening and Other Stories, p. 171.

¹⁶ William Patrick Day, In The Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 47.

tale retold, memory turned into narrative'¹⁷, the lyrical and poignant narrative style adding contrast and impact to the passion and madness it describes.

Zoraïde's love for Mézor is explicitly sensual, springing up when she sees him dancing half-naked and glistening with oil in the city square,

... his splendid body swaying and quivering through the figures of the dance ... as straight as a cypress-tree and as proud looking as a king. (CW, p. 304)

Zoraïde's mistress, however, sees nothing of Mézor's sensuous, stately beauty and regards him only as 'that negro' (p. 305). She is shocked and horrified when Zoraïde expresses her desire to marry Mézor rather than the unpleasant little mulatto with 'shining whiskers like a white man's' and eyes 'as cruel and false as a snake's' (p. 304), M'sieur Ambroise, who has been arranged as her match, and disregards Zoraïde's logical explanations that,

I am not white ... Doctor Langlé gives me his slave to marry, but he would not give me his son. Then, since I am not white, let me have from out of my own race the one whom my heart has chosen. (p. 305)

When Zoraïde falls pregnant, Madame Delarivière, 'a woman of action rather than words', has Mézor sold,

... away into Georgia, or the Carolinas, or one of those distant countries far away, where he would no longer hear his Creole tongue spoken, nor dance Calinda, nor hold la belle Zoraïde in his arms. (p. 306)

In order to have her young waiting-woman again at her side as gay and unencumbered company, she tells Zoraïde that the longed-for baby is dead and has the child, 'living and well and strong' sent to a plantation 'far up the coast'. Zoraïde's grief at her loss, like Désirée's, is despairing and self-destructive, taking the form of obsessive and inverted love rather than suicide. Forever clutching a 'senseless bundle of rags shaped like an infant in swaddling clothes' (p. 307) she cannot recognise and rejects her own child, brought back from the plantation

¹⁷ Day, p. 46.

in an attempt to restore her reason, and grows old unloved and unmarried, known to all as Zoraïde 'la folle' - the mad - and refusing to be parted from her rag doll baby. The return to the framing narrative, a bed-time scene between another mistress and another waiting-woman, re-establishes the intimate and gentle tone of the opening and gives the story a cohesive symmetry, contrasting the manipulation and tragedy of Zoraïde's experience with the affectionate and respectful relationship between Madame Delisle and Manna-Loulou, again a form of 'refraction and reflection'¹⁸ typical of the gothic.

The sensuality, physical awareness and sense of place and community that are apparent in stories such as 'La Belle Zoraïde' and 'Désirée's Baby' are of particular relevance in Chopin's best known work, The Awakening, variously described as a long story, a novelette or a novel. Although far too lengthy to be correctly described as a short story, the work, in certain aspects of form, symbolism and tone recalls Poe's theories on the unity and structure of the 'tale'. Chopin's subtle but persistent use of symbols such as the woman in black, the lovers, birds, and the sea, her careful structuring of chapters, and her intense focus on the figure of Edna Pontellier give The Awakening a concentrated totality that is in some ways more akin to the short story than to the novel. As in her stories, this shorter narrative form allows for 'the immense force' of a unified expression of a single focal experience or state of mind.

The Awakening demonstrates in particular the effectiveness of Chopin's shorter fiction in articulating an individual consciousness. Much as 'The Tell-Tale Heart' filters experience solely through the disturbed mind of its central character, placing emphasis on the workings of the mind, the processes of insanity, rather than on the experience itself, The Awakening explores the events and figures of Edna Pontellier's life in terms of Edna's thoughts, emotions, interpretations and reactions at this time of 'awakening'. Actions, themes and characters that in a longer narrative would require independent development are used solely to contrast, highlight or

¹⁸ Day, p. 47.

symbolise aspects of Edna's experience and add significance to the exploration of her changing consciousness of herself and her world. All elements of the text, in other words, can be used to develop the 'single or unique effect' of Edna's awakening to new self-awareness. By restricting the length of the work, Chopin avoids the claustrophobia that is an inherent danger in such a focussed concentration on, and articulation of, an individual mind, while maximising the impact of the totality it creates.

Much of the unity of The Awakening is achieved through the powerful sense of place and culture Chopin develops within the work. It is, as Taylor points out, 'local colour in its most sophisticated form'¹⁹, in which aspects of the setting, atmosphere and society are used to symbolise, highlight or articulate individual experience. As in stories such as 'Athénaïse', Chopin moves from detail to metaphor in her use of physical surroundings and cultural institutions. Edna's gradual growth towards sexual and creative awareness, for example, is linked symbolically with resonant images of nature such as the 'sensuous' and 'seductive' sea (The Awakening, p. 57), and juxtaposed against the rigid, patriarchal and 'inorganic' Creole society of her husband, Léonce, who is continually associated with urbane, masculine symbols such as his club, business talk, cigars, an opulent house and highly prized, valuable possessions. Chopin continually suggests the tension between the inflexible expectations and narrowly-defined, culturally-institutionalised roles of this society and what Wilbur Cash describes as 'the influence of the Southern physical world - itself a sort of cosmic conspiracy against reality in favour of romance', in which,

... the dominant mood, the mood that lingers in the memory, is one of well-nigh drunken reverie ... of such sweet and inexorable opiates as the rich odors of hot earth and pinewood and the perfume of the magnolia in bloom - of soft languor creeping through the blood and mounting surely to the brain.²⁰

¹⁹ Taylor, p. xii.

²⁰ Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1941), pp. 46 - 47.

It is the languid, intimate atmosphere of Grand Isle that first loosens the 'mantle of reserve' (The Awakening, p. 57) Edna, a Kentuckian, brings to her marriage and to her life in South Louisiana. As an 'outsider' she is particularly susceptible to the sensuality of the South, and in this lazy, holiday world of blue haze, warm breezes, yellow camomile and orange and lemon groves, she first becomes aware of the physical and the sensuous, not only in her surroundings or in the figure of her admirer, Robert, but also in herself:

She stretched her long limbs that ached a little. She ran her fingers through her loosened hair for a while. She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed them one after another, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh. (p. 84)

The 'comfort Chopin's characters seem to feel with their bodies, and their certainty about physical realities', which Taylor considers to be 'a reflection of the South and Southerners which Chopin handles with considerable success'²¹ is a vital part of Edna's sensual awakening. As in many other stories, this is underlined by a pervasive and suggestive use of such 'physical realities' - food, hair, skin, continual reminders of 'extravagant colours, of proliferating foliage and bloom, of flooding yellow sunlight'²². Edna's growing self-awareness is closely linked to the rhythms of this almost aggressively physical world; in addition to being associated with the sea and surrounded by natural imagery, the process of her awakening takes nine months, the length of Adèle Ragtinolle's pregnancy, emphasising the fact that her spiritual and sensual growth is in itself organic and 'natural', although there is no place for her 'child' - sexual and individual awareness - in the 'inorganic' society in which she lives.

Although New Orleans was a city of great cultural diversity, Chopin's portrayal of Edna's society in The Awakening suggests a view of urban culture as less flexible and accommodating than the smaller, rural social groups of the earlier stories. Whereas characters such as La Folle, M'sieur Michel and Uncle Oswald are reintegrated with their

²¹ Taylor, p. xii.

²² W. Cash, p. 46.

communities, and are even greeted with warmth, recognition and acceptance, Edna's developing 'difference' results in isolation. It becomes increasingly clear that there is no place for her, actual or potential, once she attempts to move beyond her restrictive and prescribed roles. Unlike the small, 'organic', rural communities of 'After the Winter' and 'Beyond the Bayou', in which alienating the unconventional or the bizarre can lead to a weakening of the community, and, conversely, an openness to difference and diversity leads to survival and growth, New Orleans Creole society of the 1890s, Chopin implies, had little need or inclination towards those who appeared aberrant. With its close ties with the 'old world' of Europe, its sophistication and cosmopolitan nature, the benefits of cultural diversity were available with little or no need to perform the uncomfortable adjustments required to accommodate those who did not 'fit' society easily. As Clement Eaton writes, the kaleidoscopic races, religions and nationalities that made up the New Orleans population could be mutually influential without being mutually reliant. Most groups were virtually self-contained, with the world of the Creoles, for example, being

...quite different from that of the Anglo-Americans. It was not simply because the Creoles spoke French and were Catholics, but the two groups were separated by different traditions and by a different sense of values.²³

Unconventionality in such an urban environment, as in Europe at this time, was regarded as a threat, particularly when it appeared to challenge the accepted social mores and structures of the dominant class, as does Edna's struggle to find sexual and creative expression.

Tension between the natural and the social as defined by urban culture is evident from the outset of The Awakening. Chopin skilfully creates a sense of the Creole community into which Edna has married, and, as Nancy Walker points out, her

... descriptions of this culture serve as more than mere backdrop; the contrast between Edna's upbringing in Kentucky and the Creole

²³ Clement Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilisation, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), p. 125.

society of Léonce Pontellier creates a subtle but persistent thread in the novel, one that helps to explain Edna's restlessness and alienation from the society around her.²⁴

The patriarchal attitudes towards women and women's roles maintained in this society are evident. Léonce Pontellier, a man who 'greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his' (*The Awakening*, p. 99) is shown, in a much-quoted line, looking at his sunburnt wife 'as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage' (p. 44). Women such as Edna are 'the visible and sacred prize of upper-class white men'²⁵, and are expected to conform effectively and successfully to the narrowly-defined roles society dictates for them, as do the 'mother-women' on Grand Isle, who

... idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. (*The Awakening*, p. 51)

To pursue creative and artistic fulfilment on any higher level implies a life like that of the eccentric, and therefore marginalised, Mademoiselle Reisz, who has given up conventional familial and social relationships in order to devote herself to her music.

Edna's inability to perform successfully in the required roles of mother, wife and hostess is also evident from the opening of the narrative, where she is placed in direct contrast to Adèle Ratignolle, a 'mother-woman' who is 'the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm' (p. 51) and who also underlines the fact that Edna is an outsider in this society: 'she is not one of us; she is not like us' (p. 64). Not having access to, or understanding, the open and innocent flirtations of Creole women such as Adèle, which, Chopin suggests, provide a 'safe' and socially acceptable margin for sexual expression within marriage

²⁴ Nancy Walker, 'The Historical and Cultural Setting' in *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's The Awakening*, ed. Bernard Koloski, (New York: The Modern Language Teachers Association of America, 1988), p. 57. Hereafter abbreviated to *Approaches*.

²⁵ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'The Awakening in the Context of the Experience, Culture, and Values of Southern Women', in *Approaches*, p. 38.

and motherhood, Edna increasingly experiences an 'indescribable oppression' and 'vague anguish' (p. 49) at her unfulfilling, passionless marriage. Her awakening is confused and directionless, her sensuality stirred by Robert's romantic attentions and her desire for creative expression by Mademoiselle Reisz's music; the 'light that was beginning to dawn dimly within her' simultaneously 'showing the way' and forbidding it.

The steps Edna does make towards establishing a new, individual and independent existence are, in the context of the restrictive roles her society dictates for her, courageous. On her return to New Orleans she is no longer 'at home' on Tuesday afternoons to guests that mean nothing to her, although this horrifies her husband, with his awareness of the social connections of those who have been refused:

'I tell you what it is, Edna; you can't afford to snub Mrs Belthrop.

Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over. His business is

worth a good, round sum to me.' (p. 101)

She flings away her wedding ring and, symbolically, attempts to crush it underfoot. She devotes herself to her painting. In a move that is, as Pearl Bell describes it, in 'defiance of everything her husband and his society held sacred'²⁶, while Léonce and the children are away, she moves out of her suffocatingly opulent house to live alone, she takes a lover, Arobin, who provides a form of expression for her developing sensuality. Her move away from the conventional attitudes of society is such that, after giving herself to Arobin for the first time - a seduction in which she makes the first sexual overture - she feels 'neither shame nor remorse' but only 'a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love that had inflamed her' (The Awakening, p. 139).

As the representative of his society, Léonce views Edna's search for independence and creative expression as irrational and disturbing. He wonders if 'his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally'

²⁶ Pearl K. Bell, 'Kate Chopin and Sarah Orne Jewett', Partisan Review, (Boston MA: Spring 1988, vol. 55,2), p. 245.

(p. 108), ironically believing, as she struggles to discover and articulate her individuality, that she is 'not herself', and complaining to the family doctor that she is 'peculiar' (p. 188). That the society which provides little or no avenue for Edna's sexual, creative or spiritual expression regards her attempts to articulate these aspects of her life as 'mad' - and marginalises women such as Mademoiselle Reisz who are determined to pursue such expression - ties The Awakening to the female gothic genre, in which imagery of 'monsters and madwomen' reveals 'women's hidden conflicts and their struggles to achieve personal integrity'²⁷. Discussing Florence Nightingale, Elaine Showalter establishes the reality of such gothic images in women's experience, describing how Nightingale viewed herself as a 'monster' for wanting to work, and how

... as in so many lives described in women's literature and memoirs, the image of monstrosity was related to her anger and discontent and to the necessity of concealing her drives for independence, work, and power.²⁸

Chopin, like other female writers examining madness or psychological disturbance, demonstrates a sensitive awareness of the circumstances that result in 'madness', and writes with an understanding and a compassion for the 'mad' character, male or female, that are absent from many male narratives. The marginalisation of women in society, it may be argued, enables women writers to identify and empathise with the marginalisation of those who are seen as mentally disturbed, particularly as these forms of alienation are, in many cases, symbiotic in female experience. As Fleenor writes:

Assessments of sanity are highly subjective, even among medical professionals. This subjective assessment is particularly true for women. The label of insanity has frequently been ascribed to women who fail to perform housewife's tasks, or who deviate from

²⁷ Julianne Fleenor, 'Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic', in Julianne Fleenor (ed.), The Female Gothic, (Montreal: Eden Press Inc, 1983), p. 124.

²⁸ Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830 - 1980, (1985: London: Virago Press Ltd, 1987), p. 62.

the 'average' norms of expected behaviour. Yet 'madness' is a highly personal response to a unique situation ... While the term 'madness' is applied to the behaviour of an 'outsider', an objectified other, shifting the focus to the subjective perceptions of the person behaving in an abnormal way grants us sympathetic awareness of the individual's inner realities.²⁹

Elaine Showalter agrees, stating that, in Chopin's society in particular, 'an independent will could be regarded as a form of female deviance that was dangerously close to mental illness and almost as subversive as adultery', and describing how, in the works of female writers from Chopin's time onwards, 'the madwoman who made fleeting and ominous appearances in the Victorian novel has become the heroine' and 'tensions and anxieties that were at the edge of female experience ... have moved to the centre' of literary consciousness.³⁰

Chopin extends the 'gothic' elements of her exploration of Edna's awakening to an almost mythic level. Edna's 'highly personal response to a unique situation' is expressed in language that builds up symbolic structures within the text that refer her 'abnormal' behaviour not only to the society around her, which views such forms of expression as irrational and disturbed, but also to far wider informing mythologies and fantasies. Her dinner party to celebrate her move to her 'pigeon house', for example, resounds with mystery and images from Greek legend - evocations of the cornucopia, Victor Lebrun garlanded faunlike with roses, Edna herself becoming 'the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone' (p. 145), a position recognised by another whose behaviour society regards as 'peculiar' and 'mad', Mademoiselle Reisz. In her introduction to The Awakening, Sandra Gilbert views this image as connecting Edna with Aphrodite, in a 'tale of romantic transfiguration'³¹, a view that highlights the symbolic status Edna achieves in her quest to

²⁹ J. Fleenor, p. 126.

³⁰ E. Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Insanity' in Madhouses, Mad-doctors, and Madmen: A Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era, ed. Andrew Scull, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), pp. 325, 330.

³¹ Sandra M. Gilbert, introduction © 1983, The Awakening and Selected Stories, p. 21.

... realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognise her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. (p. 57)

The climax of Edna's movement towards independence and awareness comes when she tells Robert that she is 'no longer one of Mr Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose.' (p. 167). Robert is unable to countenance, or accept, such a blatant disregard for social conventions and, returning from Adèle Ratignolle's childbed to find him gone, Edna, an Aphrodite in a world with no place for her, realises that she is unable to bridge the gap that has opened between the personal and social aspects of her life. Unequipped to 'soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice' (p. 138), and unwilling to face life with a series of lovers to satisfy her sensual needs, she takes what may be seen as the only path open to her that neither compromises her newly-found self-awareness, nor leads to ostracism on the part of a society that labels her behaviour as 'mad'. In a symbolic consummation of her relationship with nature and her mythic association with the sea, she returns to Grand Isle and swims out into the distance.

Despite its definitive social messages, however, The Awakening maintains an open-ended ambiguity that aligns Chopin with her contemporary, Stephen Crane, in treating concepts of determinism with ambivalence. Edna is unarguably shaped and directed by social forces on the one hand, yet on the other maintains her individuality, persisting in her struggle for personal freedom against both the structures of society and her own 'feet of clay'. She demonstrates faults and idiosyncrasies, such as her yearnings for romance, that, although blurring her vision, also imbue her character with a three-dimensional quality. As such, Edna emerges as an individual rather than as an emblem or a symbol, despite the resonant mythological echoes that surround her. In keeping with this sense of a distinct and complex personality, Chopin creates a text in which the tension between social determinism and the individual will is presented with ambiguity, placing the responsibility for analysis and judgement, as in Flannery O'Connor's work, upon the reader. The

'open' ending of The Awakening emphasises this absence of authorial omniscience, suggesting rather than describing the implications of Edna's long swim into the sea in much the same way that Faulkner develops 'empty spaces' within his narratives that reverberate and infer, thus fully engaging the reader's imagination.

The development that takes place in Chopin's work from the optimism of her earlier stories to the increasingly sophisticated and wide-ranging combination of hard-edged realism, naturalism and determinism reflects the growth of a sensitive social consciousness and the influence of her extensive reading, which enables her to combine aspects of social determinism with myth, romance, resonant symbolism, and physical immediacy. In comparison with Chopin's first stories, works such as 'Désirée's Baby', 'La Belle Zoraïde' and The Awakening are narratives of wide and complex dimensions, enriching themes and ideas from earlier works and creating an intricate network of intertextual connections.

In keeping with Chopin's suggestions about the inflexibility of Southern urban culture, The Awakening was greeted with censure on its publication in 1899 by readers insensitive to its subtleties. The response to its challenging depiction of women's sexuality, creativity and individuality was one of horror, with some critics declaring Chopin was 'not herself' in writing it in much the same way that Edna's attempts at self-expression are seen as disturbing and irrational. The Chicago Times Herald, for example, claimed that 'the real Miss Chopin' was 'a creator of sweet and lovable characters' rather than a writer of 'sex fiction'³². Many of the St Louis literati refused to review the book, while others openly attacked it, and by August of that year

... The Awakening had been nationally condemned. From Boston to Los Angeles the reviewers called it a morbid and unwholesome book. Literature even found it an "essentially vulgar book" and thought the end quite appropriate for "one who had drifted from all right moorings, and has not the grace to repent".³³

³² Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 177.

³³ Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 176.

The book was banned from St Louis libraries, and Chopin herself was snubbed by social acquaintances, dropped by several of her friends, and refused membership to the St Louis Fine Arts Club. Despite encouragement from her close friends, the scandal destroyed Chopin's confidence. She did not seek publication for her short story, 'The Storm', which explores a sensuous, erotic and guilt-free adulterous liaison in a narrative unbounded by conventional morality, and wrote little afterwards, with only a few characters, such as the young heroine of 'Charlie', demonstrating any vestiges of Edna's quest for independence.

