

A Disease Beyond Any Practice: The Schizoid Politics of Anna Kavan's *Ice*

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“I would like to write a Book which would drive men mad, which would be like an open door leading them where they would never have consented to go, in short, a door that opens onto reality.”— Antonin Artaud, *The Umbilicus of Limbo*

I. The Space Between Fact and Fiction

Anna Kavan is a strange figure. She stands on the fringes of literary history; her books are left dusty on the shelves, either relegated to the offhand footnote or removed from the greater critical discussion entirely. She has, in a way, been left behind— her legacy not determined by the work she produced in life, but by the addictions that resulted in her death. It is an unfortunate state for a writer of her caliber, and a side effect of what I believe to be a potent, concerted effort to trivialize many of Kavan’s life events and boil her down into a stereotypical “tortured artist”¹ or madwoman— an undertaking which has stunted both her reception as an author and the discussions surrounding her work in the decades following her death.

It is not surprising that this act of stereotyping was wielded against Kavan. She led an unconventional life, one overflowing with scandalous details ripe for the type of poisonous historical revisionism and sensationalization that often plagues those society labels as “tortured artists.” She had the drug addictions, the failed relationships, suicide attempts, and subsequent institutionalizations. Affairs, abandoned children, destroyed letters. However, by confining her in this role, Kavan’s work has become similarly stereotyped: read solely with madness in mind, as a strange game of hide-and-seek where the reader is always searching for her between the lines— every image or metaphor a reference to some secret lover or drug. Unfortunately, the only thing these readings are actually doing is perpetuating a myth. The ‘truths’ that they rely upon for their foundation are, in reality, rarely more than fabrications or exaggerations: written by friends she

¹ Figures commonly evoked as ‘tortured artists’ include Vincent van Gogh, Sylvia Plath, and Amy Winehouse. For a discussion of the problematic nature of this term, see Alacovska, Ana, and Dan Kärreman. "Tormented selves: The social imaginary of the tortured artist and the identity work of creative workers." *Organization Studies* 44.6 (2023): 961-985.

frequently fell out with for years at a time, and who often drew outrageous conclusions about even the most innocuous of life details.² Kavan's public image is not just that of the tortured artist, but is largely a complete *falsehood*.³ This glaring issue is one that has yet to be substantially remediated by Kavan scholars in their discussions; and, as a result, has continued to poison both the author and her works, especially her most well-known text: *Ice*.

Published in 1967, *Ice* is the final book Kavan released before her death, and showcases her writing in its fullest, most uninhibited form. The book follows the journey of an unnamed narrator on his journey to save a woman only known to the reader as "the girl." All while a nuclear winter, brought on by a faulty atom bomb, is slowly entombing the world in ice. While on this journey, the narrator is tormented by strange hallucinations or dreams, ones that increase in intensity as the world grows closer to total destruction. It is a deeply complex story, a novel that can hardly be labeled a novel; it works outside predetermined literary conventions and forms, choosing to embrace the absurd and the violent over order and coherence. And yet, despite this, the majority of readers, reviewers, and scholars have forcefully defanged the text and reduced it into something it is not: a psychoanalytically-charged autobiography or *roman-a-clef* narrative.⁴

I have seen all sorts of strange and convoluted readings of Kavan's work, some more outrageous than others.⁵ But none of these psychoanalytical analyses seem to have any interest in

² In 1975, Rhys Davies published one of the more famous biographies on Kavan's early life called *The Honeysuckle Girl*.

³ For an in-depth discussion and biography of Kavan's life, see Walker, Victoria Carborne. *The Fiction of Anna Kavan (1901-1968)*. Diss. Queen Mary University of London, 2012.

⁴ A novel form where real events, narratives, and people are reconstructed under a facade of fiction.

⁵ Some of these readings include, but are not limited to: Magot, Céline. "The Palimpsest Girl in Ice by Anna Kavan." *Miranda. Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone/Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-speaking world* 12 (2016).; Stephenson, Gregory. "An Inward Ice-Age: A Reading of Anna Kavan's Ice." *Foundation* 40.113 (2011): 20.; Hatipoğlu, Gülden. "The Lost Object of Desire in Anna Kavan's Ice." *Spring/Fall* (2020): 101.; and Buxbaum, Jane. "The Pleasure Principle in Ice by Anna Kavan & Picnic at Hanging Rock by Joan Lindsay." Additionally, the synopsis on the back of the Penguin 50th anniversary paperback edition claims the book is "a brilliant allegory for its author's struggles with addiction."

digging deeper into the text itself. Instead, they allow the shadow of Kavan to hang over every word, every idea— they must always find a way to link the text back to her and her “life” without fail. Anything that contradicts this goal is ignored; even the words of Kavan herself are discarded if they interrupt the motion of the Oedipal machine, the complex, or the diagnosis. As a result, inadvertently or purposefully, these analyses continue to uphold the very hierarchies and systems that Kavan was trying to dismantle through her writing.

Society versus Bill Williams

During WWII, Kavan worked as a nurse at a neurosis center for soldiers suffering from effort syndrome.⁶ After leaving the position, she produced writings that often mentioned her intimate experiences with both the ‘patient’ and ‘doctor’ aspects of psychiatry. In “The Case of Bill Williams,” Kavan discusses the life of a fictional, institutionalized soldier suffering from effort syndrome named, of course, Bill Williams:

Inevitably, right from the start, the social machine is the enemy of the individual Bill Williams. [...] Every door closing, every form filled in, every official, every broadcast, every regulation, every propaganda slogan, is a munition in the war; Society versus Bill Williams.⁷

I do not believe Kavan could possibly make her stance on psychiatry any clearer than this. In her eyes, psychiatric, state, and social systems are fundamentally faulty; as a result, humanity is undoubtedly doomed unless “a tonic epidemic of madness blazes across the world like a comet and blasts all the machinery into smithereens.”⁸ Therefore, instead of falling into the same convenient traps that have haunted her writing and personhood for nearly sixty years, I propose a

⁶ A common psychosomatic affliction that presented symptoms similar to heart disease. Nowadays known as Da Costa’s Syndrome.

⁷ Kavan, Anna. ‘The Case of Bill Williams’ *Horizon IX*, no. 50 (1944, February), 97.

⁸ 98.

reading of *Ice* that purposefully sheds the burden of psychiatry and the oppressive structures it upholds— that acknowledges Kavan as the author but does not place her life story at the forefront. *Ice* deserves to be examined as a text first and foremost— for its structure, its themes, its characters, and the novel ways in which Kavan was able to execute them. For, when *Ice* is analyzed as a literary object, without the urge to psychoanalyze its author, what the reader can discover is genuinely revolutionary: a new way of existing.

A Tonic Blaze of Madness

Kavan's sentiments about social structures, psychiatry, and madness echo similar lines of reasoning found in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's 1972 text, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Within, the pair writes: "But in any case the harm has been done, the treatment has chosen the path of oedipalization, all cluttered with refuse, instead of the schizophrenization that must cure us of the cure."⁹ The totality of madness and the "blaze" that can bring about the destruction of reductive, oppressive systems is schizophrenia— not necessarily the illness itself, but the process of desiring-production carried out by the schizo. I argue that the narrator of *Ice* is, in fact, a Deleuzian schizo whose desire for contact is realized through his desperate urge to completely possess the girl and establish a connection with reality through her. As the threat of world's complete destruction grows ever closer, his increasingly potent hallucinations and dreams forcefully alienate the reader and bring them into close contact with channels of pure desire by 'breaking' the story's reality and replacing it with his own. This act of stopping and restarting the story without warning through the implementation of vivid dreamscapes forces the reader into a strange state of inescapist suspension very similar to the one captured by Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.

