

"Madness in English-Canadian Fiction"

The study at hand deals with madness as it is represented in English Canadian fiction. The topic seemed most interesting and fruitful for analysis due to the fact that as the ways madness has been defined, understood, described, judged and handled differ quite profoundly from society to society, from era to era, as the language, ideas and associations surrounding insanity are both strongly culture-relative and shifting, madness as a theme of myth and literature has always been an excellent vehicle to mirror the assumptions and arguments, the aspirations and nostalgia, the beliefs and values, hopes and fears of its age and society.

Thus, while the overall intent of this study is to elucidate some discernible patterns of structure and style which accompany the use of madness in Canadian literature, to investigate the varying sorts of portrayal and the conventions of presentation, to interpret the use of madness as literary devices and to highlight the different statements which are made, the continuity, variation, and changes in the theme of madness provide an informing principle in terms of certain Canadian experiences and perceptions. By examining madness as it represents itself in Canadian literature and considering the respective explorations of the deranged mind within their historical context, I hope to demonstrate that literary interpretations of madness both reflect and question cultural, political, religious and psychological assumptions of their times and that certain symptoms or usages are characteristic of certain periods. Such an approach, it is hoped, might not only contribute towards an assessment of the wealth of associations which surround madness and the ambivalence with which it is viewed, but also shed some light on the Canadian imagination. As such this study can be considered not only as a history of literary madness, but a history of Canadian society and the Canadian mind.