The Awakening in many ways epitomises the aspects of Southern society and individual experience Chopin explores in her work. Like Poe, Chopin uses madness, irrationality and psychological disturbance to reflect and articulate areas of stress and dislocation in her community, focussing particularly, but by no means exclusively, on

... the female human condition as a full member of that distinctive culture that would also inform William Alexander Percy and William Faulkner.³⁴

The 'feminist', or at least 'feminine', themes of Chopin's writing link works such as The Awakening to the specifically female use of the gothic as a means of showing the distortions masculine social structures can create in female experience, and also highlight the uniquely feminine sympathy for the disturbed mind that results in narratives that explore 'madness' from a point of understanding rather than of horror. The Awakening also epitomises Chopin's development from the optimism and simplicity of her earlier works to an increasingly complex, darker, and more ambivalent view of reality, informed not only by mythology and the sensual physicality of her region, but also by the naturalism and determinism of French realists such as Maupassant. In this narrative she not only involves the reader in processes of identification and interpretation, but also demonstrates the particular effectiveness of short fiction in portraying states of mind, presenting an individual consciousness at a point of crisis or 'epiphany'

³⁴ E. Fox-Genovese, Approaches, p. 39.

with 'the immense force derivable from totality', in which all elements of the narrative can be used solely to develop this critical moment or process.

William Faulkner and the Madness of Yoknapatawpha.

‘What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forevermore as long as your childrens’ children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett’s charge at Manassas?’¹

In articulating his vision of the South, William Faulkner creates a unique and complex literary world that mirrors and comments upon Southern life. His mythic and archetypal Southern region, Yoknapatawpha County, developed most famously in novels such as Absalom, Absalom!, Sanctuary, and As I Lay Dying and also the setting for many of his short stories, provides the site for an intricate exploration of Southern history, culture and society that encompasses both subjective and objective experience. As Richard Gray argues in Writing the South:

The map of the South that the Yoknapatawpha stories present us with seems, in fact, to have been drawn by a double agent, someone who knows what it is to be both an insider and an outsider; it discloses plans, and explores dreams, that possess both observed and observer.²

Faulkner himself expressed feelings of being ‘a stranger in his own land’, particularly on returning to his home in Oxford, Mississippi, in 1918 after the First World War, when he found himself ‘home again

¹ William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, (1936: Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987), p. 297.

² R.Gray, Writing the South, p. 171.

and not at home'³. In his work this personal tension and sense of loss is used to describe what Gray identifies as 'feelings of crisis and exile' that Faulkner shares with other Southern writers of his time such as Allen Tate, Andrew Lytle, Thomas Wolfe and Robert Penn Warren⁴, and which enable him to function as a literary 'double agent': both deeply sensitive to the experience of the South, and at the same time objectively aware of the external context in which such experience exists. In her discussions of the relationships between a writer and their region, Flannery O'Connor emphasises the same type of dual perspective:

... the writer's country ... is inside as well as outside him. Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other. To know oneself is to know one's region ... and to know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks.⁵

In this position as 'insider and outsider', Faulkner, like Chopin, examines aspects of madness in a uniquely Southern context. Unlike Chopin, however, whose work focuses primarily on the dynamics existing between the individual and the structures or representatives of their society, Faulkner's use of madness encodes a region that is in itself idiosyncratic, bizarre, and, in many ways, distorted. In this world the past has particular relevance to the present, sense of place is closely intertwined with identity, and personal, sexual, and social relationships often take on distorted and gothic forms.

Despite the close interconnections - often through re-use and development of material - that exist between Faulkner's novels and his shorter narratives, and Faulkner's own claim that, although 'for some strange reason' he continued to produce them, he had 'no feeling for

³ Malcolm Cowley, ed, The Essential Faulkner, (1945: London Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1967), p. vii.

⁴ R. Gray, p. 174.

⁵ Flannery O'Connor, 'The Fiction Writer and His Country' in Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works, selected and notated by Sally Fitzgerald, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Inc, 1988), p. 806.

short stories' and that 'I shall never be able to write them'⁶, short stories like 'A Rose for Emily', 'The Leg', 'Wash', and 'Dry September' provide powerful examples of his view of the South and of the 'madness' of Southern experience. Although playing a part in the creation and establishment of Faulkner's imagined Yoknapatawpha community, such stories maintain their own discrete integrity and often provide some of Faulkner's most succinct and powerful comments on the nature of the South, that 'guilt-drenched, slavery-haunted ... bastion of segregation, chicanery, night-riding, lynching, and the routine oppression of women' as Frederick Crews describes it⁷. The very multiplicity of relationships between Faulkner's narratives of Yoknapatawpha can, it may be argued, mask the individual force of these 'tales', which in many ways follow Poe's guidelines of unity and totality to create a single, carefully-crafted 'effect'. In keeping with Poe, and with later writers such as Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty, Faulkner frequently uses the force of this concentrated unity within the story to create a pervasive sense of the gothic, the distorted, the bizarre, or the grotesque.

This may be clearly seen in 'The Leg', which, although set in England and about Oxford undergraduates - 'Oxford young gentlemen' (CS, p. 825) - demonstrates a structural and thematic unity, and develops an atmosphere of absurdity and monstrosity typical of those narratives concerned more specifically with the society, history, and people of Yoknapatawpha. The horror of 'The Leg' constitutes a metaphor for the chaos and madness of World War I - a theme Faulkner also explores in stories collectively and significantly called 'The Wasteland'. In 'The Leg' this madness is so virulent that it not only distorts the physical body, the mind, and the subsequent lives of those who experience it, but, in this instance, has the power to create its own, terrible reality, as does the individual madness of the narrator in Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart'.

⁶ Joseph Blotner, Faulkner: A Biography, (1974: New York: Random House, 1984), p. 233.

⁷ Frederick Crews, 'The Strange Fate of William Faulkner' in The New York Review of Books, vol XXXVIII, no. 5, March 7, 1991, pp. 47 - 48.

The first section of 'The Leg' opens with romantic, pastoral resonance as George, 'the afternoon light bright on his close ruddy head', declaims poetry to the waterman's daughter Everbe Corinthia, 'with her dairy-maid's complexion and her hair like mead poured in sunlight' (p. 823). In this introductory section Faulkner delicately evokes the halcyon life of 'Oxford young gentlemen' boating on the canals of the Thames and 'tramping about that peaceful land' (p. 828), talking in 'burlesque magniloquence' and believing themselves masters of 'the Thames, time and all' (p. 823). At the end of the section, however, this idyllic existence is abruptly juxtaposed with the outbreak of war. The narrator, David, poignantly describes the distortion and inversion that will later deform reality itself, and which are also characteristic features of Faulkner's treatment of the American Civil War in other stories:

... that was 1914, and in the parks bands played Valse Septembre, and girls and young men drifted in punts on the moonlit river and sang Mister Moon and There's a Bit of Heaven, and George and I sat in a window in Christ Church while the curtains whispered in the twilight, and talked of courage and honour and Napier and love and Ben Jonson and death. The next year was 1915, and the bands played God Save The King, and the rest of the young men - and some not so young - sang Mademoiselle of Armentieres in the mud, and George was dead. (pp. 828 - 829)

Unlike 'Ad Astra', 'All The Dead Pilots', and other stories of 'The Wasteland', which specifically explore the experience of war, 'The Leg' treats actual combat only obliquely. The second section of the narrative moves directly into the strange nightmare world the narrator inhabits during and after the amputation of his wounded leg - a world in which George, although dead, is as real as the surgeons and nurses, and in which the amputated leg takes on an obscure and terrifying significance. With George unable to 'find it and fix it so it can get dead' (p. 832), the narrator dreams of the outcast limb 'jeering' and waiting,

... just around the corner. I could smell a rank, animal odor. It was an odor which I had never smelled before, but I knew it at once, blown suddenly down the corridor from the old fetid caves where

experience began. I felt dread and disgust and determination, as
when you sense suddenly a snake beside a garden path. (p. 833)

His meetings with George on the borderlines of dream and reality, life and death, become full of strange and desperate assurances that he 'won't again' in response to George's accusations that 'You left me', 'You saw me and hid, Davy. Pulled up under the bank, in the shadow. There was a girl with you' (p. 833), until George ultimately vanishes along with the phantom limb - 'the dead dying in order to slay the dead' - and the narrator feels a peace like that of 'a sick man who wakes with his body spent and peaceful and weak ... [knowing] that the illness will not return' (p. 835).

That this entire section has not, however, been the nightmarish imaginings of a wounded convalescent is made disturbingly clear in the final episode of the story. Once again, apparently, in the 'real' world, as opposed to the blurred, half-dream and half-reality of the previous section, the narrative returns to the waterman's family. The pastoral idyll of the opening, however, is now perverted with an undefined horror. The narrator has been slashed in the night by Everbe Corinthia's brother, Jotham, and saved from death, ironically, only by his artificial leg, which the murderer stumbled over in the dark. David learns from the visiting padre that Everbe, after a period of odd twilight absences from the waterman's house each evening, was found by her brother one morning,

... lying in the towpath by the door. She was unconscious, but showed no physical injury. They brought her into the house and applied their spartan remedies, and after a time she revived, screaming. She screamed all that day until sunset. She lay on her back screaming, her eyes wide open and perfectly empty, until her voice left her and her screaming was only a ghost of screaming, making no sound. At sunset she died. (p. 840)

The only clue is a 'jeering' man's laugh heard in the nearby coppice which Jotham has tracked throughout the armed forces, and 'something incontrovertible' (p. 837) which the condemned man will not reveal. It is only on the morning of the execution that the padre, having been given Jotham's personal effects to destroy, returns to the narrator with a cheap photograph,

... dated at Abingdon in June of the summer just past. At that time I was lying in the hospital talking to George, and I sat quite still in the blankets, looking at the photograph, because it was my own face that looked back at me. It had a quality that was not mine: a quality vicious and outrageous and unappalled, and beneath it was written in a bold sprawling hand like that of a child: "To Everbe Corinthia" followed by an unprintable phrase, yet it was my own face ... (pp. 841 - 842)

The narrative ends with an echo of David's plea to his dead friend - 'I told him to find it and kill it ... I told him to. I told him' (p. 842) - that returns the reader to the hallucinatory world of the second section and underlines the inexplicable and appalling significance of the dead and the undead for the 'reality' of the living.

As in Temple Drake's cornucopia rape in Sanctuary, the horror of what is left unsaid is far more disturbing than the explicit, and Faulkner is skilled at allowing the 'empty spaces' of such narratives resound and imply, creating a literary equivalent of Cézanne's curved form, powerful manipulation of space, and direct use of colours rather than structural lines. On seeing Cézanne's work in Paris as a young writer in 1925, Faulkner wrote excitedly that, like Degas and Manet, Cézanne appeared to have 'dipped his brush in light'⁸, and later works such as 'The Leg' demonstrate a circularity of form, a 'curved truth', and an impressionistic use of suggestion that, like Cézanne's painting leads the audience to complete what is not shown. The deflection of focus at the end of chapter eighteen of Sanctuary, for example, fulfils a similar purpose, leaving the reader unclear about what actually occurs in the brothel between Temple and Popeye, but at the same time providing a vivid evocation of the 'harshness' and 'obscenity' of his impotent violation:

He gripped the top of her gown. She caught his wrists and began to toss from side to side, opening her mouth to scream. His hand clapped over her mouth, and gripping his wrist, the saliva drooling between his fingers, her body thrashing furiously from thigh to thigh, she saw him crouching beside the bed, his face

⁸ J. Blotner, Biography, p. 160.

wrung above his absent chin, his bluish lips protruding as though he were blowing upon hot soup, making a high whinnying sound like a horse. Beyond the wall Miss Reba filled the hall, the house, with a harsh choking uproar of obscene cursing.⁹

In The Literary Impact of *The Golden Bough*, John Vickery describes this technique as a reversal of traditional romantic emphasis on plot and narrative continuity - the idea of 'pattern by piecemeal' in which meaning is accrued gradually as 'the reader follows a trail of hints and artistically incomplete bits of information' - and goes on to argue that anagnorisis, or 'the important unimportant situation or event', which is one of the organising principles of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, has become 'a stock device of the contemporary short story'¹⁰. As the focus in 'The Leg' is concentrated on only one set of circumstances and a single central character, an effect emphasised by the use of the first-person narrator, the impact of this implicative process in a shorter narrative space is considerable, keeping the reader's imagination constantly engaged with the veiled and increasingly ominous relevance of the lost limb.

'The Leg' is an example of Faulkner at his most Poe-like, illustrating the sense of distortion, absurdity, irrationality, and grotesqueness with which he articulates human experience. In later works he refines these ideas as a vehicle for the expression of aspects of Southern experience. This sense of the distorted and the grotesque is in many ways related to the 'otherness' he, and other writers such as Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers, perceive in the region, and express through characters also set apart from society through the 'otherness' of deformity or madness. Richard Gray argues that such 'pervasive' use of the gothic, 'landscapes of nightmare', and dark, disturbing characters and relationships is, at least in part, related to the peculiar importance of the past in Southern life and society:

⁹ William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, (1931: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 127.

¹⁰ John B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of *The Golden Bough**, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 131.

... one common result of emphasising and exploring past experience - instead, that is, of future possibilities - is that one ends up with a profound sense of evil. Viewed in terms of what they have done (or at least what they are believed to have done) rather than what they might do, people seem no longer innocent and perfectible but, on the contrary, deeply flawed, weighed down by the burden of inherited failure ... a preoccupation with the past (combined, as C. Van Woodward has pointed out, with the fact that the region has had to suffer failure and defeat on a scale unparalleled elsewhere in the United States) has encouraged Southerners to believe that, to quote one of them, 'without the knowledge of evil ... there is no life'.¹¹

Faulkner's awareness of the past appears connected with a desire to encode and re-establish the history, memory and myth of the South, and to contextualise this ritual past within a wider mythology. In his exploration of past and present, fable and history, Faulkner draws from many eclectic sources that tie Yoknapatawpha not only to the South as a whole, but also to far broader contexts of history and mythology. Stories such as 'Dry September', 'Mountain Victory', 'Red Leaves' and 'The Bear' present situations and characters that are informed by Greco-Roman mythology, symbolism from the Old and New Testaments, pastoral traditions, folklore, and both religious and pagan ritual. 'Red Leaves', for example, presents two Chicksaw Indians, depicted with imagery that suggests exotic and ageless gods, hunting an escaped Negro slave through an edenic wilderness. Both Indians and Negro are sacrificial figures - the Negro hunted and killed to accompany chief Issetibbeha into the next world, the Indians not only because they have embraced evil through adopting the institution of slavery, but because they too are on the verge of being hunted and cast out of paradise. Gilbert Muller views 'Red Leaves' as 'a brilliant formulation of the South's failure to establish an Arcadian ideal - to resurrect Eden on earth' and recognises the mythic dimension of characters such as the Negro and Three Basket, who belong both 'inevitably and tragically to the present' but who also mirror 'the

¹¹ R.Gray, pp. 184 - 185.

divine past'¹². Recurring themes of sacrificial kingship, the death of gods, the symbolic scapegoat, and rites of passage imbued with religious significance - such as Ike McCaslin's baptism with blood in 'The Bear' - that appear in Faulkner's work demonstrate the influence of Frazer's The Golden Bough and Faulkner's skilful use of Frazer's 'anthropological vision of the primitive past' in order to 'crystallize the enduring dilemmas of the cultural present' and to express his vision of 'ancient ritual patterns working themselves out in the twentieth century American South', as Vickery describes it¹³.

That Faulkner concentrates closely on the past, the 'history' of Yoknapatawpha, its multiple recreations and its significance for individuals, families, and the community, is one reason for the difference in tone between his stories and Chopin's works. As a 'regional writer', Chopin focuses more on place than time, and, although also examining themes of 'otherness', madness, and alienation, her recognition of the uniqueness of the South is often expressed through inherently positive images of sensuality, fertility, rebirth, and natural beauty. In Faulkner's writing, as in that of Welty, O'Connor, and Carson McCullers, Poe's dark, gothic visions of irrationality and insanity are revived and the unique nature of Southern experience is related through concepts of physical and mental distortion, which, in Faulkner, is the legacy of an ever-present past that piles its failures, bloodshed, lost dreams, and extremities constantly into the present. Faulkner's focus on history inevitably leads, as in Poe's examination of 'cultural illness', to the failure of early ideals and the corruption of the 'American dream' - the fact that the myth of the chivalric Old South was 'rooted in the crimes of expropriation and chattel slavery', and that 'its legacy was a bankrupt economy, barbaric racial codes, inertia that alternated with spasms of cruelty'¹⁴. That the great promise of the South had led only to 'futility and

¹² Gilbert H. Muller, 'The Descent of the Gods: Faulkner's 'Red Leaves' and the Garden of the South' in Studies in Short Fiction, vol 11, 1974, p. 243.

¹³ J. Vickery, p. 149.

¹⁴ Peter Conn, Literature in America: An Illustrated History, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 428.

disappointment'¹⁵ leads to themes of dislocation most effectively expressed in images of disturbance, marginalisation, mental failure, and madness.

Many of these themes are clearly illustrated in the story 'A Rose for Emily', in which 'the world depicted is a confusion between the past and the present'¹⁶ and the supernatural horror of 'The Leg' is muted into a pervasive gothic sense of decay and corruption, of things hidden or locked away, and the 'close, dank smell' of 'dust and disuse' (CS, p. 120). Miss Emily Grierson is firmly established as a representative of the 'old order' in the opening of the story: she is referred to as a 'monument', 'a tradition', 'a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town', her house alone 'lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay' (p. 119) above the encroaching garages and cotton gins on her once select street. Beginning with her death, the story moves backwards to establish the passing of the old order in Jefferson and the increasingly anachronistic position Miss Emily maintains. The overwhelming atmosphere of isolation, dilapidation, and morbid secrecy that surrounds her and her house indicates the grotesque nature of her position as a bridge of flesh between past and present, and of her refusal to accommodate, or even communicate with, the changing world outside her shuttered rooms. Even before her death she looks 'bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water' (p. 121), and is totally unable to communicate with the 'new order' represented by the Board of Aldermen who call on her to collect her long-overdue taxes, simply repeating that they must 'see Colonel Sartoris', dead for ten years, as 'I have no taxes in Jefferson' (p. 121).

The results of such an 'irrational' inability to relinquish the past are, ultimately, shocking. As in other stories, Faulkner makes full use of the unique potential of the shorter narrative to deliver the unexpected with intense impact - the 'sting in the tale' - and, in

¹⁵ P. Conn, p. 428.

¹⁶ Ray B. West, Jr, 'Atmosphere and Theme in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily'', in William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism, ed. Linda Welshimer Wagner, (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1983), p. 192.

preparing for the final revelation of violence, uses gothic imagery particularly suited to his theme of the 'dead', decaying past continuing to survive, and hold influence, in the present. After her father's death Emily refuses to acknowledge he is dead 'for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body' (pp. 123 - 4); she buys arsenic, refusing to tell the druggist why she wants it; a strange and disgusting smell from her house forces the men of the town to break into her garden 'after midnight' (p. 122) to scatter lime; her Northern admirer is admitted to the house one evening and disappears; rooms are shut up; there are constant references to dust, age, and mould.

This increasing sense of tension, mystery, and horror is not unrelieved, however. Even in building the narrative up to its final moment of release and discovery Faulkner suggests a more complex and paradoxical relationship between the past and the present in which, as Walter Slatoff describes it:

... they are not only clear and sharp antitheses but conditions in which the opposed entities seem at once antagonistic and yet curiously inseparable and interdependent,¹⁷

To this end Faulkner shows Emily not simply as a ghoulish remnant of a passed order, but also as receiving a degree of support and recognition from her community. 'We did not say she was crazy' (p. 124), the narrator explains, and later describes her, even in her morbid isolation, as 'dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil and perverse' (p. 128). Her youth as a 'slender figure in white' (p. 123) is recalled, her reappearance after illness when her 'hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows' (p. 124), and the visit of her Alabama relatives, when the town soon feels they are 'all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins' who are 'even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been' (p. 127).