⁹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix. *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Penguin, 2009, 68.

Ice replicates the Theatre in the novel form through vivid, violent imagery initiated by someone we recognize to be a madman, specifically one who is actively ‘losing his mind.’ The Theatre, when transferred into the novel form, is a form of narrative and thematic composition I will refer to as “schizophrenic narrative”— a narrative form that emulates the stage in book form.¹⁰ The disorienting dichotomy between dream and reality, mad and sane, forces the reader to try and find their footing within the story by grasping onto anything they can recognize as ‘real.’ And yet, the only realities that the book offers for us to grab on to are ones full of cruelty. Cruelty that we try our best to ignore: sexual violence, the horrors of war, domestic violence, environmental destruction, the unfair treatment of the mentally ill. *Ice* forces these realities into the mind of the reader; and, at the end of the book, Kavan provides its solution as well: the complete destruction of oppressive social systems and the birth of an alternative form of existence mediated by radical forms of empathetic human connection.

II. The Schizo, Beyond Oedipus

To understand *Ice* as a text, one must first understand the politics of madness that Kavan is implementing and critiquing through the text’s main character: the unnamed narrator. Through him, she both feeds and pushes back against the reader’s urge to diagnose— an urge sourcing from psychoanalysis’ tempting offer of complete ‘understanding’ of the human psyche and the simplification and explanation of unpredictable variables and people through diagnosis. In the first half of the text, (until Chapter Seven) Kavan, through the narrator, plays a game of cat-and-mouse with the reader; tempting us with hints of madness, guilty admissions, and offhand remarks that all allude to something ‘greater’ and prompting us to turn into little doctors

¹⁰ I have adopted this term and its general concept from Lee Edwards. The original usage of the term can be found in Edwards, Lee. "Schizophrenic narrative." *The Journal of narrative technique* 19.1 (1989): 25-30.

striving to find the explanation or cure. It is an enticing trap, and one that we are allowed to have our fun with until it is finally weaponized against the reader in Chapter Seven's courtroom scene. A scene in which we are forced to reckon with the oppressive structures of thought we have been perpetuating, and that reveal themselves through the Theatre of Cruelty and the morphing of the novel into the stage.

Madness as a concept is ancient, existing in various forms— often hidden, yet always strangely present at the fringes of civilization. And yet, even with its lengthy history, it still seems to evade true characterization and interpretation by outsiders, by those who are not 'mad,' even in the contemporary age. We claim enhanced knowledge and accelerated societal and scientific advancement, which, while not entirely untrue, does not keep us from falling into the same familiar, comfortable patterns of discourse. In *Hamlet*, Polonius speaks about madness using familiar language and ideas: "Mad call I it, for, to define true madness, What is 't but to be nothing else but mad?"¹¹ Delving even deeper back in time, readers find tragic characters like Euripides' Orestes suffering strange and sudden attacks of madness that emerge from somewhere deep "inside him" that morph his character through hallucinations, a lack of hygiene, wild eyes, and refusal to leave his bed.¹² However, though the aftermath of madness and its origin points are often discussed in literature using strikingly similar language and descriptions, it is impossible to pin down a universal consensus that delineates the 'true,' essential qualities of madness.¹³ Both then and now, it escapes attempts at rationalization or compartmentalization; it is a nothingness manifested in "signs, in words, in gestures;" it is the absence of reason while simultaneously

¹¹ Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, New York, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2012, 2.2.100-101.

¹² Theodorou, Zena. "Subject to emotion: exploring madness in Orestes." *The Classical Quarterly* 43.1 (1993): 32-46.

¹³ See Littlewood, Roland. "The imitation of madness: the influence of psychopathology upon culture." *Pictures at an Exhibition (Psychology Revivals)*. Routledge, 2014. 84-104.

being the madman's reason, his truth.¹⁴ It is a paradox in the flesh— its existence needs no elaboration, it just *is*. However, despite this elusive nature, observers can still recognize and identify madness with confidence. So confidently, in fact, that madness has become an all-encompassing term used whenever one sees another acting “unreasonably,” adhering to structures of thought and realities that do not align with forms of thought prescribed by the State and Social machines.¹⁵ Structures that we, as individuals, have internalized and now view as unquestionable fact. There is a language of the madman, a way of walking or gesturing that betrays him, that signals to us that he is something else entirely. For example, it is when one takes the fantastical, dream-image as truth: “The man who imagines he is made of glass is not mad, for any sleeper can have this image in a dream; but he is mad if, believing he is made of glass, he thereby concludes that he is... in danger of breaking.”¹⁶ For the purposes of my analysis, madness will be understood as the practice of adhering to the *wrong* kind of truth. The madman himself is one who brings the dream-image into the waking state and treats it as if it is not a dream— therefore shaping his life around the negation of reality.

However, as Deleuze and Guattari discuss in their 1972 text, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, madness is not all *sickness*. It is a common misconception, a false equivalence brought about by psychiatry; which, in attempting to justify its continued existence and importance, had to establish its patients as ill, fundamentally faulty and in need of a cure that only trained practitioners can administer. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari believe desire is not

¹⁴ Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*. Routledge, 2003, 107.

¹⁵ Many of Deleuze and Guattari's claims in *Anti-Oedipus* center around two key ideas: “everything is a machine” (2) and “everything is production” (4). Therefore, I am using the term “State machine” to refer to the actual state apparatus, and the methods in which it polices and reproduces itself through national myths, the law, patriotism, and other affective methods. The “Social machine” refers to structures of belonging and identity that are often produced among groups of individuals in collusion with the State, typically with futurity and “safety” as their key ideals. Both of these machines are largely confined to western civilizations, which is where the majority of *Ice* presumably takes place.

¹⁶ 94.

based on a feeling of lack or loss, but is instead purely productive. A product of a great, interconnected system of endlessly churning “desiring-machines.”¹⁷ While desiring-machines lie within all persons and greater machines,¹⁸ only a select few beings allow it to operate at its full potential: the schizos. At the most basic level, a schizo is someone who experiences reality in a ‘schizophrenic’ manner, understanding himself through flows of pure desire, endlessly producing, breaking down, forming new syntheses, and re-producing. Buchanan writes: “Something ‘clicks’ in the schizophrenic and their psychical apparatus shifts into a kind of overdrive, generating ideas, images, thoughts and feelings of greater intensity than anything previously known or experienced.”¹⁹ The past and the future do not matter, nor the Family or the State, unless they serve as cogs in the desiring-machine. Schizophrenia is production “as it functions at the end, as the limit of social production determined by the conditions of capitalism.”²⁰ Therefore, in western modes of capitalistic or psychiatric thought (our thought), schizophrenia is deeply unproductive. For it is a process without a goal, a compulsion, the breakdown and rejection of signs and signifiers— nearly impossible to pin down without some act of forceful reduction. Again, it is the *wrong* truth or the *wrong* method of existing in the world, much like madness. And it is the form of existence that the narrator of *Ice* adheres to as both a schizo and perceived madman.

Anti-Odysseus

I argue that the narrator of *Ice* is a schizo whose ultimate desire for contact with both others and ‘reality’ is realized through his urge to completely and totally possess the woman

¹⁷ For further discussion of the desiring-machine, see “Desiring Production,” “The Machines,” and “The Whole and Its Parts” in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*.

¹⁸ The Social or War machines, for example.