Jefferson's communal response to Miss Emily suggests Faulkner's complex use of concepts of 'insider' and 'outsider' in his

¹⁷ Walter J. Slatoff, *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 91.

work. Unlike the small, flexible rural communities of Chopin's early stories, which accept and accommodate the insane or the unconventional despite recognising their madness for what it is, Jefferson does not view Miss Emily as 'crazy'. Her strange, gothic behaviour represents less an aberration than something her society regards as 'inescapable' - sufficiently familiar to be described in terms of collusion and even affection. The narrator reports her actions as if to a foreign spectator, explaining behaviour such as her gruesome vigil after her father's death with an understanding that belies its extremity:

We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will. (p. 124)

By presenting Miss Emily, at least in part, as a member of a community that does not appear to view her behaviour as bizarre, Faulkner effectively casts the reader as an outsider, an external position that allows recognition not only of the 'madness' of Miss Emily's actions, but also of the society that considers such madness as 'dear', 'inescapable' and 'impervious'. Faulkner's own duality of perspective is demonstrated in his sensitivity to the nature of this society, and his ability to interpret events from its point of view - highlighted by his use of a first-person, 'communal' narrator - while simultaneously displaying its insanity and distortion to the 'outsider', or the audience.

The crux of the narrative returns to and underlines to the reader the monstrosity and irrationality of Miss Emily's position and her attempts to ignore the present. Waiting until Miss Emily is 'decently in the ground' (p. 129) following her death, a group of townspeople break into an upstairs room 'which no one had seen in forty years' and find her dead lover, Homer Barron, decomposing into the bed of a rose-coloured and dust-shrouded bridal suite:

The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow

beside him lay that even coating of the patient and bidding dust.

(p. 130)

Forty years earlier, Miss Emily, a spinster, seduced by her Northern labourer beau, Homer, has realised he will desert her rather than marry her. Instead of facing the shame implicit in becoming a deserted, 'fallen', single woman rapidly becoming too old for marriage, Miss Emily retreats to her world of the past, taking Homer with her in the only way possible, through death, and continues to behave as if he has indeed been loyal, faithful, and gallant; buying a set of men's toiletries engraved with his initials and an entire set of men's clothing as if she is a new wife preparing for married life. The full horror of this distorted view of reality is brought forward by the discovery of 'the indentation of a head' and 'a long strand of iron-gray hair' (p. 130) on the pillow beside the corpse, where Miss Emily has been lying beside her rotting lover 'as though not even death could separate them'¹⁸ year after year in her appalling 'marriage' of life and death.

'A Rose for Emily' is thematically linked with several other stories which explore the passage of time and the perverting and distorting effect of time and Southern traditions on women's lives. In these narratives, and particularly in 'Miss Zilphia Gant' and 'Dry September', Faulkner focuses more clearly on the relationship between thwarted sexuality and the destruction or warping of reality suggested in 'A Rose for Emily' by such details as Emily's father driving her suitors away with a horsewhip, the undertones of pity and gossip Emily's spinsterhood provokes amongst Jeffersonians, the desperation implied by her relationship with a Northern labourer far below her in social standing, and, of course, her reaction to his unfaithfulness. 'Miss Zilphia Gant' is less subtle and evocative than 'A Rose for Emily' and 'Dry September', and, although published after them, most probably represents an earlier examination of these ideas. As Edward M. Holmes claims in Faulkner's Twice-Told Tales:

'Miss Zilphia Gant' packs too much into too few pages; certain Freudian overtones are rather overtly handled in the heavy manner of a case history rather than implied in the dramatic or

¹⁸ Ray B. West, Jr, p. 196.

narrative manner of fiction; and it lacks the evocation of the sense and feeling of the community - an element essential to all three of these stories - that is so thoroughly an integral part of 'Dry September' and 'A Rose for Emily'.¹⁹

'Miss Zilphia Gant' is, however, a valuable element in Faulkner's presentation of time, past and present. Like 'A Rose for Emily', 'Dry September', and other stories such as 'Adolescence', it explores the effect of time and age on women's sexuality, which appears to both fascinate and repel Faulkner - an ambivalence that also marks his depiction of the Negro. He personally preferred slim, elfin, 'boyish' women, and, despite the explicit eroticism of many of his letters and sonnets, viewed the display of women's bodies, such as the 'bare beef' at the Moulin Rouge in Paris, with distaste, as Blotner states in his biography:

The phrase "bare beef" bespoke a deep-seated attitude about female nudity he would articulate many times. In conversation he might refer to "nekkid meat" on bathing beaches.²⁰

Alongside, or perhaps emerging from, this suspicion, his works display an awareness of the unique relationships between time and women's sexuality, with its cycles of menstruation, fertility, and menopause. Much of the mystery - and the power and horror - of female sexuality derives from such cycles, the birth and death of fertility, which endow women with the capacity to generate new life, and, in the case of characters such as Eula Varner and the dryad of 'Nympholepsy', to enthrall men to the point of madness. Faulkner also examines the powerful social structures that exist, particularly in the South, to legitimise and control the expression of such female sexuality in the community, and the distortions such structures can engender.

In its exploration of sexuality and time, 'Miss Zilphia Gant' covers three generations. Mrs Gant, whose pioneer, stock-trading

¹⁹Edward M. Holmes, Faulkner's Twice-Told Tales: His Re-Use of His Material, (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1966), p. 181.

²⁰J. Blotner, Biography, p. 161.

husband is home 'perhaps a week out of each eight'²¹, is told by her husband's 'hulking halfwitted' partner that she has been deserted, her husband having gone 'off in the waggin' with the woman from the tavern. Mrs Gant's perverting masculinisation is prefigured when she curses the halfwit with 'the gross violence of a man' (p. 369), and, with grim masculine determination, borrows a pistol, rides away on a passing wagon, and reappears ten days later having,

... sought out Gant and the woman with the capability of a man,
the pertinacity of a Fate, the serene imperviousness of a vestal out
of a violated temple, and then returned to her child, her face cold,
sate and chaste. (p. 370)

The implicit linking of distorted or inappropriate sexual imagery with violence recurs throughout the narrative. Mrs Gant, hostile towards the outside world, shuts her daughter Zilphia away from others much as Emily Grierson's father drives away his daughter's suitors. At thirteen, the onset of puberty, the child, who has been beaten until she 'cries' and 'vomits', is subjected to her mother's voyeuristic examinations and the coupling of sexuality and violence, both past and present, recurs:

... Mrs Gant began to examine her [Zilphia's] body each month.
She made Zilphia strip naked and stand cringing before her while
the savage light fell through the bars and the gray winter drove
about the lot. After one of these examinations ... she told Zilphia
what her father had done and what she had done. (p. 373)

Finding Zilphia lying childishly with a boy under a blanket in a ditch one afternoon, Mrs Gant withdraws her daughter from school and leaves Zilphia sewing beside the window for twelve years, making dresses first for her old schoolfriends, and then for their children.

In response to Zilphia's later interest in a young, 'tramp' housepainter with 'black hair and eyes like wood ashes' (p. 375) Zilphia's 'gaunt, manlike' mother, now complete with 'grizzled' moustaches (p. 376), locks her daughter inside, where Zilphia wakes from dreams in which 'the painter performed monstrosly with his

²¹ William Faulkner, 'Miss Zilphia Gant' in Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner, ed. Joseph Blotner, (1931: New York: Random House, 1979), p. 369.

pot and brush' (p. 375). Despite her escape, their courthouse marriage, and the pleas of her new husband, Zilphia then returns to her sick mother with the same sort of strange, irrational attachment, or symbiotic dependence, that makes Miss Emily guard her father's corpse so vehemently after his death. Zilphia's painter husband lies hidden and waiting for her in a house across the street while Mrs Gant, in a bizarre parody of the protective father, sits at the window fully dressed, 'the shotgun leaning at her hand' (p. 378). When the painter (Biblically) leaves 'on the third day', she dies without moving. Zilphia continues to live alone, again dreaming of the painter, now associated with the traditional symbol of rank sexuality, the goat, and tormented by her frustrated virginity:

... rousing, furious, her hands clenched at her sides, the covers flung back and her opened thighs tossing, she would violate her ineradicable virginity again and again with something evoked out of the darkness immemorial and philoprogenitive ... (p. 379)

By employing a private detective to inform her of her husband, now remarried, and living with his new wife in a neighbouring state, Zilphia reiterates her mother's voyeurism. When the painter is, usefully, killed by a car on the way to see his new baby, Zilphia leaves Jefferson for three years, ostensibly to recover from sickness, returning,

... in mourning, with a plain gold band and a child. The child, a girl, had eyes like wood ashes and dark hair. Zilphia told quietly of her second marriage and her husband's death, and after a time the interest died away. (p. 381)

That this new 'little Zilphia' is to grow up in the same pitiful, warped, and insane manner as her 'mother' is apparent not only by her name, but by the fact that as the narrative ends she is confined to a day nursery with a barred window behind Miss Zilphia's shop - "It's a nice pleasant room," she said. 'Why, I grew up there, myself' (p. 381) - or to walking to and from school beside her mother in the same parade that so shamed and revolted Zilphia herself as a young girl. That Miss Zilphia cannot entirely convince herself of her carefully-constructed 'reality', or rid herself of her haunting, 'ineradicable virginity', is also suggested by the view of the townsfolk, who 'just can't conceive of her as a wife' (p. 381), and her potent dreams of Negro men that wake her

'wide-eyed' and 'weeping' (p. 380) in the night, convinced that something unnameable is about to happen.

The figure of the potent, disturbing or perverting matriarch recurs in 'Adolescence' and 'Elly', often imbued with mythic significance and possessing the power, like Mrs Gant, to influence succeeding generations. 'Adolescence' bears several similarities to 'Miss Zilphia Gant', with Juliet being sent as a child to live with her grandmother, who, 'having passed the troubling ramifications of sex, was wise' and who 'controlled Juliet so subtly that there was never friction between them'.²² The Biblical overtones are clear: Juliet and her young companion Lee exist as a prelapsarian Adam and Eve in an edenic 'eternal summer' (p. 462), eating berries, fishing, and swimming naked in 'a brown pool of the creek' (p. 461), until Juliet's grandmother, whose wisdom is that of the serpent in the garden, finds them 'stark nekked' (p. 465) in a blanket together, shatters their innocence, and ushers in a knowledge of evil and the 'fall' of approaching puberty by beating in disgust at the pair with her stick screaming, 'Get up, ye slut! ... What you goin' to do if he gits you with child?' (pp. 465 - 466). Much as Zilphia Gant's puberty, also brutally announced, is associated with images linking sexuality and violence, so Juliet's rites of passage are a violent quarrel with her grandmother, the death of her father, and a brief meeting with her young brother as he runs away from home. The final lines of the story associate her approaching sexual maturity with 'despair', and suggest violation and paucity, bankrupting even traditional symbols of fertility such as 'mother earth' and the female breast:

She turned over suddenly and buried her face in her thin arms,
feeling the sharp earth strike through her clothing against thighs
and stomach and her hard little breasts. (p. 473)

A more complex use of the themes of sexuality, social mores, and the disjunctions that can result in 'hysterical' or irrational behaviour appears in 'Elly'. The tension between the young girl and her grandmother, both named Ailanthia, is closely associated with

²² Uncollected Stories, p. 460.

sexuality from the outset of the narrative, with Elly passing her grandmother's room each night 'flattened ... and weary and dulled with kissing' (CS, p. 209), after an evening spent with 'almost anyone' (p. 208) in the shadows of the verandah, and meeting the old woman's 'cold, piercing' persecution with 'impotent hatred' (p. 209). This implacable opposition is increased when Elly's grandmother appears silently to discover the girl lying in the 'wild close dark' with a handsome Louisianan, whose purported Negro blood makes the old woman recoil 'as a snake does to strike' (p. 211). Once again the matriarchal figure is shown as possessing power through a knowledge of sin and evil, tormenting Elly with her 'cold, fixed, immobile, inescapable' silence (p. 212). Ultimately, in defiance of her grandmother's hatred, her own engagement to a staid bank clerk, and full of a 'desperate and voluptuous promise' (p. 221), Elly seduces the young Louisianan and, in a violent gesture that recalls Miss Emily's murder of her lover, drives their car over a cliff, killing both Paul and her grandmother, and leaving her huddled and bleeding on an embankment.

The association of female sexuality with time, irrationality, and distortion found in 'A Rose for Emily', 'Miss Zilphia Gant', 'Adolescence' and 'Elly' also appears in 'Dry September', one of Faulkner's most effective short stories, in which the subtle undercurrents and tensions of a small Southern community, together with the violence and 'insanity' they engender, and the relationship between private phobias and those of the wider community, are again portrayed. By counterpointing the experiences of the 'thirty-eight or thirty-nine' year old spinster (CS, p. 173), Miss Minnie Cooper, with the explosive brutality of the lynching party, Faulkner suggests the full range of social dynamics operating within the town, itself an emblem of Southern life on a far wider scale. The breadth, richness, and subtlety of such implication, and the resonant use of structure to superimpose two separate but related narratives in order to highlight both, makes 'Dry September' a far more effective story than 'Miss Zilphia Gant', 'Elly' or 'Adolescence', although all examine similar themes.

Miss Minnie Cooper's response to the particularly prescriptive Southern expectations of her sexual, marital, and social life, depicted so clearly in Chopin, is fantasy and hysteria - in this case, as with Emily Grierson and even more so with Zilphia Gant, very much a 'madness of the womb' arising from repressed, perverted, or inexpressible sexual energy. As with Roderick Usher, when such energy, sexual or intellectual, is inverted rather than expressed, the result is a corruption of the mind. In this instance, Miss Minnie Cooper's inability to articulate this energy is very much related to the society in which she lives. That her sexual status is 'public property' is not simply due to the gossip that flourishes in small communities but because in the South, as Fox-Genovese argues:

the sexuality of upper-class white women - like its reverse, their chastity - constituted the visible and sacred prize of upper-class white men, who were honor-bound to defend it,²³

and was 'a class and racial, rather than an individual, matter'. It is unsurprising, then, that Minnie Cooper's attempt to 'turn back the clock and make herself again the centre of attention through the fantasy of male, and in this case Negro, attack'²⁴ prompts an explosion of interracial violence.

The resonant and disturbing association of Negroes and women suggested in Zilphia Gant's dreams, Elly's seduction of her Louisianan beau, and Minnie Cooper's fantasy of Negro assault point to ambiguities in Faulkner's treatment of these 'others'. Negroes, like women, are portrayed as sources of guilt and fascination, a potent combination of victim and demon that is not only mysterious but simultaneously horrifying and enthralling, and which, as in Faulkner's depiction of women, is explicitly related to sexuality. The persistent and popular idea of the Negro as a symbol of sexual virility and power is, therefore, presented ambivalently in stories such as 'Dry September',

²³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'The Awakening in the Context of the Experience, Culture, and Values of Southern Women' in Approaches to Teaching Chopin's *The Awakening*, p. 38.

²⁴ Edward M. Holmes, p. 82.

in which the Negro's traditional sexual prowess is depicted only in the fantasies of a repressed spinster, and placed side by side with the brutal social realities that mean a mere rumour of Negro attack can result in the violent death of an innocent man.

Faulkner demonstrates the inevitability of this violence in the first section of the story in which the 'rumor, the story, whatever it was' that Miss Minnie Cooper has been 'attacked, insulted, frightened' (p. 169) by a Negro inflames the deep-seated hatred and distrust Negroes inspire in a community already on tenterhooks from a succession of 'sixty-two rainless days'. The fact that

... none of them, gathered in the barber shop on that Saturday evening where the ceiling fan stirred, without freshening it, the vitiated air ... knew exactly what had happened (p. 169)

has no real bearing on the anger aroused by the symbolic outrage of a Negro violating that ideal of Southern virtue, the white woman. The dynamics of conversation between the men in the barbershop clearly indicate the deeper divisions in the community, to which the supposed attack acts as a catalyst. The issue of Minnie Cooper and the Negro, Will Mayes, expands into questions of racial and cultural loyalty, with those urging restraint accused of betraying their class, country, and colour:

"That's right, boys," the barber said. "Find out the truth first. I know Will Mayes."

"Well, by God!" the youth shouted. "To think that a white man in this town - "

"Shut up, Butch," the second speaker said. "We got plenty of time."

The client sat up. He looked at the speaker. "Do you claim that anything excuses a nigger attacking a white woman? Do you mean to tell me you are a white man and you'll stand for it? You better go back North where you came from. The South don't want your kind here."

"North what?" the second said. "I was born and raised in this town."

"Well, by God!" the youth said ... "Damn if I'm going to let a white woman - "

... The screen door crashed open. A man stood in the floor, his feet apart and his heavy-set body poised easily. His white shirt was open at the throat; he wore a felt hat. His hot, bold gaze swept the group. His name was McLendon. He had commanded troops at the front in France and had been decorated for valor.

"Well," he said, "are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?" (pp. 170 - 171)

In this community, as in the South as a whole, Faulkner suggests, the Negro has become powerfully associated with evil and shame. Gray elaborates on Faulkner's view:

... the black, whether as a slave or more simply the member of an oppressed race, brings with him a disconcerting reminder of inherited guilt. To white Southerners, including white Southern writers, he has become a potent emblem of Original Sin, simply by being there, standing on the periphery of things: a reminder of a crime committed not so very long ago by some mythic, communal ancestor.²⁵

This symbolic link between Negroes and sin and evil is actively examined in many of Faulkner's works, and, once again, ties in with persistent themes in Southern literature of the 'fall' of man in this once-Edenic country, the corruption of early, Biblical ideals of the South as a promised land, and the warping effect of this fall from grace in both a personal and a social dimension.

In 'Dry September', as in other stories and novels, one common reaction of white Southerners to this 'disconcerting reminder of inherited guilt' is an attempt to create a preferable reality, however 'irrational', and to behave as if it is the Negro himself who is evil, subhuman, and inherently wicked. On a mythic level, therefore, the Negro becomes the scapegoat, or the symbolic representation of the evils of the community, often chosen, as Frazer puts it, 'because of some mark or bodily defect'²⁶ - in this case colour - who is sacrificed in

²⁵ R. Gray, p. 186.

²⁶ J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, (1922: London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1974), p. 741.

order to purge society of its afflictions. That such forms of behaviour take little or no heed of logical and factual evidence is demonstrated in 'Dry September' by the attitude of the Jefferson men in the barbershop. 'Facts', such as Minnie Cooper's spinsterhood, her previous 'scare' about 'a man on the kitchen roof, watching her undress, about a year ago' (p. 171), and the barber's continual insistence that Will Mayes is 'a good nigger' (p. 169) are treated with contempt. McLendon sums up the perverted logic of the group when he dismisses a question about whether or not the attack actually happened by demanding,

Happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?
(pp. 171 - 2)

Against this 'madness' that defies rationality and perverts McLendon's 'valor' in war into the killing of an unarmed, outnumbered Negro, Faulkner places the fragile figure of Miss Minnie Cooper, whose unexpressed sexuality and advancing, 'shameful' spinsterhood cause her to distort reality in her own way. Once on 'the crest of the town's social life', she carries 'that bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes' as she realises she is 'losing ground' (p. 174). Like Zilphia Gant, she watches her schoolfriends marry and have children who call her 'aunty'. During her affair with the 'high-colored', whiskey-scented cashier, which relegates her into 'adultery by public opinion' (p. 175), she attempts to deny her age by asking that these children call her 'cousin' instead. Once the banker has moved on to Memphis, she goes out only with neighbouring women to the pictures, or walks downtown alone,

... where her young "cousins" were already strolling in the late afternoons with their delicate, silken heads and thin, awkward arms and conscious hips, clinging to one another or shrieking and giggling with paired boys in the soda fountain when she passed and went along the serried store fronts, in the doors of which the sitting and lounging men did not even follow her with their eyes anymore. (p. 175)

That her fantasy of Negro attack has the desired effect is shown later in the narrative, when, walking with her friends to the pictures

she is once again the focus of attention, and attention associated with sexuality, in the town square, as all turn to stare at her and,

... even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats
and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when
she passed. (p. 181)

Like Emily Grierson and Zilphia Gant, in her inability to accept reality as it is, Minnie Cooper turns to irrationality, denying, distorting, or ignoring the truth in order to create a world which she prefers. Viewed by her community as a 'non-person' due to her sexual status, which has not been legitimised through the conventional institutions of marriage and motherhood, Minnie constructs a myth that distorts her circumstances to cast her as the sexually desirable Southern belle. Her perversion of reality mirrors that of her society, which not only prescribes narrow, restrictive and inflexible roles for individuals of either race, but which is prepared to ignore 'facts' and perpetuate pervasive myths to maintain them. Her vision of herself as violated Southern belle taps into one of the most powerful of these myths - that of the sexually-valuable, venerated and undefiled Southern woman-as-madonna - a fact that is demonstrated when her imaginings turn her instantly from a non-person in the community to the centre of righteous outrage. Throughout the narrative her association with resonant images of the antebellum South - delicate, fresh voile dresses, long mornings 'swinging in the porch swing' in 'a lace-trimmed boudoir cap' (p. 173), 'parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns' (p. 174) - emphasise that she both lives in and symbolises the past, and this is abruptly contrasted, through the sectional structure of the narrative, with the sweaty, brutal world of the present and the killing of Will Mayes.