¹⁹ Buchanan, Ian. *Reader’s Guide to Anti-Oedipus*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2008, 35.

²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 130.

known only to the reader as “the girl”: a relic from his childhood who left him years ago for her current husband. However, he does not present his desire in this manner at the beginning of the story. At the opening of Chapter One, it is more undefined— described as more of an indeterminable urge to *see*. This characterization only changes when he witnesses her abuse: “While she was happy I had dissociated myself, been outside the situation. Now I felt implicated, involved with her again.”²¹ It is her *fear* that opens the potential of her body and mobilizes the narrator’s schizophrenic desire in full force.

The reader is introduced to the girl in the first few pages of the text alongside the narrator, with him “lost,” driving at dusk through an empty, rural landscape of “lonely hills” to visit her and her husband at their countryside home.²² As he drives, the car’s headlights illuminate the world that we now find ourselves in: one dominated by strange scenery and weather that is noted to be far too cold for this time of year. The car is jerked back and forth on roads that are narrow, unkempt, and slick with ice; the once idyllic countryside “laid waste during [his] absence” by some mysterious disaster.²³ The narrator appears to be the only living creature in the general area— the inhabitants and their livestock implied to be either dead in the rubble or seeking refuge elsewhere. However, though the reader may be curious about the circumstances surrounding this strange scene, the narrator pays no mind to this site of apparent disaster, brushing it off without much interest. His mind is too focused on his goal of ‘seeing’ the girl— so focused that it appears nothing can shake him from his plans. He is in a strange state of undefined frenzy, one that he acknowledges, stating: “I myself did not understand my compulsion. [...] ...she became an obsession, I could think only of her, felt I must see her

²¹ Kavan, Anna. *Ice*. Penguin, 2017, 13.

²² 4.

²³ 4.

immediately, nothing else mattered.”²⁴ This is a rather unnerving admission. There is an air of emergency, of desperation, that is not being completely addressed. It is as if some sort of spirit has possessed him and overridden all human rationality and sense of danger.

As the narrator drives on, the snowfall begins to pick up, and in this sea of empty whiteness, the girl suddenly emerges: “For a moment, my lights picked out like searchlights the girl’s naked body, slight as a child’s, ivory white against the dead white of the snow, her hair bright as spun glass.”²⁵ Her image materializes without any warning or foreshadowing, prompting an immediate shift in mood and a sudden torrent of horrific, dreamlike imagery. The girl’s feet are frozen in place while walls of “glassy, glittering” ice close in around her. As the ice grows closer, it begins to climb up her body, freezing it in place limb by limb. Her mouth is last, and the scene ends with the echo of her shrill, agonized scream before the world falls into total silence and the image disappears back into the snow. From the moment the girl appears to the moment she vanishes again, the narrator forgets his drive, the snow, the blackened houses. The book’s reality vanishes behind what can only be described as a hallucination or some sort of waking dream. A line of rationalization that is later confirmed by the narrator himself:

But the consequences of the traumatic experience were still evident in the insomnia and headaches from which I suffered. The drugs prescribed for me produced horrible dreams, in which she always appeared as a helpless victim, her fragile body broken and bruised. These dreams were not confined to sleep only, and a deplorable side effect was the way I had come to enjoy them.²⁶

What we just read, that scene of the girl suffocated by the ice? That was not real. A shadow of doubt is suddenly cast over the narrator’s reliability and morality. With this new implication, we

²⁴ 4.

²⁵ 5.

²⁶ 6.

are forced to ask if any of what we just read was real: the car drive, the ruins, the snowstorm.

Kavan's blurring of the border between the 'real' and 'unreal' of a fictional narrative creates a strange struggle in the reader's mind. Usually, the line between these two concepts is concrete and unmovable— placed comfortably between the reader and the story they are consuming. The typical line of reasoning being: *I am real, and I know I am real because this story is unreal.*

However, in this moment, the narrator has created a third plane of reality, insular and separate from the reader's and the story's: his own. The dream. As seen through the sudden appearance and disappearance of the girl's image, his mind has the capacity to warp the very fabric of the text, break the story's linear motion, and focus the reader into pools of concentrated imagination that trap us temporally. But it appears there are limits to this narrative ability. The sequence does not last very long at all. It is contained in a single paragraph, less than half a page. As soon as the reader gets their feet under them and grasps the nature of the situation, it vanishes and we find ourselves back in the car. Faced with this development we can't help but wonder: *Is he insane?* These breaks with reality are extremely reminiscent of schizophrenia as represented by psychoanalysis and popular culture: the unstable madman whose reality is dominated by false hallucinations and dreamworlds that separate him from the *true* experience of reality.

The reader is now on guard against the narrator as the originator of this discomfort and confusion, as an unpredictable variable. It doesn't help that the dream's imagery is deeply off putting, centering around the harm (and implied death) of the girl's body. A specifically naked, white, childlike body— characteristics closely tied to ideas of innocence and purity. The narrator, in imagining harm coming to such a 'pure' form of humanity, faces accusations of perversion, amorality, and sadism in conjunction with the pre-existing suspicions of insanity. Strangely enough, the reader's potentially hostile interpretation is not something the narrator directly

pushes back against. About the dream-image he states: “I felt no pity for her. On the contrary, I derived an indescribable pleasure from seeing her suffer. I disapproved of my own callousness, but there it was.”²⁷ However, he clarifies these feelings weren’t necessarily unusual because “reality had always been something of an unknown quantity to [him].”²⁸ A state only worsened by trauma and the drugs prescribed for his insomnia and headaches, which he claims is the true cause of the dreams.²⁹

These little admissions are the narrator’s only saving grace in the face of total readerly estrangement. Because these moments display that, while he is undoubtedly unstable, he is *self-admittedly* unstable— no external interjection or diagnosis necessary. He is aware of this disconnect, as he is still in touch with reality in some capacity, although the extent to which is still unknown. Though his dream about the girl is deeply unnerving and contains some hints of sadism, it is still fairly short and concise. It appears to him, not his own creation but an invention of the medication. In a moment of vulnerability, he even admits the source of his trauma: the girl breaking off their relationship to go marry another man, her current husband.³⁰ And, most importantly, he does not believe the dream image. He does not act as if the girl is actually, physically in front of him by slamming the breaks or swerving. Nor does he jump out to try and save her. The narrator is skirting about our definitions of madness, those key signals that make us say *Aha! Caught you*. As a result, we pity him in a strange way. It is almost as if he is putting up a fight to attain his sanity, pushing back against this wave of madness brought on by his medications and trauma. But it is a forced pity, artificial and bestowed with a grimace. After all,

²⁷ 5.

²⁸ 4.

²⁹ “The drugs prescribed for me produced horrible dreams, in which she always appeared as a helpless victim, her fragile body broken and bruised. These dreams were not confined to sleep only, and a deplorable side effect was the way I had come to enjoy them.” 4.

³⁰ This character is similarly unnamed and will therefore be referred to as “the girl’s husband.”

he is still a threatening figure, having taken pleasure in images of violence against an innocent feminine body.