The interrelationship of these two worlds adds much to the complexity and power of 'Dry September'. Beneath her immaculate voile dresses and delicate caps Minnie Cooper is 'haggard' - corrupt in the sense that she lives in an unreal, hysterical world of fantasy, haunted by her age, spinsterhood, and repressed sensuality, and further corrupt because her attempts to recapture the social attention of the past through projecting her sexual fantasies into the present results in the unnecessary death of Will Mayes. Once again, Faulkner plays on

concepts of the 'curved truth', demonstrating the insanity that can result from discrepancies between perceived and actual reality, and showing both the individual and the community acting out myths of the past that are not only distortions of reality, but that result in violence and death.

Despite regarding Minnie Cooper as 'poor Minnie' (p. 182), and seeing through the misrepresentative fresh dresses and 'sheer underthings' (p. 180), however, sections of the community at least remain vulnerable to the power, myths, and ideals of the past. The force of what Minnie Cooper and her 'rape' represent is enough to spark the full force of another, different 'madness' in which the roles of sinned against and sinning are reversed and logic, facts, and reason are irrelevant. Pertinently, in the final section of 'Dry September' McLendon is depicted treating his wife with an accusing callousness and physical roughness that links her in some ways with Will Mayes, once again suggesting the similarity between the haunting, guilt-ridden 'otherness' of the Negro and the 'otherness' of women, a reflection of the 'otherness' with which the South is regarded, and regards itself. Faulkner's dual perspective as both an 'insider' - sensitive to the experiences and social institutions of the South - and an 'outsider' - aware of the distortions and exaggerations inherent in such experiences and structures - is clearly evident in this story, emerging particularly in his ambivalence towards the potent myths and restrictive social mores of the South. In its compact treatment of themes and symbols, 'Dry September' becomes one of Faulkner's most forceful and economic statements about aspects of Southern experience, in which the world that is implied, once again, is vaster and more complex than the tightly-structured events of the narrative itself.

From a detailed examination of these stories, then, it may be seen that Faulkner's exploration of madness and the grotesque in his shorter narratives is multifaceted and closely related to concepts of Southernness. In his best short stories, such as 'Dry September', 'A Rose for Emily', 'That Evening Sun', and 'There Was A Queen', the implication, suggestion, and skilful use of structure that extend and heighten the mystery and horror of 'The Leg' are used to create

reverberations that imply the wider world of Yoknapatawpha and the South as a whole. In this succinct form, it may be argued, Faulkner's complex vision of the South is often at its most powerful, although novels such as Absalom, Absalom!, As I Lay Dying or Sanctuary undoubtedly provide a more detailed and extensive development of themes such as time and history, and the implications of past actions upon the lives of those in the present.

In comparing Faulkner's treatment of irrationality and insanity with that present in Chopin's work, it is evident that in several respects they are markedly different - a difference that is also indicative of certain wider trends in literature. As discussed previously, Chopin, like many other female writers, approaches madness from a position of understanding, compassion, or empathy. Works such as 'La Belle Zoraïde' and The Awakening demonstrate what Annette Kolodny describes as the 'writing out of nondominant or subcultural traditions'²⁷, or texts that emerge from women's marginalisation in society - from those who are predominantly defined only by what they 'are not': the 'nondominant', the 'subcultural', the man's 'other half'. From this position of alienation female writers such as Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath articulate other aspects of marginalisation with sensitivity, identifying strong parallels with others who are defined in terms of deficiency, such as the in-sane, the un-conventional, and the irrational.

Together with, and in many ways because of, such experiences of marginalisation, female writers like Chopin seek to explore the strong connections between women and madness, and to establish female 'madness' in the perspective of, as Barbara Rigney expresses it:

... a patriarchal political and social system, a universe dominated by masculine energy, which, in itself, manifests a kind of collective

²⁷ Annette Kolodny, 'A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts' in E. Showalter, ed, The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 54.

madness in the form of war or sexual oppression and is therefore ...
threatening to feminine psychological survival.²⁸

From this position as the 'insider', Chopin and other writers portray what is labelled 'insanity' or 'hysteria' not only as attempts at self expression that cannot be reconciled with what a male-dominated society views as 'normal', but often as an extreme reaction to the extreme circumstances that occur in such a society, in which, as Phyllis Chesler writes in Women and Madness, women are 'categorically denied the experience of cultural supremacy, humanity, and renewal based on their sexual identity'.²⁹ The treatment of madness in works by writers such as Chopin, therefore, is one that suggests that 'madness', and that particularly female madness, 'hysteria', is frequently a question of interpretation rather than categorisation, and can be viewed as an understandable, if not justifiable, response to restrictive or unbearable situations.³⁰

In comparison to this 'internal' view of madness, certain aspects of Faulkner's work display an 'external' perspective. Concepts of insanity, irrationality or mental disturbance are closely associated with ideas of 'otherness', or that which constitutes or symbolises the world outside the self. Once again, this is a realm defined in terms of deficiency or lack - the 'un-known', that which is 'not self' - which,

²⁸ Barbara Hill Rigney, Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 7.

²⁹ Phyllis Chesler, Women and Madness, (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 31.

³⁰ After the First World War many women writers, such as Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf, used the theme of 'shell-shock' or male hysteria to criticise psychiatric attitudes and treatments. Unlike male doctors, who often took a punitive approach in order to re-establish patriarchal, 'manly' virtues in their 'weak', 'feminine' shell-shock patients (the very name 'shell-shock' was an attempt to avoid the very 'feminine' connotations of 'hysteria'), such women recognised all too well, as Showalter argues, that 'powerlessness could lead to pathology, that a lasting wound could result when a person lost the sense of being in control' (The Female Malady, p. 190), and that shell-shock was an understandable reaction to the extreme conditions of war.

because it possesses few or none of the characteristics of the known, is a source of fear, fascination, superstition and myth. Writing specifically about religion but using terms with wider relevance, Richard Wentz states that:

... human beings treat the encounter with the mystery of otherness in various ways. Generally speaking, however, they tend to make a [religious] foreclosure on the mystery, based on either fear or the need to control ... Our continued pursuit of meaning, fulfilment, and knowledge takes place in reference to multifarious otherness. But because we rarely acknowledge in openness the mystery of the others we encounter, we tend to be fearful, defensive and hostile.

We retreat into delusions of *self-realization* and *privatisation*.³¹

Cartesian philosophy, similarly, holds that there is always 'a sense of unbridgeable distance between self and Other' because one can only express oneself to another through external behaviour, which is 'outer, derivative, inferior, susceptible to misinterpretation and error, and only tangentially related to oneself', and can never perceive the other through anything but 'secondary and inaccurate representations' of their true nature.³²

Julia Kristeva identifies this otherness in literature and language as 'the irrationality, chaos and fragmentation that has come to represent femininity' as opposed to the 'reason, order, unity and lucidity' of 'masculine rationality'³³; however, as her choice of words indicates, concepts of otherness can be applied to any group or individual that seems alien to the 'reason, order, unity and lucidity' of the self. In Faulkner's work, women and Negroes are particularly associated with ideas of otherness, and women especially, as Gray suggests, because:

³¹ Richard Wentz, The Contemplation of Otherness: The Critical Vision of Religion, (Mercer: Mercer University Press, 1984), pp. 4, 5.

³² William Ralph Schroeder, Sartre and His Predecessors: The Self and the Other, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Plc, 1984), p. 3.

³³ Julia Kristeva, 'Marginality and Subversion' in Toril Moi, ed. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, (London: Methuan, 1985), p. 160.

Even more, perhaps, than the black characters (who can be dehumanised or ignored, if necessary) they represent the alien and the unknown; as a result, they call into question established codes, habitual methods of mediating, organising, and explaining experience.³⁴

As 'the other', such figures are a potent catalyst for behaviour or beliefs that are irrational or grotesque: the killing of Will Mayes in 'Dry September'; Roth Edmonds's sudden inability to sleep beside his Negro foster brother in 'The Fire and the Hearth'; Colonel Sutpen's excessive callousness in 'Wash', a precursor to Absalom, Absalom!, when he discovers Milly Jones's child is a girl; the horrible, unexplained, supernatural betrayals of 'The Leg', to cite only a few of many possible examples.

Faulkner's portrayal of madness, in keeping with other aspects of his work, is, however, characterised by an ambivalence and an ambiguity that reflect his position as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' in terms of the South as a whole. As an 'outsider', on the one hand, he presents such madness and distorted behaviour in others as the unknown, and as such inherently chaotic, irrational, fragmented and 'insane' - a position that is objective and descriptive rather than subjective or interpretive. The central women characters of 'A Rose for Emily', 'Miss Zilphia Gant', and 'Dry September' deny reality and create in its place grotesque and pathetic worlds of fantasy. Narcissa Benbow of 'There Was A Queen' is prepared to give her body in order to recover obscene letters written to her and later stolen, an action that effectively sacrifices her virtue to her reputation in a bizarre inversion of values. 'That Evening Sun' presents Nancy Manningoe's terrible conviction that her husband Jesus is watching and waiting to kill her as inexplicable to her white employers, the Compson family, particularly as her belief is based not on 'rational' facts but on feelings:

"I can feel him. I can feel him now, in this lane. He hearing us talk, every word, hid somewhere, waiting. I aint seen him, and I aint going to see him again but once more, with that razor in his

³⁴ R. Gray, pp. 188 - 189.

mouth. That razor on that string down his back, inside his shirt.

And then I aint going to be even surprised. (p. 295)

She is portrayed as alien and 'uncivilised' in her fear, keening in a tone of 'not singing and not unsinging' (p. 300) in the night, unable to drink coffee without spilling it, terrified by 'primitive' superstitions and beliefs that are oddly juxtaposed with the Compsons' way of life:

Then the sound began again, in the stairway, not loud, and we could see Nancy's eyes halfway up the stairs, against the wall. They looked like a cat's eyes do, like a big cat against the wall, watching us. (p. 296)

In comparison to Chopin's 'feminine' treatment of madness, these aspects of Faulkner's point of view may be seen as 'masculine'. Although such terms are reductive and may have unnecessarily restrictive connotations, they point to important differences in perspective between the two writers, and between male and female experiences of madness in general. Faulkner's view of insanity and irrationality is primarily - although not exclusively - of an 'otherness' that is not only mad, chaotic, distorted, and foreign in itself, but which also acts as a catalyst for such disruption and insanity in reaction with the known or the self. The focus is less on an understanding or empathetic interpretation of 'mad' or 'irrational' behaviour, than, as in Poe, upon the fascination such behaviour exerts, and its power to shock and horrify. This is the point of view of the 'outsider' rather than the 'insider', of the majority rather than the marginalised, of the sane and known observing the insane and the unknown.

Faulkner's gothic madwomen and hysterics are, therefore, symbols that radiate their meaning outwards, the spectacle through which to mirror disjunctions in society, history, myth, and reality. In a more 'feminine' examination of madness, such social and historical disjunctions are perceived as refracting inwards onto the individual, whose reactions have an internal or personal relevance. Faulkner employs Minnie Cooper's hysterical imaginings, for example, as a disturbing vehicle to depict the corruption of Southern myths of history and the general social 'madness' this can engender. Chopin, however, shows Edna Pontellier's attempts to establish 'a house of her

own', to express herself artistically, and to develop her own sexual identity - all actions deemed unconventional and irrational by her society - as highly personal and reflecting the 'intense experience of female biological, sexual, and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency'³⁵ that Phyllis Chesler describes as characteristic of women's experience.

Faulkner's use of 'otherness' in his treatment of madness can be related in a wider sense to the concept of the South as inherently different from America as a whole. Faulkner, participating as the observer, presents Yoknapatawpha as an emblem of a geographical, cultural, and historical 'otherness' in which the South itself can be seen as alien and fascinating, a potent source of myths, ideals, dreams and superstitions. This perspective of the 'outsider' is extended to the reader through his depiction of communities such as Jefferson in 'A Rose for Emily', which are in themselves distorted to the extent that exaggerated, 'insane' behaviour is not regarded as extreme, and it is the audience alone, on the outside looking in, that recognises the monstrosity and madness these societies epitomise. Faulkner's position in regard to the South is ambivalent, both internal and external - much like the ambiguity expressed in Quentin Compson's desperate cry at the end of Absalom, Absalom!: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*³⁶. As Gray states, his texts encompass the perspective of 'someone who knows what it is to be both an insider and an outsider: it discloses plans, and explores dreams, that possess both observed and observer.'

This ambivalence makes it impossible to categorise Faulkner's work as solely 'masculine'. Although clearly demonstrating the external perspective of the 'outsider', and exploring concepts of 'otherness' as inherently mysterious, chaotic, irrational and unknown, Faulkner also remains intensely aware of, and sensitive to, the experience of the South from an 'internal' viewpoint - a more 'feminine' position that is also reflected in aspects of his treatment of

³⁵ P. Chesler, Women and Madness, p. 31.

³⁶ William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 311.

madness. This ambiguity makes a simple division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' examinations of madness inappropriate, and suggests a more complex interpretation of Faulkner's narratives. Although resulting in a focus that is less sharply-defined than Chopin's portrayal of the individual in tension with a restrictive society, Faulkner's dual perspective leads to rich, reflective, and wide-ranging works that encompass the divergent experiences and beliefs of both 'insider' and 'outsider'.

Faulkner, alienated due to his 'Southernness' from America as a whole, and also experiencing a sense of being 'a stranger in his own land', presents many of his mad, irrational or aberrant characters with empathy and awareness. Figures such as Miss Emily, Minnie Cooper, Elly, and Roth Edmonds are not simply symbols that reflect blindly, but characters that can also be 'seen into', and exist on an internal as well as an external level. Extreme forms of behaviour such as Miss Emily's murder of her lover, or Roth Edmonds's sudden antipathy towards his black foster brother Henry, therefore, are not seen in isolation as disturbing spectacles of insane behaviour, but also maintain 'internal' integrity as intensely personal reactions to a far wider context of disjunctions and lost, failed, or distorted ideals. In his novels, this internal perspective is fully developed in his use of idiot or insane narrators, such as Benjy Compson in The Sound and the Fury and Darl in As I Lay Dying.

In keeping with this ambiguity, 'Mountain Victory', for example, portrays the personal dimension of the deep and often insane divisions of the Civil War in the brutal deaths of Saucier Weddel and his Negro manservant after they have sheltered for the night with a primitive mountain family. Although the war is over, the men of the family are incapable of viewing Weddel as anything but an enemy, and run the travellers down in the snow the next morning with implacable hatred. Their actions are not merely those of simple-minded savagery, however, but imply a response to the extremity of a war that divided the geographic and symbolic unity of America profoundly and shockingly. Similarly, the seven year old Roth Edmonds's abrupt

refusal to sleep with his closest companion and foster brother is portrayed as a particularly chilling manifestation of

... the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride
based not on any value but on an accident of geography, [which]
stemmed not from courage and honour but from wrong and shame.³⁷

The wider perspective that results from combining these two points of view, observer and observed, gives considerable depth and impact to Faulkner's use of madness, irrationality, or mental distortion as a means of articulating the truth, as he sees it, of Southern experience. Characters such as Narcissa Benbow of 'There Was A Queen', McLendon in 'Dry September', Miss Emily Grierson, and Miss Minnie Cooper, informed as they are with resonant images and suggestions of Southern history, myth and ideals, point out through their extreme behaviour the nature of the world they symbolise, and, on a personal level, respond to. In its most developed and extensive form, this concept of madness representing or expressing truth is portrayed in Benjy and Darl, both of whom see through the facades and subjectivity of what is supposedly 'normality' to the true nature of people, events, and experiences³⁸. This is only partially the world of

³⁷ William Faulkner, 'The Fire and The Hearth' in Go Down Moses and Other Stories, (1942: London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 83.

³⁸ In the character of Benjy we may perceive a connection with traditions of the innocent, or the 'holy fool' - a figure whose idiocy renders him uniquely sacred to God. This perspective on madness is not included in this discussion as it is not a significant feature of the short fiction examined. Even Flannery O'Connor, in her explorations of the relationships between man and God, does not portray characters that can be seen as holy fools, or idiot-savants, although she makes an allusion to the type in The Violent Bear it Away, when Tarwater speaks roughly to the idiot child Bishop in front of a hotel receptionist:

'Mind how you talk to one of them there, you boy!' the woman hissed.

He looked at her as if it were the first time she had spoken to him. 'Them there what?' he murmured.

'That there kind,' she said, looking at him fiercely as if he had profaned the holy. (Flannery O'Connor, The Violent Bear it Away in Flannery O'Connor:

Poe, in which madmen such as Roderick Usher or the narrator of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' create a distorted world that bears little or no relation to true reality; and it is also partially the world of The Awakening, in which Edna Pontellier's 'mad' behaviour is a far more accurate expression of the state of her society than the 'normality' of those who surround her.

In articulating internal as well as external reality, and exploring the relationships between individual madness or distortion and the nature of Southern experience, Faulkner develops the personal ramifications of a region and a society uniquely imbued with history and myth. As an 'insider', and proceeding from his experiences of forms of alienation, Faulkner engages in an examination of the relevance of cultural memory and its 'truth' for the individual, responding to what Lewis Simpson identifies in his book The Dispossessed Garden as a peculiarly Southern 'degradation of memory and history' resulting in 'a tendency of the literary consciousness to become isolated from its corporate relation to the cultural past'³⁹. In reaction to this perceived alienation of the literary consciousness, first recognised by Poe, and later particularly evident following the First World War, Simpson argues that

Southern writers beginning with ... Allen Tate and William Faulkner - and in this unlike the dark diagnostician of cultural illness, Poe - inaugurated a struggle to comprehend the nature of memory and history, and to assert the redemptive meaning of the classical-Christian past in its bearing on the present.⁴⁰

While it may be argued that Faulkner focuses more on the symbolic significance of the classical-Christian past than on its

Collected Works selected and notated by Sally Fitzgerald, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1988), pp. 426 - 427.)

³⁹ Lewis P. Simpson, The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), p. 69.

⁴⁰ L.Simpson, p. 70.

'redemptive meaning', Simpson's view of Faulkner as attempting to re-validate Southern cultural history and to explore its relevance to the present and to the individual is underlined by the mythic complexity and resonance of Faulkner's work. Like Hawthorne in the North, Faulkner inscribes a representative history of his region. The narratives of Yoknapatawpha, again reflecting the South as a whole, are imbued with its history, from the time of the Indians, recorded in stories about Issetibbeha, Mokketubbe, Doom and Ikkemotubbe - who have their own legends and ritual past - to the intricate interrelationships of families such as the Compsons, the Snopes, and the McCaslins. In keeping with Faulkner's dual perspective as 'insider' and 'outsider', the implications of this history are explored on both a personal and social level, developing their contribution not only to the unique, and often distorted, nature of the South as a region, but also to the pressures, institutions and traditions that influence the individual.

Faulkner's best short stories, therefore, may be seen as providing a succinct, reverberative, and powerful articulation of his complex vision of the South. Although closely related to many of the novels, narratives such as 'A Rose For Emily', 'Dry September', 'The Leg', 'There Was A Queen', and 'Wash' maintain their own integrity and demonstrate the effectiveness of Poe's theories of concentrated totality and unity of focus. Faulkner's position as a 'double agent', 'insider and outsider', 'observed and observer'⁴¹ demonstrates his ambivalent perspective on the South, and his combination of both 'masculine' and 'feminine' treatments of madness in order to express the complex and ambiguous nature of Southern experience. This use of a dual focus creates an evocative and rich relationship between concepts of otherness and an understanding of bizarre, grotesque, and insane behaviour that, although developed more extensively in his novels, is arguably presented at its most intense in such shorter narratives.

⁴¹ R. Gray, p. 171.

Flannery O'Connor: Who can stand when He appeareth?

... I have found that anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic.¹

Flannery O'Connor, writing in the 1950s and 60s, imbues her novels and short stories with a unique and powerful theological sensibility absent from Chopin and Faulkner, but which also proceeds from a distinctively Southern view of the condition of humankind. In exploring themes such as the relationship between God and man, the possibilities of grace, and agents of revelation and prophecy, O'Connor, herself a Catholic, draws strongly on the traditions and expressions of Protestant fundamentalism found in the 'Bible belt' South, and particularly her native Georgia. The distortion, fanaticism, and insanity of her characters serve to 'make [her] vision apparent by shock', much as 'to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling pictures'² - this to a reader who 'wants his grace warm and binding, not dark and disruptive'³. Like Poe, Chopin and Faulkner, and her contemporaries Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers, O'Connor uses madness as a means of expressing a reality that lies beneath external appearances, or beyond the consciousnesses of her characters and audience, employing distortion, exaggeration, the gothic and the grotesque as a means of portrayal that in itself articulates the nature of such a reality.

¹ Flannery O'Connor, 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction' in Flannery O'Connor : Collected Works selected and notated by Sally Fitzgerald, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Inc, 1988) p. 815. Hereafter abbreviated as CW.

² 'The Fiction Writer and His Country', CW, p. 806.

³ 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South', CW, p. 862.

O'Connor is explicit about the unique relationship between the South and the grotesque in literature, and the relevance this has to her examination of theological themes. In her discussion 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction', she comments on the affinity Southern writers demonstrate for the gothic, the mad, the irrational, and the deformed, and the significance of such figures to the tenor and culture of the South itself:

Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognise one. To be able to recognise a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological ... I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner who isn't convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature. In any case, it is when the freak can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature.⁴

This links closely with Faulkner's similar ideas of the South as 'haunted', not so much by Christ - other than as a figure of guilt and sacrifice - as by the past, a sense of inherited guilt, and an awareness of the sins of the fathers, for which the Negro is a potent symbol. In O'Connor's work, the 'essential displacement' of white from Negro, man from man, even past from present, is a reflection of man's 'displacement' from God, which underlies all other forms of dislocation and alienation, as in her story of an insidiously disturbing Polish immigrant family, 'The Displaced Person'. The ghosts in her writing emerge not so much from inherited sins as from the distancing of man from God, which is the foundation of sin and guilt, from her vision of the 'dark and disruptive' grace of God, or even from good, which,

⁴ 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Literature', CW, pp. 817 - 818.

... few of us have stared at ... long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction.⁵

Like Faulkner, O'Connor attributes much of the awareness and sensitivity Southern writers bring to bear upon the flawed, the fallen, and the mentally, physically, or spiritually distorted to the experience and results of the Civil War:

When Walker Percy won the National Book Award, newsmen asked him why there were so many good Southern writers and he said, 'Because we lost the War'. He didn't mean by that simply that a lost war makes good subject matter. What he was saying was that we have had our Fall. We have gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitation and with a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence - as it has not sufficiently developed in the rest of our country.⁶

In the South, O'Connor argues, Bible belt traditions and the infusion of Southern history with religious significance provide Southerners, and Southern writers in particular, with a medium through which to interpret this 'Fall'⁷, and to articulate its full impact and relevance. It is just such a world, where theological concepts are inextricably bound into the experience, relationships, and beliefs of characters, and even into the physical landscape around them, that O'Connor develops in her novels and short stories, and uses to express the various relationships of man to God.

The significance of O'Connor's 'mad', irrational and grotesque characters in this world is twofold, as they not only demonstrate the results of an 'essential displacement' from God and from grace, but can also be prophets, preachers and agents of revelation for God and for grace. In her writing O'Connor skilfully combines psychological verisimilitude with powerful scriptural symbolism in order to tie her

⁵ O'Connor, 'A Memoir of Mary Ann' CW, p. 830.

⁶ O'Connor, 'The Regional Writer', CW, p. 847.

⁷ 'The Regional Writer', CW, p. 847.

characters to both the world of the physical body and mind, and the realm of the spirit or the soul, recognising that:

... to the eye of the general reader, these prophet-heroes are freaks. The public invariably approaches them from the standpoint of abnormal psychology.⁸

In order to express what she views as the greater truth, a truth that is theological rather than psychological, O'Connor refers to what she terms the 'prophecy' of the writer, or the ability to use the material or the familiar as a means of symbolising and magnifying aspects of a far different reality:

In the novelist's case prophecy is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up. The prophet is a realist of distances, distances in the qualitative sense ...⁹

The 'fanaticism and torment' of 'the emotion-torn, apocalyptic primitive Protestantism of the back-country South'¹⁰ provides a unique medium for exploring such a conjunction of the near and the distant, as it is a religion which views its world and community as 'integrally connected to, and penetrated by, the divine'¹¹. The biblical symbolism and mythology underlying Southern culture find expression in such fundamentalism as an intense belief in the realities of good and evil, salvation and damnation, Christ and the Devil, and their presence in everyday life. It is a world in which visions, prophets, evangelists and zealots testify directly to their community, and signs along highway verges demand 'WHERE WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?'. O'Connor describes it as:

... a do-it-yourself religion, something which I as a Catholic find painful and touching and grimly comic. It's full of unconscious pride

⁸ 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South', CW, p. 861.

⁹ 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South', CW, pp. 860 - 861.

¹⁰ Louis D. Rubin Jr, 'Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt' in Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, eds, The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 53.

¹¹ Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr, The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 29.

that lands them in all sorts of ridiculous religious predicaments ...¹²

She also views such fanatics seriously, however, considering them to be dealing with ultimate matters of salvation, God and the powers of evil, and feeling that 'I accept the same fundamental doctrines of sin and redemption and judgement that they do'¹³.

She is explicit about the need to articulate and explore such faith through a medium that is concrete and realistic, believing that, 'our sense of what is contained in our faith is deepened less by abstractions than by an encounter with mystery in what is human and often perverse'¹⁴. In the 'Christ-haunted' world of the South, therefore, the writer who is informed by a religious view of the world is surrounded by a community in which the Biblical and the sacramental are inescapably linked to the common and the everyday. He or she can thus avoid what O'Connor views as the dangerous tendency of religious writers to attempt to 'enshrine the mystery without the fact', which results in disjunctions inimical to art, as judgement is separated from vision, nature from grace, reason from imagination¹⁵. In O'Connor's work, a sow suckling her piglets, a tree bursting into flame after a tractor accident, a wayward scrub bull, a plaster Negro, a prosthesis-pilfering Bible salesman, woods, pastures, sunsets and rivers all become agents of transfiguration and revelation, leading her grotesque, perverse and fanatical characters through crisis to experiences, ambiguous as they may be, of grace or knowledge.

O'Connor died in 1964, at the age of thirty-nine, of disseminated lupus. It was the onset of the disease in 1950 that forced her to return to Georgia from Connecticut, although following four years at the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa and periods in Yaddo and New York, she had considered never returning to the South due to 'the notion that the life of my writing depended on my

¹² O'Connor, letter to John Hawkes, 13 September 1959, CW, p. 1107.

¹³ Letter to John Hawkes, CW, p. 1107.

¹⁴ 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South', CW, p. 863.

¹⁵ 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South', CW, p. 864.

staying away'¹⁶. Her later observations on the South and its relationship to her own fiction in particular, and Southern writers in general, however, demonstrate an awareness of the individuality of the region and the manner in which such uniqueness is manifested in literature. In 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South' O'Connor writes of the influence of the South in terms that are reminiscent of the physicality and sensuous immediacy of Chopin's fiction, and display her belief that particular experience underlies the strength and power of faith, and that the experience of the South may be used in fiction as a means of articulating such faith:

The things we see, hear, smell and touch affect us long before we believe in anything at all. The South impresses its image on the Southern writer from the moment he is able to distinguish one sound from another. He takes it in through his ears and hears it again in his own voice, and, by the time he is able to use his imagination for fiction, he finds that his senses respond irrevocably to a certain reality The discovery of having his senses respond to a particular society and a particular history, to particular sounds and a particular idiom, is for the Southern writer the beginning of a recognition that first puts his work in real human perspective for him ... The energy of the South is so strong in him that it is a force which has to be encountered and engaged, and it is when this is a true engagement that its meaning will lead outward to universal human interest.¹⁷

O'Connor is also clear about the strong story-telling traditions of the South. Although producing, like Poe and Chopin, two novel-length works, Wise Blood and The Violent Bear it Away, she is considered by many critics to be at her most effective and powerful in her short stories. Louis D. Rubin Jr., for example, describes her as 'primarily a short story writer, one of the best of her century , rather than a novelist'¹⁸ and remarks that her 'decidedly promising talent

¹⁶ Letter to Cecil Dawkins, 16 July 1957, CW, p. 1037.

¹⁷ 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South', CW, pp. 855, 857.

¹⁸ Louis D. Rubin Jr, 'Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt', The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, p. 51.

seemed to fulfil itself adequately only in the short-story form'¹⁹, while the Literary History of the United States considers her collections of short stories to contain 'some of the most accomplished and terrifying fictions of the postwar period'²⁰. In narratives such as 'A Good Man is Hard to Find', 'Good Country People', 'Revelation', 'Greenleaf', and 'The Life You Save May Be Your Own', O'Connor's expressions of the revelation of sacramental mystery in everyday life and the experiences of individuals at a point of crisis are in many ways at their most succinct and disturbing, an achievement she views as a continuation of distinctly Southern traditions of interpreting and articulating aspects of life through the medium of the tale. Telling stories, she states, has developed in the South as a means of 'reasoning and dealing with experience'²¹ that is in several important ways more truthful to the culturally-intricate, myth-infused, multiple-voiced nature of the region than any other forms of expression:

The Southerner knows he can do more justice to reality by telling a story than he can by discussing problems or proposing abstractions. We live in a complex region and you have to tell stories if you want to be anyway truthful about it.²²

The complexity with which O'Connor uses the concrete and the recognisable to express her sacramental themes may be seen in 'Good Country People' - a story she considered to be 'the best thing I have ever done'²³ - from her first published collection of short stories, A Good Man is Hard to Find. At the opening of the narrative O'Connor frames the grotesque figure of Joy, a thirty-two year old with a doctorate in philosophy and an artificial leg, between the 'normal', sane, or

¹⁹ Louis D. Rubin Jr, The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 195 - 196.

²⁰ Literary History of the United States, R. Spiller, W. Thorp et al, eds, (1946: New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc, 1974), p. 1464.

²¹ Robert Donner, 'She Writes Powerful Fiction', Sign, March 1961, quoted in The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, p. 240.

²² C. Ross Mullins, 'Flannery O'Connor, An Interview', Jubilee, June, 1963, quoted in The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, p. 240.

²³ O'Connor, letter to Thomas Mabry, 1 March 1955, CW, p. 930.

everyday figures of Joy's mother, Mrs Hopewell, and the tenant farmer's wife, Mrs Freeman. Joy's physical and mental abnormality is further highlighted by an implicit contrast with Mrs Freeman's two daughters, effective and subtle 'doubles', who, although blessed with the exotic names of Glynese and Carramae, are concerned only with the mundane things of life, such as men, marriage, and motherhood:

Glynese, a redhead, was eighteen and had many admirers; Carramae, a blonde, was only fifteen but already married and pregnant. She could not keep anything on her stomach. Every morning Mrs Freeman told Mrs Hopewell how many times she had vomited since the last report.²⁴

Much to her mother's resigned despair, Joy has shown none of this reassuring behaviour. After having had her leg 'literally blasted off' (p. 267) in a hunting accident at the age of ten, and having been diagnosed as having a 'weak heart', she has deliberately exaggerated her grotesqueness until 'it seemed to Mrs Hopewell that every year she grew less like other people and more like herself - bloated, rude, and squint-eyed', wearing only a 'six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it', graduating with a virtually useless doctorate in philosophy, and spending all day sitting 'on her neck in a deep chair, reading' (p. 268). She considers changing her name from Joy to Hulga 'her highest creative act', a perverse victory in terms of both her vindictive treatment of her mother and her own attempts to exaggerate her ugliness and her 'difference':

One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga. (p. 267)

In Flannery O'Connor's Religion of the Grotesque, Marshall Bruce Gentry identifies the further implications of this name, which Joy, or Hulga, envisages as 'working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called' (p. 267). According to the mythology that informs Hulga's choice, however, the goddess Aphrodite frequently deceived her husband Vulcan, or Hephaistos, with Ares, and thus 'presumably'

²⁴ O'Connor, 'Good Country People', CW, pp. 263 - 264.

often did not come 'when called'. In the Odyssey Vulcan (Hephaistos) finally catches the adulterous couple in a net and leaves them trapped until the gods appear to witness the guilty pair. Although Aphrodite and her lover are condemned and mocked, both Hermes and Apollo recognise Ares' position as enviable and agree that they too would like to be captured in such a position with the goddess of love. Gentry argues that the themes of enviable capture and the marriage of the grotesque and the ideal are closely related to the narrative and resonate fully in Hulga's experience with the young Bible salesman, Manley Pointer, in the barn²⁵.

O'Connor's use of emblematic names points to the presence of various levels of allegory in her work. An obvious symbolic dimension, often ironic or satiric, is utilised in characters such as Mrs Freeman, who as a tenant farmer's wife is bound to the land and to her employer, and who has only three rigid expressions, forward, neutral and reverse. Mrs Hopewell, similarly, is beyond the point of 'hoping well', having seen her hopes turn to 'dust' rather than 'Joy', while the aggressively masculine overtones of 'Manley Pointer', who both seduces Hulga and 'points her' in an ambiguous new direction, are clear. In other stories O'Connor presents Mrs Cope, who is ultimately unable to cope; Mrs May and Mr Greenleaf in a grotesque pastoral in which Mrs May is gored to death by a Bacchanalian bull; Sheppard, who proves himself to be a distorted and bankrupt version of the Good Shepherd, and numerous other characters whose names invite direct symbolic interpretation. On another level, symbolic names become signifiers, as in The Pilgrim's Progress or Everyman, of the allegorical dimension of the text and the presence of deeper structures of meaning, as do the mythic associations of 'Hulga'. Like Faulkner, O'Connor draws from Greco-Roman legend, pastoral traditions, and pagan ritual, as well as resonant Biblical imagery in order to enrich and highlight the importance of her central themes, characters, and conflicts.

²⁵ Marshall Bruce Gentry, Flannery O'Connor's Religion of the Grotesque, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), p. 116.

The ideas of deception that are suggested in O'Connor's reference to Vulcan are also centrally important to the narrative, and find fullest expression in Hulga's point of crisis in the barn. Through the course of the story O'Connor introduces and develops themes of self-deception, or perverted and illogical perception, beginning in the opening paragraphs with the statement that Joy's mother 'thought of her [Joy] as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated' (p. 263). Later it is repeated that 'it was hard for Mrs Hopewell to realize that her child was thirty-two now' and that 'she thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times' (p. 266). Mrs Hopewell also demonstrates a simplistic conviction that experience can be summed up in clichés:

Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs Hopewell's favourite sayings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well, other people have their opinions too. She would make these statements, usually at the table, in a tone of gentle insistence as if no one held them but her. (p. 264)

In the context of the story, however, as Gentry suggests, 'the literal meaning of a cliché always threatens to break through the conventional meaning', and when Mrs Hopewell declares, 'It takes all kinds to make the world' (p. 265), she is, in effect, presenting 'a partial rationale for the grotesque'²⁶. Her view of 'good country people' underlines her reliance on cliché to order and categorise her world. Despite Mrs Freeman's annoying habits, she and her husband represent 'the salt of the earth' rather than 'trash' to Mrs Hopewell, who realises that 'nothing is perfect and that in the Freemans she had good country people and that if, in this day and age, you get good country people, you had better hang onto them' (p. 265). On hearing that Manley Pointer is, supposedly, just a country boy from 'around Willohobie, not even from a place, just from near a place', and that he believes 'you dont see any more real honest people unless you go way out into the country' (p. 271), she instantly believes, in a phrase that prefigures Hulga's misguided idea of his innocence, that he, too, is 'good country people': 'so sincere, so genuine and earnest' (p. 272).

²⁶ Gentry, p. 117.

Mrs Hopewell's benevolent, if not harmless, self-deception prefigures and underlines Hulga's far more damaging distortion of point of view and belief. In exaggerating her own grotesque 'otherness', Hulga emphasises that she sees herself as separate from the world of her mother, Mrs Freeman, Glynesse and Carramae, but, O'Connor suggests, does not recognise her true alienation from God and grace. Much like the unnamed twelve year old in 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost', Sally Virginia Cope in 'A Circle in the Fire', and Mary Grace of 'Revelation', Hulga displays her intelligence as a destructive rather than a creative force. As Louise Westling puts it:

Female intelligence is a curse in these stories, for it creates profound discontent. Frustrated in a society of hillbillies, religious fundamentalists, and snuff-dipping tenant farmers, most of these bright fat girls snipe away at the pretension and stupidity around them.²⁷

Hulga focuses her 'brilliance' on nihilism and believes only in the great nothingness behind existence, which leads her to what O'Connor implies is one of the most damaging perversities of all: setting herself up as the voice of enlightenment in place of God. Believing herself to be a genius, Hulga sees her mother and the visiting Bible salesman, both 'good country people', to be mere innocents blinded by faith, and, as Brinkmeyer states:

... armed with what she sees as her penetrating vision and thoroughly rational mind, Hulga perceives herself as the potential savior of those about her. Like O'Connor's other intellectuals, she is given to teaching others lessons about life, lessons that call into question the very identities of those so taught.²⁸

Her methods of 'teaching others lessons about life' are in themselves grotesque. She stands up 'in the middle of a meal with her

²⁷ Louise Westling, Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. 147.

²⁸ Brinkmeyer, p. 146.

face purple and her mouth half full' to shout at her mother, 'Woman! do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*? God! ... Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!' (p. 268), and, after being invited to 'pic-nic' with Manley Pointer, imagines seducing the young salesman 'very easily' and then using his 'inevitable' remorse to lead him towards enlightenment:

True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful. (p. 276)

Her intellectualisation of events and experiences demonstrates that Hulga has retreated from the realm of the heart - the seat of 'joy' - into the head, a fact underlined by her deliberate disinterest in her bodily appearance. She spends all day physically collapsed, lying slouched in a chair in her sloppy clothes, while directing her energy into mental alertness reading philosophy. The extent to which she intellectualises experience is highlighted during Manley Pointer's 'seduction', when her 'clear and detached and ironic' mind analyses his kisses 'from a great distance' with a somewhat patronising 'amusement' and 'pity' (p. 278). During his childish fumbblings her mind 'never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings' (p. 279), intent on using his seduction as a means of enlightenment.