The Schizo Protagonist

While it is easy to brush past this moment and continue on with the story, I believe that this moment of ‘vulnerability’ is key in the narrator’s characterization as a schizo, and provides a useful baseline to examine him as such. As stated, the schizo is one whose existence is mediated by the desiring-machines and the pure, uncoded flows of desire they produce. Unfortunately, the schizo does not make for a terribly compelling character. The narrator is driven by bursts of passion, obsession, hatred, lust, love in turn— all different, but only existing to facilitate the ultimate force of desire underpinning his every thought and action: his desire to possess the girl and root himself into reality through her. This results in a strange character composition. For, in the schizo’s mind, anything that does not directly translate into the furthering of his desire and the perpetuation of the desiring-machine has no true value. As a result, he feels flat and stationary, more robot than man, without all the necessary complexities that form a true flesh-and-blood human. He has no name, no likes or dislikes, fears, hopes, no concrete goals or ambitions. He tends to not react or exhibit emotion, even when faced with challenging or difficult stimuli. However, though all these aspects do undoubtedly contribute to his flatness, I argue that the key aspect of his schizophrenic characterization that makes him feel so alien is his lack of a real, discernible past.

The omission of his past is not due to oversight on Kavan’s part, but is instead a deliberate narrative choice. For, the schizo as an entity cannot be “oedipalized.”³¹ Throughout

³¹ “We knew the schizo was not oedipalizable, because he is beyond territoriality, because he has carried his flows right into the desert.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 67.

Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari use Oedipus³² as a sort of catch-all term for Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and their followers' theories of the family, sexuality, the unconscious, and desire. Fundamental to these theories is the childhood: it is the fabled origin point to which the practitioner must always return to and analyze, no matter the patient's complaint or diagnosed condition. This is all done in the service of finding the source of the patient's abnormality, identifying the first signs of deviance, delivering a diagnosis, and finding the cure or cures that will likewise 'return' the patient to a better, purer state. These ingrained goals make oedipalization reductive in nature, as it forces every symptom and sign into predetermined boundaries laid out in the "classical order of representation."³³ The horse is the father, the phallus is the father, any hole is a vagina, the cave is mother, castration, father, sister, brother, everything comes back to the child and the Family triangle.³⁴ The schizo, however, cannot be oedipalized because he does not have a past, an origin, or a family— at least not one that extends outside the realm of his productive, future-facing desire.

Throughout the entirety of the text, the narrator never once mentions a family or even a home country. He alludes to different careers but never elaborates, instead leaving it up to the reader's interpretation: "Most of my life was spent abroad, soldiering, or exploring remote areas..." with the most recent "area" being an unnamed tropical island where he was studying a species of singing lemur, the Indris. What he was studying about them was never clarified, and he never claims to be a biologist. The only life event he deliberately details is the source of his trauma: when the girl broke off their relationship, presumably sometime in their teens or early twenties. In this absence of detail, the reader finds themselves clinging to the images they can

³² This concept is also occasionally referred to using the terms Oedipal triangle, the Family, and the Family triangle.

³³ 55.

³⁴ "The desiring-experience is treated [by psychoanalysts] as if it were intrinsically related to the parents, and as if the family were its supreme law." Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 120.

derive from the careers he's described. Soldier, explorer, naturalist. Roles that spark ideas of dominance, masculinity, bravery, and intelligence. But even the most basic, insubstantial of traits seem to be a bad fit when measured against his actions and self-presentation; the narrator not maintaining a stable set of personality traits but instead adopting whatever trait or quality he feels may be best to further his desire in the given situation. He is a tactical warmonger receiving medals for his conquests in one chapter and a foolishly sentimental sap in the next, weeping over an imagined scenario. There is no sense of true stability or 'character.' The only constant is his schizophrenic desire for the girl.

III. Dream, Hallucination, Nightmare

The narrator's desire for contact is realized through his obsession with possessing the girl and using her to connect with reality— an act he perceives as being able to meaningfully involve him in the fate of the world.³⁵ Along with the rest of the rest of humanity, he is facing the unprecedented threat of total global destruction that is forcefully destroying all previous methods of existence. States, laws, the labor market— every mechanism of control and structure that he may have previously relied upon to order his reality is either in turmoil or has been completely liquidated: “I knew no country was safe, no matter how far removed from the present devastation, which would spread and spread, and ultimately cover the entire planet. . . . universal unrest was inevitable.”³⁶ In the face of this insanity, he has decided, subconsciously or deliberately, to reach into his past, to a figure symbolizing a better time in his life, one that he can use to root himself into reality: “I wanted to keep her with me, to anchor myself in the present through her.”³⁷ The schizo's grasp on time and place is loose and less defined than the

³⁵ “But I knew that my place was here, in our world under sentence of death, and that I would have to stay here and see it through to the end.” Kavan, *Ice*, 143.

³⁶ 89.

³⁷ 90.

average person's; and now with time being measured by the nearness of total annihilation, it is understandable that the narrator may want a way to connect to reality that does not entail simply counting down the hours to death. So he has chosen an alternative, what Antonin Artaud calls "the only true reality" that one can hope to conquer when their mind is "uninhibited", as the narrator's is: the deeply human reality of meaningful connection with others.³⁸ It is a reality that can give the narrator purpose in a world without reason, order, or futurity.

However, the girl is her own person with her own respective thoughts, ideas, and reactions to the disaster, and they often run counter to the narrator's goals of establishing a forced sense of connection. For example, when he manages to find her hiding away in a town on the brink of being destroyed by the ice, she responds to the narrator's appearance at her doorstep with extreme hostility, attempting to protect her independence:

I moved closer to her, touched her hand. She jerked it away. "Don't do that!" I held the fold of her coat, looked at her angry, frightened face of a child betrayed, the look of faint bruising round the eyes like a child that has cried a long time. "Leave me alone!" She tried to drag the heavy material out of my hand. "Go away!" I did not move. "Then I'll go!"³⁹

This response is one that is largely indicative of almost every single one of their few encounters throughout the text. Crying, running, fear, and force. However, as a schizo, the narrator operates according to the flows of the desiring-machines, and, in some way, their flows have now become inextricably intertwined with the girl as a mediating force. His desire is immense, ruling the flow of his life— and now he cannot imagine life without possessing the girl, without controlling *her*

³⁸ "Something which enlarges and consolidates you, which gives you the only reality that man can reasonably hope to conquer by his own forces, the reality in others." Excerpt from a March 25, 1924 letter from Jacques Riviere to Antonin Artaud. Artaud, Antonin. *Collected works*. Vol. 1. Calder Publications Limited, 1968.

³⁹ Kavan, *Ice*, 124.

life as an extension of his own, and using it to achieve what he wants. Consequently, the girl's cries fall on deaf ears, and the narrator indulges in several methods or syntheses that keep the desiring-machines in operation, that keep him believing in his mission of "saving" or "rescuing" the girl even as he abuses her and prolongs their shared sentence of death. One of the most potent of these methods is the indulgence in the free will and motion that the dream-scape offers him.

As the text progresses, the narrator's dreams increase in duration and violence, moving from repetitive images of the girl being swallowed by ice to the brutal deaths of thousands, all-out war, specters, living forests, blood-caked bodies, sacrifice, and rape. Additionally, they become more confusing, characterized by muddled, overlapping timelines and senseless actions. In the ice dream found in Chapter One, there were fairly clear breaks where it began and ended; these breaks interfered with the book's reality by creating a new 'plane' of existence for the narrator: the dream-scape. When the dream ended, the reader found themselves back in the car, as if nothing had happened. However, in Chapter Five, a new type of dream is introduced with enhanced, absurdist qualities that become largely indicative of the dreams found throughout the remainder of the text. This new dream form is what I will be referring to as the 'never-ending' or multifaceted dream. It is one that overlaps, changes subject and setting, transverses space and time, blurs boundaries; and, most importantly, initiates the Theatre of Cruelty through its implementation of disinterested violence.