Hulga's distorted and mistaken impression of the phallicly-named Manley Pointer is a reflection of the depth of her own self-deception. Her imagined 'dialogues for them that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of' (p. 275) become a perverted reality in the barn. When the young man wants to see 'where your wooden leg joins on' (p. 280) because 'it's what makes you different' she is shocked, believing she is face to face with 'real innocence' and 'an instinct that came from beyond wisdom' that can touch what she sees as 'the truth about her'. Her attempts to experience with the mind alone rather than with the heart are explicitly reversed - 'she felt as if her heart had stopped and left her mind to pump her blood' - and the revelation and removal of the leg become a distorted consummation of their relationship:

It was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his. (p. 281)

Without the leg, Hulga feels 'entirely dependent' on her pseudo-lover. Having lost her defining feature she is no longer in control of the situation or of herself, becoming - in terms that strongly suggest the nightmare quality of madness - part of an increasingly bizarre reality and feeling that 'her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be about some other function that it was not very good at' (p. 282). When the 'childish' Manley Pointer opens his valise to reveal whiskey, condoms and obscene playing cards, stored, with dry symbolism, in a hollow Bible, she unconsciously echoes her despised mother as she pleads, 'Aren't you just good country people?', to which he only replies, 'Yeah ... but it aint held me back none.' Realising that the distraught Hulga is not going to 'have us a good time', he then throws the false leg into his suitcase, slams the lid, and abandons her. His comments as he disappears with Hulga's 'embodiment of her secret self, her "difference"' ²⁹, are, indeed, insane on the surface, revealing his own perversity, and, at the same time, underlining the emptiness, self-deception, and distortion of what Hulga considers to be her 'genius' and 'penetrating vision':

'I've gotten a lot of interesting things,' he said. 'One time I got a woman's glass eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my name. I use a different name at every house I call at and don't stay nowhere long. And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga, ' he said, using the name as if he didn't think much of it, 'you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!' (p. 283).

O'Connor's depiction of this nightmare world of 'dark and disruptive' - and, in this case, highly ambiguous - revelation, allies her with both Hawthorne and Poe. In claiming that she was one of Hawthorne's descendants³⁰ and stressing the influence of his 'dark and

²⁹ Brinkmeyer, p. 147.

³⁰ O'Connor, letter to William Sessions, 13 September 1960, CW, p. 1131).

divisive' romances³¹ on her work, O'Connor identifies the potential of romance to emphasise certain aspects of reality in order to highlight what lies beyond reality. In Hulga's case, her grotesque false leg parallels her false and distorted self-image, which, when removed, leaves her open to some form of revelation - although her 'churning face' (p. 283) gives little insight into its nature. O'Connor's controlled use of allegory and symbolism is also reminiscent of Hawthorne, while the bizarre exaggeration and the sense of inverted, 'insane' intelligence such symbolism informs is drawn more directly from Poe. Indeed, many of the more grotesque aspects of stories such as 'Good Country People' recall the wry perversity and distortion of tales such as 'The Imp of the Perverse', 'The System of Dr Tarr and Professor Fether', 'The Man That Was Used Up' and 'Loss of Breath', many of which O'Connor read in a volume named 'The Humerous Tales of Edgar Allan Poe', and later described dryly as 'mighty humorous'³².

In 'Good Country People', and in other stories, O'Connor also examines the 'madness' of intelligence that leads away from a knowledge and acceptance of God. In several narratives she portrays individuals who, like Roderick Usher, hold distorted views of reality, or become completely divorced from it, due to intellectual power that is used in an inverted rather than a creative manner, and thus leads to mental and spiritual dislocation. As Asbury's mother thinks in 'The Enduring Chill', 'When people think they're smart - even when they are smart - there is nothing anybody can say to make them see things straight' (CW, p. 551). Asbury considers himself, like Hulga, to have moved beyond simplistic faith to a higher level of culture and understanding, although his attempts to write great literature in New York have resulted only in 'two lifeless novels', a 'half-dozen stationary plays', 'prosy poems', and 'sketchy short stories' (p. 555). Believing that he is, artistically, dying of consumption, he destroys everything but a letter to his mother 'which filled two notebooks' and is, he considers, 'such a letter as Kafka had addressed to his father' (p. 554), which he intends her to read after his death and carries home

³¹ 'The Grotesque in Southern Fiction', p. 818.

³² letter to A, 28 August 1955, CW, p. 950.

to the 'collapsing country junction' (p. 548) of Timberboro. In it he accuses her of starving his creative gift - 'I have no imagination. I have no talent. I can't create. I have nothing but the desire for these things. Why didn't you kill that too? Woman, why did you pinion me?' (p. 554) - and believes that on reading it,

... she would at least begin to sense his tragedy and her part in it.

It was not that she had ever forced her way on him. That had never been necessary. Her way had simply been the air he breathed and when he had at last found other air, he couldn't survive in it. He felt that even if she did not understand at once, the letter would leave her with an enduring chill and perhaps in time lead her to see herself as she was. (pp. 554 - 555)

O'Connor satirises this grotesque distortion of art and the artist through a series of incidents that demonstrate Asbury's self-delusion on the level of the ridiculous and the cynical, but which contain ironic undertones that prepare for the moment of revelation that closes the narrative. As in other stories such as 'The Lame Shall Enter First', 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost' and 'The Partridge Festival', O'Connor uses the grotesque, the exaggerated or the fanatical as a medium of prophecy and truth, meeting the distorted with the distorted. Father Finn 'from Purgatory' (p. 565) is a caricature of a priest, half-blind and half-deaf, 'battering' (p. 566) Asbury with questions about his catechism, and completely the opposite of the worldly, intellectual 'man of culture' (p. 561) Asbury envisages when he realises talking to a Jesuit will irritate his mother no end. In his roaring outrage at Asbury's ignorance, however, Father Finn expresses the truth underlying the boy's position, dismissing Asbury's attempts to discuss James Joyce as too trivial to comment upon, replying to Asbury's plea that 'the artist prays by creating' with the retort that this is 'not enough', implying the spiritual paucity of one who is not aware of God as the source of creativity, and shouting that 'the Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are - a lazy ignorant conceited youth!' (p. 567). When Asbury furiously claims that 'the Holy Ghost is the last thing I'm looking for', the priest pins him with his one inflamed, tell-tale eye and, prophetically, cries, 'And He may be the last thing you get.'

Dr Block's revelation that Asbury is suffering from undulant fever rather than anything more poetic, and that he 'ain't going to die' (p. 571), strips away the final layer of Asbury's self-deception. The jovial doctor's reassurances that 'undulant fever ain't so bad, Azzberry ... It's the same as Bang's in a cow' (p. 572) stand in ludicrous contrast to Asbury's earlier beliefs that 'He had failed his god, Art, but he had been a faithful servant and Art was sending him Death' (pp. 563 - 564) and that 'Death was coming to him legitimately, as a justification, as a gift from life' (p. 560). Ironically, Asbury has contracted the disease from drinking unpasteurised milk while working in his mother's dairy in order to observe how the Negroes 'really felt about their condition' before writing his 'play about the Negro' (p. 558). Rather than the 'moments of communion' he intends, however, his attempts to communicate with Morgan and Randall by sharing his cigarettes and offering them milk falter in the face of the Negroes' lassitude, and he abandons the project. The fact that, symbolically, he finds his mother's milk indigestible, juxtaposed with Randall's comment that 'She ain't whup him enough when he was little' (p. 560), underlines the essential childishness of his behaviour, and links with his increasingly helpless state as the narrative progresses. Asbury is, virtually, infantile when the Holy Ghost, significantly embodied in the waterstain he has always seen as a 'fierce bird with spread wings' (p. 555) rather than the sacramental dove, descends upon him. O'Connor makes it clear that a return to the helplessness of childhood is necessary before Asbury can be shocked out of his perverse and pretentious immaturity to self-knowledge:

The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of the new ... The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes ... A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend. (p. 572)

Similar examples of O'Connor's use of the grotesque or fanatical to testify and prophesy to those whose vision is also distorted

can be seen in 'The Lame Shall Enter First', 'Revelation', and 'The Partridge Festival', in which O'Connor satirises the self-centred and misguided opinions of characters whose thoughts and experiences are concerned solely with themselves. Sheppard in 'The Lame Shall Enter First', although genuinely sincere, remains blindly self-centred throughout the narrative, using his 'good works' unconsciously to reinforce his own self-image as a virtuous, generous, rational and logical man. His name is, again, an emblem, pointing to his distortion of the role of the 'Good Shepherd', and the suffering he unwittingly inflicts on the children in his care, whom he seeks to guide and teach. Even in his moment of revelation at the end of the story, when he realises he has neglected his son, Norton, in his unsuccessful attempts to educate and reform the demonic Johnson, Sheppard views his son only as 'the image of his salvation' (p. 632), and focuses on his own experience of changing the child's sadness into joy, and his own achievements in being 'mother and father' and 'never letting him suffer again'. As Gentry writes, 'Sheppard's unconscious maneuverings are among the most corrupt in O'Connor's works'³³. O'Connor skilfully portrays the 'madness' of Sheppard's 'rational' and reasonable mind, which, while concentrating on 'opening up' Johnson's intelligence to the wonders of science - it is the young delinquent's I.Q. of 140 that initially attracts Sheppard, a social worker at a reformatory, and convinces him of the boy's potential - can ignore the all too apparent symptoms of grief and loneliness in his own son, still unable to come to terms with his mother's death. Similarly, Sheppard has no tolerance for Johnson's sense of the power of Christ and the devil:

He has in fact no concern for Johnson's spiritual life except in figuring out how to smother it by finding a way to counteract what he sees as the pernicious influence on Johnson of his fundamentalist grandfather ... he wants, in effect, to substitute rationalism for the boy's fundamentalism.³⁴

³³ Gentry, p. 156.

³⁴ Brinkmeyer, p. 93.

Johnson, on the other hand, demonstrates a far greater insight into the nature of his own and Sheppard's characters, and testifies vehemently to his own belief. Although he is convinced that Satan 'has me in his power' (p. 600), and, in keeping with the bliss-or-hellfire choices of fundamentalism, also feels that if he ever repents he will become 'a preacher' because 'If you're going to do it, it's no sense in doing it half way' (p. 627), his acknowledgment of Christ is, O'Connor implies, of far greater value than Sheppard's acts of generosity and goodness. It is Johnson who recognises that it is irrelevant whether Sheppard is 'good or not' because 'he ain't *right*' (p. 604), is outraged at Sheppard's Christ-like posturings, and understands on a fanatical level the insidious and damaging corruption such a denial of the spiritual can produce. His name, 'John's son', allies him with St John the prophet, who was sent 'to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe'. According to the Bible, and appropriately in the case of the demonic Johnson, who testifies to the presence of God through his belief in the devil, St John is explicitly 'not that Light' but rather a prophet and a witness of its power (John 1: 7-8).

When finally apprehended after a series of thefts and burglaries, Johnson is asked why he deliberately allowed himself to get caught, and becomes an embodiment of St John's voice 'crying in the wilderness' (John 1: 23) as he denounces Sheppard as a false Christ:

The question and the sight of Sheppard seemed to throw the boy into a fury. 'To show up that big tin Jesus!' he hissed, and kicked his leg out at Sheppard. 'He thinks he's God. I'd rather be in the reformatory than in his house, I'd rather be in the pen! The Devil has him in his power. He don't know his left hand from his right, he don't have as much sense as his crazy kid!' (p. 630)

It is also the deformed and extremist Johnson who realises Norton's need for attention and exploits the child's pitiful desire to hear about where his mother is in order to irritate Sheppard. With her characteristic ability to fully develop the potential of the short story to shock, the 'sting in the tale', O'Connor shows Sheppard's moment of revelation as coming too late. Running upstairs to give Norton some long overdue caresses and reassurances, Sheppard is left reeling at the attic door, faced with his son hanging dead over the telescope bought to

expand Johnson's mind, and through which Norton had earlier insisted he could see his 'Mamma' in the stars.

Strong ties exist between 'The Lame Shall Enter First', a story O'Connor remained dissatisfied with, and her second novel, The Violent Bear it Away, in which Rayber, Tarwater and Bishop echo Sheppard, Johnson and Norton. In The Violent Bear it Away Tarwater is also a prophetic figure, appalled at the vision of himself 'trudging off into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, lost forever to his own inclinations'³⁵. Unlike Rufus Johnson, Tarwater undergoes a process of purgation and revelation not unlike that of Asbury, Hulga, or Hazel Motes in Wise Blood, in which, through a series of bizarre events, such as his baptism-drowning of the idiot child Bishop and his rape in the woods by a 'pale, lean, old-looking young man' (p. 438) who picks him up hitch-hiking, he is reconciled to his destiny as a prophet. Having received this dark and disturbing grace, Tarwater may be seen as insane to the world, but sane in the service of a God who casts a 'bleeding stinking mad shadow', his 'scorched eyes' no longer 'hollow' but appearing rather 'as if, touched by a coal like the lips of the prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sights again' (p. 442).

In 'The Partridge Festival' and 'Revelation' a similarly dark and disturbing grace is unveiled through the medium of the insane or the fanatical, using the compact symbolism and powerful narrative structure of the short story. In 'The Partridge Festival' both Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth consider themselves artists seeking the symbolic truth behind the Partridge Azalea Festival massacre, in which a man named Singleton, given a mock trial, imprisoned in a pair of stocks, and then locked in an outdoor privy with a goat for not buying an Azalea Festival Badge, had then reappeared at the courthouse and shot five dignitaries and one bystander. Both have inflated opinions concerning Singleton as 'a Christ-figure' (CW, p. 787), a scapegoat 'laden with the sins of the community' (p. 783), 'a man of depth living among

³⁵ O'Connor, The Violent Bear it Away in Three by Flannery O'Connor, (New York: Signet Books, 1960), pp. 434 - 435.

caricatures' that 'finally drove him mad' and 'unleashed all his violence on themselves', and are equally irritated at the other's rhetoric. After needling each other into agreeing to visit Singleton where he is being held in a mental institution, Calhoun begins to view the experience as one that will purge him of what he sees as his sordid commercialism and raise him to the true heights of an artist:

It would be a torturing experience, but it might be his salvation. The sight of Singleton in his misery might cause him suffering sufficient to raise him once and for all from his commercial instincts. Selling was the only thing he had proved himself good at; yet it was impossible for him to believe that every man was not created equally an artist if he could but suffer and achieve it. (p. 789)

In the same breath, however, he dismisses the girl's ability to share in such an elevating suffering, considering it unlikely 'the sight of Singleton would do anything for her' and mentally reducing her intelligence to 'that peculiar repulsive fanaticism peculiar to smart children - all brain and no emotion'. Almost immediately afterwards Mary Elizabeth is depicted weeping at the thought of Singleton's lifelong incarceration at Quincy in a juxtaposition that prefigures the collapse of Calhoun's other pretentious opinions.

Their visit to the institution, posing as Singleton's relatives, is a failure. Singleton appears not as a mythical Christ figure but as an obscene lunatic dressed in a hospital gown, 'black shoes from which the laces had been removed' and a black derby hat 'such as might be worn by a gunman in the movies' (p. 794). When he escapes from the restraints of his two attendants he grasps Mary Elizabeth's knee, begins to make suggestive noises, propositions her, and attempts to pull the hospital gown up over his head to expose himself. After a highly undignified exit, Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth glance at one another in the car only to see 'the likeness of their kinsman', a recognition of their own insanity that makes both flinch. As Brinkmeyer expresses it:

When Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth go to the asylum, they pose as Singleton's relatives ... in order to get in. Both see the step as representing the cementing of their identity with Singleton and with each other. After their disastrous visit, the significance of

their common identities becomes unmistakable: Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth, though not literally crazy like Singleton, nonetheless are, in their own ways, as out of touch with reality as he is. Both have isolated themselves from their own inner being and the reality about them; and both ... are shown to be as ridiculous and misguided as Singleton was when he took on the city council with his loaded pistol.³⁶

Unlike Hulga, Asbury, and Mrs May of 'Greenleaf', whose understanding of such self-revelation is left ambiguous or fragmentary, Calhoun, like Mrs Turpin in 'Revelation' or the unnamed girl in 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost', is depicted as recognising some form of concrete truth in his disturbing experience of the grace of self-knowledge. Leaning closer and closer to Mary Elizabeth 'in despair', he is arrested by the reflection, tiny in her glasses, of himself, not as an artist, but as a 'master salesman', a direct descendant of the grandfather he has attempted to distance himself from and whose 'gift of life had pushed straight forward to the future to raise festival after festival' (p. 796).

In the same way, Mrs Turpin in 'Revelation' is led towards vision by the apparently unbalanced actions of the aptly-named Mary Grace. Increasingly incensed by Mrs Turpin's self-satisfied remarks in the doctor's waiting room, the fat, acne-'seared' college girl, described by her mother as 'a real book worm' (p. 643), at first simply scowls and fixes Mrs Turpin with eyes shining with 'a peculiar light, an unnatural light like night road signs give' (p. 637), and finally, at Mrs Turpin's self-congratulatory cry of 'Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!' (p. 644), hurls her book violently at the woman and throws herself howling across the table to sink her fingers into Mrs Turpin's neck. When restrained on the floor her 'fierce brilliant eyes' (p. 645) lock with Mrs Turpin's and she delivers her 'message' to the woman who is convinced she is known 'in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition' and who is waiting 'as if for a revelation': 'Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog' (p. 646).

³⁶ Brinkmeyer, p. 155.

Mary Grace is dismissed as 'a lunatic' (p. 647) by the others in the waiting room, but as the day progresses Mrs Turpin finds herself becoming more and more distressed and furious at the girl's comment. Attempting to describe the incident to her Negroes she finds their sycophantic cries - 'She b'long in the sylum' (p. 650) - echo the judgements of those in the waiting room and their flattery merely adds to her rage. It is only when she goes to the pigpen, fiercely questioning, 'How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?' (p. 652), and gazes 'as if through the very heart of mystery' at the pigs panting 'with a secret life' that 'a visionary light' appears in her eyes, mirroring the strange prophetic illumination she witnessed at the opening of the narrative in Mary Grace's face. In the last purple streaks of day in the sky, a medium typically associated with revelation in O'Connor's work - 'the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork' (Psalm 19:1) - she sees a great company of people, whites, white trash, Negroes, and even 'battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs' (p. 654). These are all 'rumbling' their way up to heaven, with the people like herself and her husband Claud bringing up the rear 'accountable as they always had been for good order and common sense and respectable behaviour'.

Many critical interpretations have been put forward concerning the nature of this vision, with some critics considering it as demonstrating Mrs Turpin's inability to move beyond her narrow and self-satisfied beliefs about herself and her class even in her moment of prophecy, with the title of the story itself an ironic comment on her 'revelation'. The fact that Mrs Turpin, who is shown at the opening of the story as judgemental and opinionated, leans forward in order to examine her own class more closely, and witnesses their 'shocked and altered faces' as, approaching heaven, 'even their virtues were being burned away' (p. 654) suggests a far more positive reading, an interpretation supported by the optimistic tone of the final lines. In language that recalls the Negro spiritual playing in the doctor's waiting room, which Mrs Turpin has earlier unconsciously sung along with, she is shown walking back to the house hearing not crickets in the

woods, but 'the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah' (p. 654). Her vision can be seen, therefore, as a recognition, like Rufus Johnson's, of the sheer insignificance of those human 'virtues' she was so assured of at the opening of the narrative in the face of God's judgement - 'For He is like a refiner's fire' (Malachi, 3:2).

In her stories O'Connor uses madness in two main ways. Firstly she depicts characters such as Hulga, Asbury, Julian in 'Everything that Rises Must Converge', and Sheppard in 'The Lame Shall Enter First' as perverse and misguided, concerned only with their own virtues and intelligence. In focussing their intelligence, goodness or virtue inwards upon themselves, these figures are shown to be blind to the realities of their existence and, more significantly, to the presence of God. They mistakenly attribute their talents to their own power or creativity rather than recognising them, or acknowledging them, as a reflection of God in man. Their gifts are portrayed as worthless, damaging, corrupt, or even evil due to this inversion; at best they deceive only themselves with their distorted perspectives, at worst they are blind to the pain, frustration and despair they cause others, or project onto them their own failures and view such pain as due recompense for lack of recognition. Thus Sheppard is so divorced from reality he cannot recognise his young son's blatant need for affection and comfort; Julian in 'Everything that Rises Must Converge', concerned only with 'teaching his mother a lesson' about what he sees as her ridiculous attitude towards Negroes, does not understand she is having a stroke until it is too late; Asbury and Calhoun cannot perceive their own inflated conceit; 'female intelligence is a curse ... for it creates profound discontent' and O'Connor's 'bright fat girls snipe away at the pretension and stupidity around them'³⁷.