The sequences found within the never-ending dream all center around various acts of egregious violence, specifically violence done to the girl. Though the reader does not always see the acts themselves, they usually see their result: the girl's dead body. She is mangled, liquidated by strange mists, even eaten by a dragon as a sacrifice; however, though they vary in implementation and description, not a single one of them establishes themselves as truly *real*,

producing an impact on the story. Instead, they are pure fantasy, a product of the narrator's mind. Every time the girl is killed and the reader is shown her mangled corpse, she always rises from the dead within a page or two, perfectly healthy and unchanged, ready to be slaughtered again. These great acts of violence forcefully establish the Theatre of Cruelty for the reader, but they also confirm the reader's fears, and cement the narrator as a *madman*. To streamline my analysis, I chose to focus on two sequences within the greater dream that display this act of twisting reality, the Theatre, and the girl's deaths in their fullest forms. They are what I will be referring to as the 'war dream' and the 'dragon dream.'

Undead and Nonliving

The war dream occurs roughly halfway through Chapter Five. It appears essentially out of nowhere, suddenly halting the motion of the previous, more grounded dream⁴⁰ and taking the reader by surprise. It centers around the sudden invasion of the warden's town by a group of fierce, animalistic soldiers who race through the streets, slaughtering anyone they can find. A horrifying idea that is made only more intense by Kavan's usage of visceral, descriptive prose:

The strangers raced through the town like madmen, pouring wine down their throats, slaughtering all they met, every man, woman, child, animal. The wine streamed down their faces mingled with sweat and blood so that they looked like demons. [...] Hacked off heads were impaled on [their] lances, sometimes infants or dogs. Huge fires blazed everywhere... The air was full of the reek of burning... As people were smoked out of their homes they were massacred by the enemy. Many preferred to die in the flames.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The previous dream started with the narrator seeing the girl through his window, running through the forest after having presumably escaped the High House. Because this event could potentially occur within the story itself (not just a dream), I believe it to be less absurd and surprising than the war dream, which is considerably more unlikely to take place.

⁴¹ 57.

As the death count rises, the narrator is forced to navigate through a labyrinth of bloodied human and animal carcasses in search of the girl, whom he now presumes to be dead, stating: “I knew the fate of girls in sacked towns.”⁴² Shortly after this statement, his fears are confirmed. Skirting around the streets where fighting is the heaviest, the narrator stumbles across the girl’s body by chance— her neck twisted unnaturally, broken due to her being “dragged by the hair.”⁴³ Her back is coated in a mosaic of dried and fresh blood, the bones of her forearm snapped: “the sharp pointed ends of bone [projecting] at the wrist through the torn tissue.”⁴⁴ But, even faced with such a horrific sight, the narrator does not cry out in horror or even display the slightest hint of mental disturbance. Instead, he remains strangely cool and collected, if not a little frustrated: “I felt I had been defrauded: I alone should have done the breaking with *tender love*; I was the only person entitled to inflict wounds.”⁴⁵

This is a horrifying admission, and one that only enhances the reader’s existing distaste of the narrator. However, before we can fully consider the weight of his words, the scene suddenly shifts without warning and we find ourselves alongside the narrator, standing amongst the townspeople as they begin their sacrifice of the girl to appease the “dragon” that lives in the depths of the fjord. She is alive again, no blood, no broken neck or limbs. Her soft, white, childlike body is whole, ready to be victimized once again. Standing on a precipice, the narrator stoically observes the girl being led to the edge— hands tied, crying out in pain— about to be thrown over into the freezing waters below. In a sudden frenzy he leaps up, making a move as if he was going to save her, before suddenly stalling, his fingertips just barely grazing her flesh.

⁴² 58.

⁴³ 58.

⁴⁴ 59.

⁴⁵ 59, emphasis mine.

Armed men came up, pushed me back, seized her by her frail shoulders. Big tears fell from her eyes like icicles, like diamonds, but I was unmoved. They did not seem to me like real tears. *She herself did not seem quite real.* She was pale and almost transparent, the victim I used for my own enjoyment in dreams.⁴⁶

The girl is thrown off the edge and the surface of the fjord explodes in response, the dragon leaping towards her flailing body, jaws closing around her with a solid crunch. Silence falls, and the girl is dead once again.

For the narrator, the dream is where he is freest—he can act and indulge without fear of retribution, he can exercise complete and total control over the girl’s existence without its inevitable culmination point being final: actual bodily death. For, one cannot truly, completely possess a human as long as they live, and instilling the girl with fear is not a way to establish a meaningful relationship, as seen through the narrator’s failures in ‘saving’ her. Even if he controls her actions like the warden, locks her in a room and forces her to follow his orders, she still has independent thought and can hate him in secret. That is not the reality he is searching for. In the dream, the narrator can control the fate of the girl by letting her get thrown off the ledge; he can rationalize his desire to possess *correctly* (“breaking with tender love”); he can place his darkest urges in the hands of another and act as if he is not the one actually responsible for the girl’s harm, even if he does take enjoyment in her victimization. It is a great game of justification and rationalization, a byproduct of desire that allows the narrator to operate alongside the desiring-machines without guilt, that can allow its breaks and syntheses to continue to be wholly productive even in the face of the great breakdown: the end of the world.⁴⁷ As René

⁴⁶ 61, emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ “An insane impatience for death was driving mankind to a second suicide even before the full effect of the first had been felt. I was profoundly depressed, left with a sense of waiting for something frightful to happen, a sort of mass extinction.” 141.

Girard writes in *Violence and the Sacred*, “Men can dispose of their violence more efficiently if they regard the process not as something emanating from within themselves, but as a necessity posed from without.”⁴⁸ He desires to use her as a victim, and does— but he does not want to embrace the finality it offers, nor the label of murderer. He still wants and *needs* to play savior. However, this line of rationality is not one that the non-schizo reader adheres to. Instead, they are *horrified* by the blatant violence done against the girl’s body, *disgusted* by the narrator’s wish to do further violence, and *lost* due to the tug-of-war between the overlapping, contradictory dreamscapes. Here, in this moment, the narrator has become the madman we have suspected him to be. His experiences are too frightening, too alien for him to be *like us*. And, most importantly, he has taken the dream-images as truth by consciously reacting and acting within them. He grabs a sword to defend himself in the war dream, and attempts to avoid the fighting by using the town’s “lower streets” near the harbor and hiding when the soldiers pass.⁴⁹ He becomes emotionally embroiled in the dragon dream, and even briefly attempts to stop the sacrifice before it happens. Undoubtedly, the narrator has revealed himself as what he really is. Not just a schizo, but a madman: a threat, not to be believed.

Suspension

It is hard to capture the sheer disorientation accompanied by the constant surge between realities that this chapter forces upon the reader. There is no warning each time the perspective or the scene shifts, the narrative instead throwing the reader in headfirst and leaving them to figure it out on their own. This technique and the resulting sensation it produces can only be described as creating a sort of *suspension* of the reader’s consciousness. Torn between settings, perspectives, and potential realities, there is no solid narrative ground where the reader can

⁴⁸ Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, 340.

⁴⁹ Kavan, *Ice*, 58.

steady their footing and catch their breath. Instead, they are engaged in a goose chase for the ‘real’ reality; the constant ‘breaks’ or switches in the story’s setting and time-space requiring constant stopping and re-reading of the events so that the reader can locate the exact moment where one scene ended and the next began. This act of searching comes at expense of the story’s natural flow, and only further suspends the reader. However, just before it becomes too much, before the reader gives up and throws in the towel, the suspension is shattered by the introduction of reality. *Our* reality.

This suspension finally brings into focus what French playwright Antonin Artaud calls the “Theatre of Cruelty,” a concept introduced in his 1938 text, *The Theatre and its Double*. Though his ideas have been largely restricted to and considered within the realm of experimental theater, I am proposing that *Ice*, through its narrative structure and flow, is reproducing similar effects in a novel form. Moving *Ice* from the realm of the conventional, postwar novel into what Lee Edwards has termed a “schizophrenic narrative.”⁵⁰

The Theatre’s core goal is to make the spectator aware of a difficult reality they have been previously ignoring for the sake of their personal comfort— typically one that undermines or goes against the realities embraced by hierarchical State and Social structures. For example, the Social manages those with severe mental illness by institutionalizing and dehumanizing them— an act that is not seen as oppressive or unfair, but benevolent— something done for the greater good of society. The Theatre breaks through this facade by administering an artistic “cure”: one that forces the audience to “assume the apparent and exterior attitudes of the desired condition.”⁵¹ More specifically, this means exacting a very specific form of violence or “cruelty” upon the audience. Not a violence against the body, but against the mind and the soul: capturing

⁵⁰ Edwards, Lee. *Schizophrenic narrative*.

⁵¹ Artaud, Antonin. *Theatre and its Double*. Alma Books, 2018, pp. 80.

the “much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us.”⁵² To embody such nebulous and individualized concepts, the Theatre presents every idea in an egregious, excessive, unreal manner. While everything presented on the stage could never actually happen in the real world, each action is based in a concrete reality that one has already experienced or thought about, much like a dream is.⁵³ The images shown on the stage are simply rearrangements of images we have already seen and concepts we already know. Therefore, while the combinations of concepts might be unique and absurd, there is nothing *new* in them. This distinction is where the power of the Theatre lies.

In the same way that our dreams have an effect upon us and reality has an effect upon our dreams, so we believe that the images of thought can be identified with a dream which will be efficacious to the degree that it can be projected with the necessary violence. And the public will believe in the theater's dreams on condition that it takes them for true dreams and *not for a servile copy of reality*; on condition that they allow the public to liberate within itself the magical liberties of dreams which it can only recognize when they are *imprinted with terror and cruelty*.⁵⁴

In addition to readerly suspension, Kavan recreates the Theatre's principles through the implementation of disinterested violence. This type of violence is fundamentally theatrical—a movement which exists, but does not contain within it the quality of the real or the implication that its existence will produce an effect. Artaud writes, “The theater teaches precisely the *uselessness* of the action, which, once done, is not to be done, and the superior use of the state unused by the action and which, restored, produces a purification.”⁵⁵ Disinterested violence is

⁵² 79.

⁵³ “This is why all those who dream without regretting their dreams, without bringing back this feeling of atrocious nostalgia after diving down into the fertile unconscious, are swine. A dream is the truth. All dreams are true.” Antonin Artaud, “Who, in the heart...,” *Collected Works Vol. 1*, 92.

⁵⁴ Antonin Artaud, *Theatre and its Double*, 86, emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ 82, emphasis mine.

instrumental in creating the spectacle of the Theatre, inciting “the organism and, through it, the entire individuality, to take attitudes in harmony with the gesture.”⁵⁶ By the narrator acting ‘disinterested’ in the true consequences of the violence against the girl and refusing to engage in reactions typically indicative of witnessing violence (crying, shock, disbelief), the burden of emotion is pushed onto the reader. For, while these scenes and the girl’s dead body are not ‘real’ in terms of the story, they are very real within our own world. Have we not seen images of war and the consequent human casualties? Watched the news and been horrified by what we see and hear? Do we not know the fate of girls in sacked towns? By virtue of the reader’s alignment with the narrator as the teller of this story, his actions become ours. We experience every touch, word, and dream from the perspective of a commingled ‘I.’ An ‘I’ made up of the reader and their vessel: the narrator. Resultantly, the dreams and their violence are rendered inescapable. Even if the reader knows what they are reading is unreal, and are able to separate themselves from the violent reading experience, it is near impossible to not have some form of emotional reaction, even if it is just surprise at the narrator’s strange stoicism. These emotions are rooted in the lived experience, they are prompted by previous experiences or even socially constructed. But they are still real— forced to emerge by the violence of the Theatre.

Schizophrenic Narrative

Ice takes the ideas and principles of the Theatre and amplifies them tenfold, for the Theatre is limited in ways the book or “novel”⁵⁷ is not. The most glaring limitation is the issue of staging. Artaud’s plays often run into problems regarding feasibility; much of the violent,

⁵⁶ 81.

⁵⁷ *Ice* is commonly marketed as a novel, and Kavan as a novelist. The synopsis for the Penguin 50th anniversary paperback edition calls the text “a novel unlike any other.”

dreamlike imagery simply cannot be captured by props and live human actors. For example, a set of stage directions for Artaud's play *Spurt of Blood*⁵⁸ proceed as follows:

Silence. There is a noise as if an immense wheel were turning and moving the air. A hurricane separates them. At the same time, two Stars are seen colliding and from them fall a series of legs of living flesh with feet, hands, scalps, masks, colonnades, porticos, temples, alembics, falling more and more slowly, as if falling in a vacuum: then three scorpions one after another and finally a frog and a beetle which come to rest with desperate slowness, nauseating slowness.⁵⁹

This imagery is simply impossible to display on a stage as it is written (although many have tried), but it is not impossible to display on the page. As readers, we are used to suspending disbelief when consuming fiction and encountering scenes that could never take place in the 'real world.' The book, instead of offering you the image like a movie or play would, instead offers it to the reader and asks them to imagine the image in their mind. This involves the reader in the creation of the image, and whatever most horrifies them about it will be emphasized. In my case, the images of broken bones protruding through the girl's skin and her broken neck have haunted me the most. It is fairly easy to forget images created by others or ones projected at you on the screen, but it is much harder to forget those which we have participated in creating and visualizing. This is the art of schizophrenic narrative— eliding and “merging what was previously kept decorously disparate, distinct, divided”— specifically the realities we don't want to see but *need* to acknowledge.⁶⁰ It is the blurring of times, spatial distinctions, mental states. Objects can disappear and appear, settings can explode in a second— the narrative defined by utter dissolution of convention, completely out of our control. It is terrifying, unusual, and

⁵⁸ This play's title is also commonly translated as *Jet of Blood* and *The Spurt of Blood*.

⁵⁹ Artaud, *Collected works*, 62.

⁶⁰ Edwards, *Schizophrenic Narrative*, 25.

difficult, but it is necessarily cruel. But most importantly, it forces us to collude with the madman, with a figure that we have been taught to dread and disavow as an Other: a threat to our safety and social cohesion.

The defining feature of schizophrenic narrative is the schizo and the novel experiences he brings to the reader's attention. However, the suspension he ushers in is not limitless. After a few chapters, the reader slowly begins to adjust to the idea of the narrator switching between the book's reality and the reality of the dream— an adjustment that comes along with our recognition of him as a madman. This aspect of this narrative form, the mad narrator, is equally as important as the act of acknowledgement of cruelty. The madman's voice is one that is often relegated to what Foucault describes as an "archaeology of silence," writing: "The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence"— the madman's silence.⁶¹ By bringing the madman, this figure who is denied the right to his own voice and methods of understanding, into a position where he is able to narrate and vocalize his own reality, the reader is forced to listen, potentially for the first time, to the voice of the silenced. Of the undesirable, of the different, of those we believe to be intrinsically wrong. This act is key in fostering new forms of understanding. For, as we see in Chapter Seven, his experience is not much different than our own: a case study of life under often unacknowledged forms of oppression.