As Richard Gray argues, however, such grotesque inversions of virtue and 'insane' alienations from reality serve a double purpose in O'Connor's fiction:

³⁷ Westling, p. 147.

Absurd as her people are, their absurdity serves ... as a measure of God's mercy in caring for them. Corrupt and violent as their behaviour may be, its very corruption can act as a proof, a way of suggesting the extraordinary scope of His forgiveness and love. Instead of broad satire, in fact ... O'Connor practises a comedy of savage paradox, in which every incident assumes a double edge because it reminds us, at one and the same time, that man is worthless and yet favoured of God - negligible but the instrument of Divine Will. The irremediable wickedness of humanity and the undeniable grace of God are opposites that meet head on in her writing ...³⁸

By the scope of human logic, therefore, God's grace, love and forgiveness are themselves 'insane', inverting human measures of desert and value. The further man is sunk in sin, the greater is the depth of God's forgiveness. The more foul, brutal and evil, the more profound the grace that comes upon him. In O'Connor's fiction, the sheer grotesqueness of her characters demonstrates that the grace of God is, in one sense, even more extreme, in that it falls most piercingly on those who, it would appear, are the least open to it, who least 'deserve' it, and who seem impregnably closed to infiltration by the Holy Ghost. Whatever extremity man can descend to, she implies, God can surpass with a grace that passes comprehension.

The means by which O'Connor's spiritually bankrupt characters receive an understanding of 'the undeniable grace of God', and the nature of this grace, is often in itself grotesque, irrational, bizarre or insane. In order to shock individuals who have become divorced from reality and from God into a realisation of their own madness and self-delusion, O'Connor suggests, they must be faced with a form of revelation that mirrors their own distortion. To this end O'Connor employs the fanaticism of Protestant fundamentalism and exaggerated and unbalanced characters such as Rufus Johnson or The Misfit in 'A Good Man is Hard to Find', who speak words of prophecy, become instruments of divine mystery, and have the ability to see the innate

³⁸ Richard Gray, The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South, (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1977), p. 277.

truth behind characters and situations. O'Connor attributes this ability to the fact that such characters, often more demonic than angelic, recognise the terrible presence and power of God as a reality in their world, whether they have committed themselves to Christ, like Mrs Greenleaf or the beautiful crippled child who testifies against Rayber in The Violent Bear it Away, or to the Devil.

The insanity of such characters reflects upon the nature of the grace they witness to. O'Connor, possibly in keeping with her theories of an audience that holds few if any of her beliefs and to which she must make her vision 'apparent by shock'³⁹, and of a region where even

... the traditional Protestant bodies of the South are evaporating into secularism and respectability and are being replaced on the grass roots level by all sorts of strange sects that bear not much resemblance to traditional Protestantism - Jehovahs Witnessess, snake handlers, Free Thinking Christians, Independent Prophets, the swindlers, the mad, and sometimes the genuinely inspired,⁴⁰

writes less of a divine mercy that 'droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven'⁴¹ than of a grace that is in itself often mad and brutal. She depicts Jesus, in the eyes of her characters, as 'the General with the sword in his mouth, marching to do violence' ('Why Do the Heathen Rage?', CW, p. 800), the one who has 'thrown everything off balance' ('A Good Man is Hard to Find', p. 152), who drags his prophets along in his 'bleeding stinking mad shadow', and who offers the blessed a revelation of mystery that is indeed 'dark and disruptive'. Much of this, it may be argued, proceeds from her concept of true virtue or goodness as things that are 'under construction' in most people and are therefore distorted, botched, askew or grotesque, lacking the symmetry and sanity of completion, and which are too often expressed 'with a cliché or a smoothing down that will soften their real look'⁴². Not only

³⁹ O'Connor, 'The Fiction Writer and His Country', p. 806.

⁴⁰ letter to William Sessions, 13 September 1960, p. 1131.

⁴¹ Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, ed W.Moelwyn Merchant, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), IV . i . 182, p. 138.

⁴² O'Connor, 'A Memoir of Mary Ann', CW, p. 830.

are self-deception, pretentiousness, and corruption as ugly as Hulga attempts to make herself, and not only may the process of revelation or the giving of grace be profoundly disturbing, but what is revealed after self-delusion is stripped away can, O'Connor suggests, appear in itself insane and shocking.

O'Connor's vision of the South and the interrelationships between the insane or the grotesque and Southern experience is profoundly different from that of Poe, Chopin or Faulkner, although informed by a similar recognition of the failed ideals and the pervasive mythology of the region. Her work displays a shift from 'masculine' or 'feminine' treatments of madness to an interpretation that is primarily theological, although Claire Kahane identifies an 'explicitly female form' in O'Connor's fiction that she associates with 'images of pregnancy and procreation', and sees O'Connor's 'grotesque-Gothics' as emphasising 'the limits of female identity' through 'images of self which reflect deformity, fragmentation and annihilation'⁴³. A less extreme interpretation of O'Connor's place in the tradition of the Female Gothic can be found in Louise Westling's Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens, in which the author suggests that O'Connor depicts:

... a poignant and often excruciating picture of the problems ... women have in living together, of female self-loathing, powerlessness, and justified fear of masculine attack. She presents fictional doubles of herself, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown so many women writers to have done, doubles who express the rage and frustration which is too dangerous for women to admit in ordinary life.

Stories such as 'Good Country People', 'A Circle in the Fire', 'Revelation' and 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost', in which O'Connor's 'bright fat girls' exist in tension with their mothers, their conditions, and their own powerless intelligence, appear to bear out this analysis. Westling continues, however, to describe this depiction as

⁴³ Claire Kahane, 'The Maternal Legacy: the Grotesque Tradition in Flannery O'Connor's Female Gothic' in J. E. Fleenor, ed, The Female Gothic (Montreal: Eden Press, 1983), pp. 245, 255.

'inadvertent', and argues that O'Connor's fiction then punishes such rebellious figures through the actions of a dominant and essentially patriarchal system of divinity, which, she claims, restores the 'values of the world in which we all must live'⁴⁴.

O'Connor's sexual ambivalence, which Westling also comments upon, seems an important key to the portrayal of female characters and relationships in her work, and to her use of a Gothic framework for themes of divine retribution and revelation. Writing to her close friend, 'A', about the sexes, O'Connor explains that 'I've always believed there were two but generally acted as if there were only one', and that she herself found something so 'repulsive' about becoming a teenager, or reaching the age of sexual maturity, that 'when I was twelve I made up my mind absolutely that I would not get any older'⁴⁵. She also speaks of sexuality being plainly identified, in her view, 'with the sacred', and explains the lack of explicit sexuality, or the 'strong kind of sex potential that [is] always turned aside' in her works in theological terms:

My inability to handle it so far in my fiction may be purely personal, as my up-bringing has smacked a little of Jansenism even if my convictions do not. But there is also the fact that it being for me the centre of life and most holy, I should keep my hands off it until I feel that what I can do with it will be right, which is to say, given.⁴⁶

Her comments highlight the importance O'Connor places on concepts of divinity rather than sexuality, and underline the level of transcendence that her works appear to aim for. Explicitly, at least, sexual tension, the use of specifically feminine consciousness and experience, and the portrayal of mother-daughter relationships appear as media through which O'Connor expresses theological and sacramental ideas.

⁴⁴ Westling, p. 174.

⁴⁵ O'Connor, letter to A, 11 February 1956, CW, p. 985.

⁴⁶ letter to A, 25 November 1955, pp. 970, 971.

Despite this aspect of transcendence, however, the subcommentaries identified in O'Connor's work by critics such as Kahane and Westling are nonetheless real. Female intelligence is strongly, if implicitly, associated with physical grotesqueness - observant Sally Virginia Cope is 'a pale fat girl of twelve with a frowning squint and a large mouth full of silver bands' (p. 238); Mary Grace in 'Revelation' is also fat, scowling and ugly, with a face that is 'blue with acne' (p. 635); Asbury's sister Mary George, a school principal, is presented wearing Girl Scout shoes and 'a white rag around her head with metal curlers sticking out from under the edges' (p. 549); while Hulga, besides being crippled, is stout and abrasive. In contrast, the idiot girl, Lucynell Crater, in 'The Life You Save May Be Your Own', speechless and non-threatening, is described as a 'baby doll' (p. 180) and 'an angel of Gawd' (p. 181) with her conventionally beautiful 'long pink-gold hair and eyes as blue as a peacock's neck' (p. 173).

Despite their intelligence, characters such as Hulga remain powerless, at odds with their conditions yet unable to change them, and marked out, like the mythic scapegoats identified in Frazer's The Golden Bough, by deformity, affliction, or, significantly, 'more than usual symptoms of inspiration or insanity'⁴⁷, for some form of retribution for their 'rebellion'. Thus Hulga's crisis in the barn, for example, may be seen on a symbolic level as the castration of the thinking woman, in which the emblem of her 'difference' - her unconventional intelligence - is violated, leaving her helpless. Similarly, Mary Grace, who prophecies to Mrs Turpin in such a disturbing manner, is sedated and restrained after her outburst in a symbolic castration of her potency. After sedation she clutches her mother's thumb like a baby (p. 646), reduced to Lucynell's unthreatening, infantile, inarticulate state.

O'Connor's works also demonstrate a social conscience that is similarly implicit but significant, and which links with her complex use of point of view and 'polyphonic' rather than 'monologic'

⁴⁷ J. Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 749.

narratives⁴⁸. In using characters who articulate multifarious opinions and beliefs, O'Connor provides an ironic commentary on social relationships that, although again serving primarily to express theological truths, displays an awareness of the nature and structure of society as a whole. Mrs Turpin's imagined discussions with Jesus, for example, portray her narrow-minded opinions of 'white trash', whom she considers to be 'worse than niggers any day' (CW, p. 635). Given a choice between becoming incarnate as 'a nigger or white trash', Mrs Turpin visualises herself writhing before Jesus, caught between a rock and a hard place:

She would have wiggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded but it would have been no use and finally she would have said, 'All right, make me a nigger then - but that don't mean a trashy one.' And he would have made her a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black. (p. 636)

Attitudes towards Negroes are also shown in 'The Geranium', from an early collection of short stories, which depicts Old Dudley, brought to New York by his daughter from a dilapidated boarding house in Coa County, and unable to comprehend a world in which 'niggers' can take the apartment next door:

He knew yankees let niggers in their front doors and let them set on their sofas but he didnt know his own daughter that was raised proper would stay next door to them - and then think he didn't have no more sense than to want to mix with them. Him! (p. 707)

As in 'Judgement Day' - which expands the idea of an old man from the deep South, Tanner, living unwillingly in New York with his daughter and coming into contact with 'niggers' behaving like white people - such tension ends in violence, symbolised in 'The Geranium' by the smashed flower in the alleyway, and made explicit in 'Judgement Day' when Tanner is brutally 'crucified' by the Negro he has unwittingly mocked and insulted. Similarly, in 'The Displaced Person', the insidious dislocations caused by a Polish immigrant tenant farmer are ultimately solved by an 'accident' with a tractor, which runs

⁴⁸ terms from Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, trans. R.W. Rotsel, (United States: Ardis, 1973), p. 5.

the Displaced Person down and kills him. Such disturbing violence, which also marks stories such as 'A Good Man is Hard To Find' and 'A View of the Woods' again demonstrates the madness and brutality that result from 'displacement' from God. O'Connor's awareness of the disjunctions within society reflects her belief that such distortions proceed from a distancing from the divine and the sacramental. As she explains to 'A':

... when I see these stories described as horror stories I am always amused because the reviewer always has hold of the wrong horror.⁴⁹

O'Connor's use of multiple points of view, which allows her to explore varying attitudes and beliefs, adds much to the complexity of her fiction. In his discussion of Dostoevsky, Mikhail Bakhtin describes this 'dialogic' form of narrative as:

... the plurality of equal consciousnesses and their worlds, which are combined ... into the unity of a given event, while at the same time retaining their unmergedness.⁵⁰

Brinkmeyer views the polyphonic nature of O'Connor's works as a counterpoint of the 'heterogeneous voices' of the South, O'Connor's own 'multi-voiced self', Catholicism, and fundamentalism⁵¹, which constantly juxtaposes and interrelates contrasting, or even opposing, points of view. A mark of this form of text is the absence of a controlling authorial or narrative consciousness, and thus a lack of any omniscient interpretation of the events, opinions, or beliefs articulated in the fiction. As Bakhtin, speaking primarily of the novel, expresses it:

It [the text] is not constructed as the entirety of a single consciousness which absorbs other consciousnesses as well as objects, but rather as the entirety of the interaction of several consciousnesses, of which no one fully becomes the object of any other one. This interaction does not assist the viewer to objectify the entire event in accordance with the ordinary monological

⁴⁹ O'Connor, letter to A, 20 July 1955, CW, p. 942.

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, p. 4.

⁵¹ Brinkmeyer, p. 34.

pattern (thematically, lyrically, or cognitively), and as a consequence makes him a participant. The novel not only gives no solid support outside the dialogical conflict for a third, monologically engulfing consciousness - on the contrary, everything in it is so constructed as to make the dialogical opposition perpetual. Not a single element of the work is constructed from the viewpoint of a non-participating 'third party' ...⁵²

In O'Connor's work, the presentation of information through varied, independent consciousnesses demonstrates her commitment to art - 'because I am a Catholic I cannot afford to be less than an artist' - and to maintaining total objectivity. She is explicit about the need, as a Catholic, to avoid producing 'soggy, formless, and sentimental literature'⁵³, and the fact that it is impossible to 'move or mold reality in the interests of abstract truth'⁵⁴. Reality, she suggests, must speak for itself, and 'if the Catholic writer hopes to reveal mysteries, he will have to do it by describing truthfully what he sees from where he is'⁵⁵ - a standpoint she demonstrates in her use of diverse, interrelated, self-contained points of view to express multiple aspects of reality. The absence of an omniscient, guiding narrative presence in her texts means that the moral responsibility for judging 'right' and 'wrong' amongst such various independent consciousnesses, for interpreting the revelation of mysteries, and for discovering the deeper meaning underlying events is shifted onto the reader, who, as Bakhtin states, becomes a 'participant' in, rather than a detached observer of, the narrative.

This lack of a 'godlike' consciousness - an absence rather than a presence at the centre of the text - also links O'Connor with concepts of existentialism and nihilism prevalent at the time she was writing. Hulga's claim that she is 'one of those people who see *through* to nothing' (p. 280) articulates the sense of emptiness that characterised

⁵² Bakhtin, p. 14.

⁵³ O'Connor, 'The Fiction Writer and His Country', CW, p. 806.

⁵⁴ 'The Church and the Fiction Writer', p. 808.

⁵⁵ 'The Church and the Fiction Writer', p. 811.

this 'God is dead' mentality - a belief that saw nothing 'in control' and no guiding purpose behind events. Much of the bizarre, nightmare quality present in O'Connor's works, similarly, reflects ideas of existence as absurd and the persistent horror of Conrad's 'heart of darkness' that lies in discovering not the presence of something but the lack of anything at the 'soul' of life. O'Connor's list of the varied and eclectic influences on her work demonstrates her awareness of such ideas, and also the attraction of writers whose works, like her own, explore concepts of mystery and levels of meaning:

I read all the Catholic novelists, Mauriac, Bernanos, Bloy, Green, Waugh; I read all the nuts like Djuna Barnes and Dorothy Richardson and Va. Woolfe ... I read the best Southern writers like Faulkner and the Tates, K.A. Porter, Eudora Welty and Peter Taylor; read the Russians, not Tolstoi so much but Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Checkov and Gogol. I became a great admirer of Conrad and have read almost all his fiction ... I have learned something from Hawthorne, Flaubert, Balzac and something from Kafka, though I have never been able to finish one of his novels. I've read almost all of Henry James - from a sense of High Duty and because when I read James I feel something is happening to me, in slow motion but happening nevertheless.⁵⁶

In utilising these divergent ideas of existentialism, the absurd, and the revelation of mystery to explore 'Christian realism'⁵⁷, O'Connor acknowledges in particular the influence of Poe, Hawthorne and James, stating that she felt 'more of a kinship' with Hawthorne 'than with any other American' and describing her stories as 'what Hawthorne called 'romances', while emphasising that this affinity had little to do with the traditional 'romantic mentality'⁵⁸. Rather, like Hawthorne, O'Connor develops the potential of the 'romance' to use aspects of the everyday world as symbols of a deeper reality, employing

⁵⁶ letter to A, 28 August 1955, p. 951.

⁵⁷ letter to A, 20 July 1955, p. 942.

⁵⁸ letter to John Hawkes, 28 November 1961, pp. 1156-1157.

... one image that will connect or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye...

As such, the 'surface' or external reality of things is used as a reference to move through to 'an experience of mystery itself'⁵⁹. Art, O'Connor argues, involves a skilful balance of these two ingredients, a 'careful adjustment of inner and outer worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other'⁶⁰ - a tension she considers to be operating particularly effectively in the work of Henry James, whom she described as having 'balanced the elements of traditional realism and romance so admirably within each of his novels'⁶¹.

In contrast to the understatement and control that characterises the work of James and Hawthorne, however, O'Connor's narratives demonstrate her belief that the reflection of two worlds, actual and symbolic, 'through each other', can result in a fiction that is by nature grotesque and exaggerated:

It's not necessary to point out that the look of this fiction is going to be wild, that it is almost of necessity going to be violent and comic, because of the discrepancies that it seeks to combine.⁶²

This 'wild look', absent from Hawthorne and James, is arguably a function of the 'Southernness' of O'Connor's work, in which the concrete or the real is in itself often freakish, irrational or aberrant, and the mystery she seeks to explore founded in the fanatical, dark and disruptive grace of Southern fundamentalism. In comparison with the controlled, restrained use of metaphysical symbolism and allegorical depth O'Connor draws from Hawthorne, this sense of the distorted and the bizarre aligns her with Poe - a conjunction that emblematically combines in her work the traditions of logic and moral awareness of the North with the volatility and 'madness' of the South.

⁵⁹ 'The Grotesque in Southern Fiction', p. 816.

⁶⁰ 'The Fiction Writer and his Country', p. 806.

⁶¹ 'The Grotesque in Southern Fiction', p. 820.

⁶² 'The Grotesque in Southern Fiction', p. 816.

The influence of Poe's 'walled-in monsters'⁶³ is considerable, an influence she describes in a letter to 'A' in reference to Poe's gothic, lunatic tales:

... always the largest thing that looms up is The Humerous Tales of

Edgar Allan Poe. I'm sure he wrote them all while drunk too.⁶⁴

Despite her tongue-in-cheek tone, O'Connor's stories clearly demonstrate the effects of this 'Edgar Allan Poe period' which lasted for 'years', and mirror something of the nightmare quality of tales such as 'The Cask of Amontillado', 'The Imp of the Perverse', and 'The Fall of the House of Usher', in which reality takes on freakish proportions, and normal events, situations and people suddenly become fantastic and monstrous. Like Poe, O'Connor explores and develops the maniacal, fanatical aspects of human nature, examining distortions such as inverted intellectual energy, obsession, and forms of crisis and transfiguration, although, unlike Poe, she directs this examination towards an expression of theological truth.

O'Connor also demonstrates Poe's influence in her use of, and emphasis on, the short story as a vital and definitive form of fiction. In discussing the context of her works, she identifies the particularly Southern tradition of storytelling as a form of encoding history and experience, and relates this specifically to the immediacy of Biblical legend in the 'Bible Belt' South:

For the purposes of fiction ... guides have to exist in the form of stories which affect our image and our judgement of ourselves. Abstractions, formulas, laws will not do here. We have to have stories. It takes a story to make a story. It takes a story of mythic dimensions; one which belongs to everybody; one in which everybody is able to recognise the hand of God and imagine its descent upon himself. In the Protestant South the Scriptures fill this role. The ancient Hebrew genius for making the absolute concrete has conditioned the Southerner's way of looking at things.

⁶³ letter to Ashley Brown, 22 May 1953, p. 911.

⁶⁴ letter to A, 28 August 1955, p. 951.