IV. The Right to Reality

As Antonin Artaud stated in *Theatre and Its Double*, the violence of the Theatre is "not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies... but the much

⁶¹ Foucault, "Preface," *Madness and Civilization*, x-xi.

more terrible and necessary cruelty *which things can exercise against us*.”⁶² Though he does not clarify exactly what “things” he was speaking about, in regards to *Ice*, I believe Kavan is using the technique to critique psychiatry and its cruel, dominating influence over those deemed undesirable because of their diagnosis. Cruelties which, now having infiltrated both moral and State Law, are widely and systematically wielded against both the madman and the public at large using methods we often don’t recognize as anything but benevolent and ‘for the greater good’ of society.

On this topic, Foucault writes: “psychology, as a means of curing, is henceforth organized around punishment. Before seeking to relieve, it inflicts suffering within the rigor of a moral necessity.”⁶³ A specifically silent form of suffering; the medicine meant to deliver this “cure” being the complete alienation of the patient in feelings of “guilt” about the ingrained qualities of their being and mode of existence.⁶⁴ This cure often follows a similar pattern: making the madman a patient, confining him to the clinic, isolating him from the social structures he was meant to be serving through faithful labor, and emphasizing the idea of ‘return’ to an idealized, Edenic mental state that brings the patient in touch with *true* reality. Until this fabled return is made, the madman is forcefully relegated into an essentially subaltern⁶⁵ class. That of the ‘undesirable’— a group that, while having many faces throughout history, has retained the madman as one of its most lasting, dangerous, and ubiquitous forms.

The undesirable is, at its most basic level, one who is perceived as dragging down society through their lack of adherence to moral or State Law. One who lags behind, either stuck in the past or in place, totally self-contained and self-separated from the reality of the human lived

⁶² Artaud, *Theatre and its Double*, 79, emphasis mine.

⁶³ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 182.

⁶⁴ 182-183.

⁶⁵ I am using “subaltern” according to the definition and examples provided in Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the subaltern speak?." *Imperialism*. Routledge, 2023. 171-219.

experience. They don't further society; and, in their most potent forms, even hinder it through their refusal to participate. This is a stereotype that has existed long before psychiatry; but, in its act of catering to the hierarchical Social and State machines, the practice has greatly influenced the stances of society, and, by proxy, we as individuals, have taken on the undesirability of mental disorders and madness in the modern age. Especially more severe conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, dissociative identity disorder, and psychopathy, whose scandal and easily sensationalized nature remain popular sources of fear and ire in contemporary media.⁶⁶ Michel Foucault writes, "Madness still occupies an extreme place, in that it is beyond appeal. Nothing ever restores it either to truth or to reason. It leads only to... death. Madness... is not vanity; the void that fills it is a "disease beyond my practice."⁶⁷ The psychiatrist's madness is extreme, dangerous, and unexplainable—a force to be controlled and minimized for fear that its presence will be a threat to the productivity and futurity of society. Psychiatry's establishment of madman (specifically the schizophrenic) as the ultimate enemy Other of society cannot be overestimated, for it is through "the definition and clinical management of this disorder that psychiatry claimed, and continues to claim, its authority to legislate in the name of science between normal and abnormal, sane and insane, reason and unreason."⁶⁸ In response to this steadfast claim to unquestionable authority over the human consciousness, the State and the Social machines have accepted the practice and built the hospitals, jails, laws, and social dynamics required to confine the madman like a leper. Structures that, in justifying their existence, have instilled within us a fear of the madman.

⁶⁶ Movies and television shows such as *Split* (2016), *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2011), *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), *Black Swan* (2010), and *Euphoria* (2019-2022) are all examples of media containing depictions of serious mental illness. The accuracy of each depiction and its participation in the stigmatization of mental illness varies widely.

⁶⁷ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 31. The quote he is using is from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, spoken by the physician when describing Lady Macbeth's state.

⁶⁸ Woods, Angela. *The sublime object of psychiatry: Schizophrenia in clinical and cultural theory*. International Perspectives in, 2011, 15.

These structures of oppression are those that are often ignored— so well integrated into the mechanisms and dialogues perpetuated by Social and State machines that they are viewed as necessary. Specifically, they are necessitated by fear. A fear not just of the madman’s existence, but of his potential: what he might do if he was allowed to go free. If *they* were allowed to run around everywhere and destroy what we love.⁶⁹ The Social and State machines view this possibility as producing one possible outcome: the madman wreaking havoc on what we’ve worked so hard to build, getting away without doing their share of labor. Whether it be democratic principles or ideas of general public cohesion, the madman and the schizo have been designed as the force to ruin it all, for “there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors”— demolishing the ideals the State has worked so hard to build and uphold.⁷⁰ Ideals such as justice, individuality, and free speech that are notably not allowed to the madman or schizo. I argue that these structures of thought and mismatched ideals are what Kavan is directly pushing back against in one of the most unusual moments in the text: Chapter Seven’s courtroom scene. While at first glance this scene appears to have no business being in the chapter, greatly interrupting the flow of the story and containing no real consequences; it is, in fact, what I believe to be the key to her criticisms of psychiatry and the oppressive social structures it wields against those viewed as undesirable.

The Trial

Chapter Seven opens with the narrator once again in a new, unnamed country, just barely having escaped the ice yet again. After wandering about the town for some time, he decides to return to the lodge he is staying at in order to pack up his things and restart his search for the girl,

⁶⁹ Sara Ahmed articulates the affective dynamics between fear and love and their role in creating and perpetuating systems of oppression in Ahmed, Sara. *The cultural politics of emotion*. Routledge, 2013.

⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 116.

stating: “After all, I had not escaped the past. My thoughts kept wandering back to the girl; incredible that I should have wished to forget her. Such a forgetting would have been monstrous, impossible. She was like a part of me, I could not live without her.”⁷¹ His desire and morale, even after being battered and thwarted, continues strong, the illusion of possibility still hanging in his mind. Back at the lodge, the narrator finds his jacket waiting for him, a red carnation in its buttonhole. He throws the jacket on, curious, and almost immediately finds that the police are at his door. They enter without knocking and arrest the narrator, refusing to give an explanation when he demands one. Instead, they silently march him to the town’s courthouse and sit him down in front of a readied judge and jury. Once he’s seated, it is announced that the narrator is a suspect in the case of a girl who had “vanished, supposed kidnapped, possibly murdered.”⁷² It is, of course, *the* girl. It appears the narrator is seemingly meant to defend himself, given that no attorney has been provided for him. The first line of questioning the narrator is subjected to centers around the nature of his relationship with the girl. “You were intimate with her?” “We were old friends.” There was laughter... “You expect us to believe that you changed your plans all at once, dropped everything you were doing, in order to follow *a friend* to a foreign country?” [...] I said: “That is the truth.”⁷³

This is the first time the narrator’s desire has been questioned within the story itself. Before this moment, every character of substance that the narrator has met thus far (the warden and the girl), has not meaningfully questioned his aims or the odd nature of his journey. No one else but the reader has believed him a madman, has recoiled at his reaction to violence. In a dearth of explanation or agreement with our feelings, we feel an urge to psychoanalyze. To ‘dig deeper’ and discover the meaning behind his strange attachment to the girl, as if we were solving

⁷¹ Kavan, *Ice*, 82.

⁷² 84.