That is one of the big reasons why the South is a story-telling section at all.⁶⁵

In a region in which the story, the tale, or the anecdote traditionally constitutes a universal means of understanding, judging, and disseminating experience, therefore, O'Connor consciously draws on a unique narrative history to shape and inform her fiction. As in the Bible, she employs short narratives that resound with mythic and sacramental meaning, and which seek to express the concrete as an emblem of the absolute. In one sense, such short stories become allegorical icons, 'heaven and earth in litel space', focussing on the profound and eternal concepts of grace, revelation and the nature of the divine within the limits of the tale or the parable, and presenting 'the possibility of reading a small history in a universal light'⁶⁶.

In creating such intense and symbolic narratives, O'Connor utilises Poe's concepts of the impact of a single, unifying effect to highlight her themes of revelation and sacrament, and to present a grace and a God that are frequently bizarre, shocking and unexpected. As in Faulkner's works, the potential of the shorter narrative to maintain tension and deliver the unexpected at its dénouement means that stories such as 'A Good Man is Hard to Find', 'Good Country People' and 'The Enduring Chill' present resonant and lasting impressions of O'Connor's theological ideas. It may be argued, furthermore, that such narratives sustain a sense of the bizarre, the shocking and the insane - subjects whose impact is by definition short-lived - far more effectively than the novel. Mental and spiritual deformation, the moment of revelation, experiences of epiphany, and the violent descent of grace are subjects particularly suited to the short story, which can present a sudden, alarming and reverberative glimpse of a mind at a point of crisis. In a longer narrative the power of Poe's 'single effect' is diminished, and the grotesque and the bizarre lose their power to shock through familiarity.

⁶⁵ 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South', pp. 858-859.

⁶⁶ 'The Regional Writer', p. 847.

Whereas in her novels, Wise Blood and The Violent Bear it Away, O'Connor achieves a deeper development of character and an extensive examination of the processes by which characters such as Hazel Motes and Tarwater initially resist, and then are ultimately driven to, an all-consuming commitment to Christ, her short stories arguably present the most effective articulation of ideas of a dark and disruptive Christian reality. In combining Hawthorne's traditions of moral allegory and controlled symbolism and the volatile, nightmarish madness of Poe's tales within the framework of the cohesive and unique totality of the short story, O'Connor creates multifaceted, resonant narratives that explore the insanity of displacement from God, the fanaticism of belief, and the shocking or bizarre nature of revelation.

Conclusion.

There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination ...¹

In the differing perspectives each adopts in treating the relationships between versions of madness and the experience of the South, Kate Chopin, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor effectively reflect the 'heterogeneous voices' ² of the region. On a broad level, their various ways of using madness to encode aspects of 'otherness' and displacement provide clear examples of a more general preoccupation of Southern writers, the 'penchant for writing about freaks' O'Connor attributes to the potent 'ghosts' of Southern history, culture and society, which, she argues, 'cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature'.³ The influence of the 'father of the short story' and Simpson's 'dark diagnostician of cultural illness'⁴, Poe, is, similarly, particularly evident in the works of these three authors, who extend and develop both his exploration of madness as a metaphor for social dislocations, and his theories of the short narrative as a uniquely powerful literary form. In comparing the diverse ways in which Chopin, Faulkner, and O'Connor expand and intensify Poe's themes it is possible to identify not only the multifaceted 'ghosts' of Southern experience, but also some of the many ambiguities that underline the aspects, expressions and significance of madness itself.

¹ Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, ed. Paul O'Prey, (1902: Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1983), p. 31.

² Brinkmeyer, p. 34.

³ O'Connor, 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction', p. 818.

⁴ Simpson, p. 70.

One of the most obvious similarities in the works of these authors is the engagement, explicitly or implicitly, with concepts of 'the other' or 'otherness' through madness, insanity or irrationality. In Poe, the 'other' is frequently and symbolically given flesh as a physical manifestation of a mind divided against itself. In 'William Wilson', for example, Wilson is haunted by his mysterious nemesis, the embodiment of the rational and moral conscience he has exiled from his own corrupt mind, while the logical narrator of 'The Fall of the House of Usher', similarly, is Roderick Usher's alter-ego, who observes Usher's reason 'tottering ... upon her throne' from a position of sanity. Flannery O'Connor picks up this theme in the subtle 'doubling' that appears in many of her short stories as an implicit, and often ironic, form of comment on the 'otherness' of her grotesque, distorted and godless characters. The writings of O'Connor, Chopin and Faulkner extend Poe's fundamental grasp of 'otherness' in that direct physical representations of 'otherness' are placed within a complex context of alienation, displacement, myth and superstition, of which the doppelgänger or double is only part.

Chopin, in her exploration of the irrational consciousness, displays a sense of empathy, indeed, often of identification, with the 'victim' and the marginalised - conditions that apply to both the insane and to women - that proceeds from an awareness of women's alienation, powerlessness and limitation within society, and within the patriarchal institutions of Southern society in particular. Her novella, The Awakening, demonstrates her increasingly sophisticated development of these concepts in terms of aspects of female experience that Edna Pontellier's society regards as disturbing and irrational behaviour. Chopin interprets and expresses aspects of otherness from the point of view of the other - the 'inside'. Like Poe, she examines facets of what Foucault terms 'madness in its positive truth'⁵, or what Barbara Christian identifies in an article on Alice Walker's short stories as the 'wholesome' dimensions of such 'madness', portraying 'contrariness as healthy, as an attempt to be whole rather than a defect

⁵ Foucault, p. xii.

of nature or as nonexistent'⁶. In her clear sociological comments, Chopin associates the 'other' with the nondominant, portraying 'madness' as an extreme response to the extremities of alienation and marginalisation experienced by subcultural groups, and articulating Edna's representative position as 'other' in her society with understanding and sensitivity.

In comparison to Chopin's direct social messages, which illustrate some of the subjectivity and ambivalence of definitions of 'madness', Faulkner's narratives encompass far broader ambiguities of perspective. Once again, concepts of 'otherness' are given physical reality, primarily, in Faulkner's case, in the figures of women and negroes, who become in some ways doppelgängers or 'ghosts' of Southern society, representing, as Richard Gray describes it, the 'alien and the unknown', and challenging, if not threatening, 'established codes, habitual methods of mediating, organising, and explaining experience'⁷. Unlike Chopin, however, whose works clearly depict women, despite their inner strength and potential, as victims trapped in a male-dominated society, Faulkner's position as 'double agent', insider and outsider, is mirrored in his ambivalent attitude towards such 'others'. On the one hand, his works present women and Negroes as powerless victims, yet on the other they link them strongly with ideas of enthralling, mysterious and disturbing potency, exhibiting and inciting insanity, chaos and distortion. Terry Eagleton expresses the ambiguity of this Janus-like position in respect to women:

The woman is both 'inside' and 'outside' male society, both a romantically idealized member of it and a victimized outcast. She is sometimes what stands between man and chaos, and sometimes the embodiment of chaos itself.⁸

Faulkner presents a dual perspective on such otherness, and on the otherness of the South as a whole, that incorporates both Chopin's

⁶ Barbara Christian, 'The Contrary Women of Alice Walker' in The Black Scholar, vol. 12, March/April 1981, p. 71.

⁷ Gray, p. 189.

⁸ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), p. 190.

'feminine', internal interpretation of madness, and also the view of the 'outsider', or the dominant rather than the subcultural - an 'external' viewpoint that objectively recognises the fascinating and horrifying spectacle of the insane or the mentally aberrant.

The powerful impact of Faulkner's intricate vision of the madness of Southern experience, haunted as it is by the past, the 'fall' of the South as a new Eden, Biblical symbolism, and images from Greco-Roman mythology, and incorporating versions of madness that 'possess both observed and observer'⁹, is explicitly identified by O'Connor. Writing about the diversity of 'good Southern writers', and their approaches to themes of madness, the grotesque, the gothic and the deformed, she argues that:

The presence alone of Faulkner in our midst makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do.

Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down.¹⁰

Her own literature engages with a sense of 'the freak ... as a figure for our essential displacement'¹¹ in metaphysical terms, exploring the 'otherness' of the South in relation to its 'Bible Belt' heritage and the immediacy of Christ and the Devil to the fanaticism of Southern Protestantism. As in Faulkner's works, expressions of madness or mental distortion are highly complex and multifaceted, serving to articulate not only the 'insanity' of displacement from God - particularly relevant to the South following the 'fall' of the Civil War - but also knowledge of the power of God, expressed through prophets who are themselves maniacal and extreme, the shocking, dark and disruptive manifestations of grace, and the nature of God itself.

Like Chopin, O'Connor provides a clear sense of her messages through her work, which examines madness not so much in terms of 'masculine' or 'feminine' forms of representation, as in its significance as a vehicle for theological truths. In her exploration of the

⁹ Gray, p. 171.

¹⁰ O'Connor, 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction', p. 818.

¹¹ O'Connor, p. 818.

relationships between man and God, she extends Poe's use of the doppelgänger, as her characters, arguably, become pale doubles of the Divine, created in God's image but also displaying the corruptions of sin and evil, or the likeness of the Devil. Within this primary theme, however, she, like Chopin, also examines some aspects of specifically female experience, presenting poignant associations between female intelligence and physical grotesqueness, and portraying her 'bright fat girls' as existing in uneasy tension with their intellectual abilities. In contrast to Chopin, however, whose later work is geared expressly to articulate these powerful 'feminist' or 'feminine' concepts, O'Connor's central concern is sacramental rather than sociological, and thus such ideas take the form of subcommentaries underlying her main theses, and pointing to deeper levels of madness, otherness and displacement.

O'Connor is also explicit about the influence of Poe on her work, describing his tales of the bizarre and the exaggerated as 'the largest thing that looms up'¹² in her wide reading. Simultaneously acknowledging herself as a 'descendant' of Hawthorne¹³, she demonstrates a symbolic merging of the literary traditions of North and South, and the continuing importance of Poe to writers 'in the family below the MDline'¹⁴. This relevance is evident, too, in the works of Chopin and Faulkner, both of whom extend Poe's ideas of unity and totality, and expand his potent use of the short narrative as an expression of the mind 'in extremis'. In Chopin's works, a clear movement develops from her early anecdotes and simple 'folktales', not far removed from the sentimentality of regional literature, to stories such as 'La Belle Zoraïde' and 'Désirée's Baby', which demonstrate an understated, unified force reminiscent of both Poe and of his successor, Maupassant. A progression in technique is also evident, as the rudimentary gothic structures of early works become increasingly sophisticated, linking The Awakening with the female gothic and displaying an ability, as in Poe's tales, to use aspects of this genre to heighten the concentrated focus on a single consciousness.

¹² O'Connor, letter to A, p. 951.

¹³ O'Connor, letter to William Sessions, p. 1131.

¹⁴ O'Connor, letter to Ashley Brown, p. 911.

Faulkner's short narratives illustrate a development in both the structure of the story and in its unique ability to shock - a potential recognised by Poe in his insistence that all elements of the short story should be crafted in order to build a single effect, or tension, within the work, which is then 'springloaded' with the force of total unity to deliver the 'sting in the tale' - and which O'Connor, too, utilises in her narratives of dark epiphanies and unexpected revelation. Faulkner also extends the construction of the short narrative into areas of 'space', creating a literary equivalent of Cézanne's impressionism or the Pointillist school, in which the eye is left to finish what the painter has suggested with juxtapositions of shape, or points of pure colour that blend when observed to form subtler shades. Again using a technique later employed by O'Connor, Faulkner structures his short fiction to create narratives in which what is 'not said' becomes as central to the 'unique or single effect'¹⁵ as what is explicitly stated, and in which such 'empty spaces' develop resonance and meaning within the reader's imagination. This is particularly effective in his examinations of madness, in which he exploits the ability of the audience's mind to create scenarios out of implications and suggestions in order to demonstrate the nightmarish potential of a mind unconstrained by reason.

Chopin, O'Connor and Faulkner, despite demonstrating profoundly different perspectives in their treatment of madness, also draw upon and develop similar themes. All recognise an essential 'otherness' about the South, and seek to articulate this through versions of madness or mental aberrance. Madness thus becomes a figure that symbolises forms of alienation, deformation, dislocation and superstition that such authors view as inherent in Southern experience. Like Poe, the 'dark diagnostician of cultural illness', Chopin, Faulkner and O'Connor examine the disjunctions in historical, cultural, and theological structures that they consider to be present in the South in particular, but which also have universal relevance in terms of concepts of otherness, and the reflection of wider

¹⁵ Hough, p. 136.

social or ideological dysfunctions in individual manifestations of madness. Of the three, Chopin and O'Connor appear to provide the clearest articulation of their themes, while Faulkner, in contrast, projects a sense of ambivalence that is in many ways representative of the South as a whole, and of madness itself.

Faulkner extends this ambivalence to the role of the reader in relation to his texts. On the one hand, his narratives exploit the externality of the reader, who is outside the text, projecting onto the audience concepts of the dominant, the majority, and the 'normal' against which the 'otherness' of the South can be displayed. On the other hand, however, his fiction also allows the reader access to the experience of the South and invites understanding of, if not identification with, figures whose madness mirrors the dysfunctions inherent in this experience. The divisions between these external and internal perspectives are, in the view of the reader, by no means clear, and carry with them overtones of ambiguity that can allow identification with a character or situation that is, at the same time, objectively shocking. In contrast, Chopin actively invites the reader to identify with the subcultural and the nondominant, a position epitomised in The Awakening, in which, to use Mary Jacobus's words about feminist writing in general, 'writing, the production of meaning, becomes the site both of challenge and Otherness'¹⁶. Chopin's 'production of meaning' through a single consciousness opens the 'other' to the reader in a way that prompts identification with the self. In this re-evaluative identification Chopin suggests the subjectivity of definitions of 'madness', and directly demonstrates that, from the 'insider's' point of view, it is frequently society, rather than the individual, that appears illogical and insane. As Foucault argues in the opening lines of his history of insanity:

We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbours, and communicate and recognise each other through the merciless language of non-madness; to define the moment of this conspiracy

¹⁶ Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View' in Women Writing and Writing About Women, ed. Mary Jacobus, (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979), p. 12.

before it was permanently established in the realm of truth, before it was revived by the lyricism of protest.¹⁷

In Flannery O'Connor's writing, moral responsibility for interpreting the independent, dialogic narrative voices and multiple perspective viewpoints of her fiction is placed on the reader in the absence of an omniscient authorial presence, a 'nothingness at the centre'. Her own intense belief in God is neither easy nor unargued, and her use of a multiplicity of voices in her fiction reflects this, acting as a challenge to the reader to find the truth - the 'right' and 'wrong' - for herself. At the same time, this sense of absence mirrors the existentialist beliefs prevalent during the 1950s, and, together with ideas of the absurd and the surreal, clearly links O'Connor's work with the intellectual currents of her time. Faulkner's persistent sense of ambiguity, complex use of symbolism, and multi-layered, ambivalent construction of concepts of self and other, similarly, reflect an awareness and an encompassing of the currents of Modernism in his time. His use of the 'curved truth' and impressionistic - rather than rigid - forms of structure is also Modernistic, as Melvin Freidman suggests, arguing that 'characters are intricately related to an insistent pattern of language and image which helps to create form, the "expansion" rather than "completion" that Forster sees as the emancipation of the modern novel'¹⁸. As in O'Connor's work, the reader is drawn in as a participant in constructing this 'curved truth' and 'expansion'. In contrast to O'Connor's writing, however, in which the reader is less an 'other' than one of the many independent presences in dialogue with, and within, the text, in Faulkner's work the reader remains in an ambivalent relationship to the text, both other and participant - a tension that itself reflects a sense of Modernist unease.

Kate Chopin, too, demonstrates strong links with contemporary developments in thought and philosophy, engaging

¹⁷ Foucault, p. ix.

¹⁸ Melvin J. Freidman in Modernism 1890-1930, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1976), p. 463.

with themes of determinism, naturalism, fictional realism and free will. The Awakening, in its open-endedness and its demonstration of the tension between social determinism and the individual, presents a dialogue between ideas of social and physical determinism and Edna Pontellier's influence over this 'destiny' through her own free will as a unique, idiosyncratic and self-determined human being. Through this dialogue, however, as through the dialogue of O'Connor's multiple narrative voices, emerges a definitive articulation of themes that stands in contrast to Faulkner's ambivalent position as 'double agent', 'insider' and 'outsider'. The clarity with which Chopin and O'Connor express both their concepts and their social awareness is, arguably, a direct function of their relationship to the idea of otherness. As a white male in patriarchal white society, Faulkner's experience of otherness is restricted to his position as a Southerner, and to his feelings of exile from the South, both of which may be viewed as 'secondary' in comparison to his status as the dominant, the definer rather than the defined, within society. Chopin and O'Connor, as representatives of the nondominant and the subcultural, experience marginalisation and otherness in a way Faulkner - at least in a 'primary' sense - cannot, and which finds a direct correlation in their work.

What emerges most strongly from a comparison of these versions of madness is a view of 'madness' as a medium by which society comes to terms with factors within it that are disturbing, and which represent, or come to represent, the 'other'. Definitions of madness are ambiguous and fluid; despite social, cultural or historical ratification and institutionalisation, concepts of sanity and insanity derive from subjective or relative, rather than empirical, criteria. There is, to use Lacanian terminology, 'a perpetual sliding of the signified under the signifier'¹⁹, with the signifier - the term 'madness' - moving over a continuum from which the signified - the mad - is or are selected. In this state of flux, therefore, meaning cannot be

¹⁹ Modern Literary Criticism and Theory: A Reader, ed. David Lodge, (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1988), p. 79.

sustained 'by anything other than reference to another meaning'²⁰, or, in other words, 'madness' exists only in relation to 'sanity', or, on a more basic level, self only exists in relation to other. It is the mirror of the self in the other that allows us both to define the self and to create a division between self and other, marginalising that which is perceived in negative terms - the 'not self' - in relation to the primacy of the self.

Once a concept of the self is established, however, that which exists as 'not self' constitutes the alien and the unknown, threatening the dominance of the self, 'blurring its well-defined boundaries'²¹, and challenging 'established codes, habitual methods of mediating, organising, and explaining experience'. Marginalisation and definition by deficiency or difference increasingly become a means of controlling, de-fusing or de-emphasising such otherness - a method of coming to terms with the potency of the unknown in a way that allows continued belief in the dominance and power of the known. The self-perpetuating institutionalisation of the dominant and the nondominant is clearly expressed in a discussion of 'Otherness and the Identity-Body':

When a group is in power it propagates the reigning ideology, it imposes categories. The group in power, which always needs to justify its domination, condemns those that it oppresses to being different: he or she cannot be treated equally because - ... Such 'differences' are not explained by specific historical circumstances because history evolves and can bring about resolutions. For the oppressor, it is safer to speak of natural differences that are invariable by definition. That is the basis of racist and sexist ideologies. And thus a status of inferiority is inextricably bound to a status of difference.²²

This institutionalisation of difference is also the basis of divisions between 'madness' and 'sanity', 'rationality' and 'irrationality', the 'normal' and the 'lunatic': forms of otherness that are

²⁰ Modern Literary Criticism and Theory, pp. 79 - 80.

²¹ Terry Eagleton, p. 190.

²² from an editorial collective, Feminist Literary Theory, pp. 233 - 234.

controlled within the context of the dominant group by marginalisation, alienation and confinement, and by 'the merciless language of non-madness' itself. What such concepts of madness reflect in terms of the relationship of the self and the other, wider aspects of society, history, culture and belief, and the dialectics of madness itself, are themes explored and articulated in various ways in the works of Chopin, Faulkner and O'Connor. In narratives that are closely tied to contemporary intellectual thoughts and trends, and which exhibit profoundly different perspectives on madness, they express interpretations of mental dysfunction that are simultaneously immediate to their time and region, and universal in implication. Through their narratives, these writers open 'a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer' and provoke 'a breach without reconciliation' between versions of madness and sanity in which 'the world is forced to question itself'²³.

²³ Foucault, p. 288.

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