⁷³ 84, emphasis mine.

a whodunit mystery. The label of madman is too general and nebulous to mean much, and does not act as an explanation—madness is almost always portrayed as having a root cause. Schizo identity is likewise too unsatisfying of a conclusion: he desires without reason, and will always do so. That is the essential quality of his being, and nothing more. In contrast, the reader wants the secrets, mystery, scandal, and mystique we typically associate with madmen. The tearing of hair and clothes, bloodied hands, wailing, hiding in the shadows, haunting displays of animalistic humanity. Instead of spectacle, the narrator gives us nothing but breadcrumbs, little hints here and there that pretend to allude to something more. This does not mean that the hide-and-seek game of diagnosis that the narrator has been leading us on is not pleasurable. We still enjoy the intrigue and want to ‘figure it all out.’⁷⁴ In this moment, the court appears to be the answer, the mechanism that will fulfill our desire for knowledge; however, when we think we are finally about to get what we want, we are subverted by the narrative once again.

I was asked: “What happened when you met your friend?” “We did not meet.” Subdued excitement broke out, an official voice had to order silence. The next voice sounded like an actor’s, trained in elocution. “I wish to state that the witness is a psychopath, probably schizoid, and therefore not to be believed.” Someone interjected: “Produce a psychiatrist’s confirmation.” The theatrical voice continued: “I repeat, *with all possible emphasis*, that this man is known to be a psychopath and totally unreliable. We are investigating an atrocious crime against an *innocent pure young girl*: I ask you to note his unnatural callousness, his indifferent expression. What cynicism to come here with that flower in his buttonhole! How arrogantly he displays his *utter contempt* for the sanctity of family life, for all decent feeling! His attitude is not only abnormal, but depraved,

⁷⁴ One example of this readerly “temptation” occurs on page 67: “My ideas were confused. In a peculiar way, the unreality of the outer world appeared to be an extension of my own disturbed state of mind.”

infamous, a *deseccration* of all we hold sacred...” Somewhere up high in the room, where I could not see it, a bell rang. A superior, unimplicated voice stated: “A psychopath is not an acceptable witness.”⁷⁵

Instead of being given the necessary pieces to come to our own conclusion and the pleasure of solving the ‘mystery,’ we are instead delivered an answer in an incredibly straightforward, sterile manner. The narrator is unreliable, a psychopath, and depraved. That’s it. No secrets, no fun, no secret childhood trauma, and definitely no satisfaction. The court adjourns almost immediately after this declaration, steadfastly refusing to allow the narrator to defend himself. Instead, the police swiftly deliver him to a prison cell where he ends up spending the night. His guilt is apparently unquestionable.

Psychiatry and the Art of Diagnosis

The narrator’s trial reflects the ways in which those deemed mentally ‘undesirable’ are treated: the Social and State machines taking the role of judge, jury, police, psychiatrist, and executioner. Condemnation and guilt, in both the narrator’s case and for the undesirable at large, is less a question and more of an absolute certainty. Watching these typically covert systems unfurl and play out in prose, the conclusion becomes simple: the Social machine will crush and oppress anyone who is determined to not be “docile” or “well-adjusted” enough.⁷⁶ The narrator, a schizo, is operating outside the Social’s bounds by refusing to inhibit his desire; and as a result, the machine decides it must limit him, fearing its subversion— the desiring-machines he’s harboring “capable of calling into question the established order of a society.”⁷⁷ It is a cruel and unfair condemnation, but a very realistic one. For, though the madman is not *literally* put on trial

⁷⁵ 85-86, emphasis mine.

⁷⁶ Kavan, “The Case of Bill Williams,” 97.

⁷⁷ Seem, Mark. “Introduction.” *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Penguin, 2009, XXIII.

by the psychiatrist and Social in our reality, his daily existence is one defined by constant justification, attempting to fend off the violence of the assumed guilt he has been saddled with.

The diagnosis is a key component of psychiatry, serving as the foundation and blueprint for the cure the practitioner aims to administer. It is also a powerful identity-making tool that has transformed madness from a way of being to a concrete identity—delineating what was once beyond imagination and forcefully reducing the madman's reality into mere fantasy. It is a process not unlike a trial, with the practitioner cataloging and comparing behaviors, attempting to prove what they suspect to be the issue by lining up the 'evidence.' In the narrator's case, however, the trial is not insular. Its influence branches out and envelops the reader in the Theatre of Cruelty once again. Only this time it does so by placing them in the role of both judge and defendant simultaneously, suspending them between opposing ideological positions.

In the scene, the reader is simply offered the court's opinion without the opportunity to collude with the decision or participate in the ruling. The claim that the narrator is "schizoid" and a "psychopath" is presented not unlike how a psychiatric diagnosis would be: sterile and unflinching, meant to inform the patient about themselves. This method of delivering information is what places the reader in the position of judge: asked by the text to collude with the court's assumption of guilt. After all, we have already labeled him mad, so why should this extra step, this concrete diagnosis, be any different? However, it is the idea of *intrinsic* guilt and the court's refusal to allow the narrator to defend himself that causes the reader to hesitate. For, during the questioning, the narrator is actually telling the truth—or his perception of the truth—the whole time. The reader knows he is, for we have been privy to his inner dialogue. We know that the narrator didn't actually kill the girl, he just dreamed about it, and we know she is still currently alive and in the warden's possession. Shortly after the dream sequences end in Chapter

Five, the narrator returns to the High House and interacts with the girl again: the pair even speak briefly in her room before the warden arrives in order to take her and flee the country to escape the approaching ice.⁷⁸ And yet the court— this apparition with no real claim to a concrete authority over the narrator— insists he is completely and totally unreliable. That it is automatically right, not because it has been following him this whole time and is in touch with his thoughts, but by virtue of it being an authoritative structure bestowed with the powers of an invisible State. And, of course, because he is mad and its participants are not. But to the reader, it has become expected that the narrator would imagine insane or violent things— even the narrator *himself* expects to imagine violent things. He does not think twice about wearing the carnation,⁷⁹ for he is beholden to no Sign nor Signifier. He sees a simple flower, not a desecrating symbol. But he is found guilty for it yet again. The suspension between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ embodied in this fundamentally paradoxical trial brings the reader face-to-face with fairly difficult questions that it does not provide answers for: can you try someone and find them guilty for their thoughts, even if they don’t act on them? Can a person be intrinsically guilty by virtue of a prescribed identity? The Social and State machines, in following the structures set in place by psychiatry, seem to think so. These diagnoses are final and all-encompassing: it is not as if the psychopath or schizophrenic could ever change or deviate from the flows that have been transcribed upon their being— it is who they are and always will be. But then, do we believe the madman when he speaks in his own voice, as the narrator does? Psychiatry, embodied in the deaf, disinterested

⁷⁸ “She knew me at once, said: “What are you doing here?” I said: “You’re in danger; I’ve come to take you away.” “Why should I go with you?” She sounded astonished. “There’s no difference—” We both heard a sound at the same moment; footsteps were starting to mount the stairs. I stepped back, froze... I was pretty safe; unless she gave me away. The [warden’s] ungentle hands gripped her. “Put on your outdoor things quickly. We’re leaving at once.”” Kavan, *Ice*, 72.

⁷⁹ The carnation has been used to symbolize a number of different movements, identities, and ideas throughout history, further contributing to both the flower’s and the organization’s ambiguity in the text. For example, carnations were adopted as a queer symbol after Oscar Wilde popularized them in 1892 and the Catholic Church has made the flower a symbol of the Virgin Mary’s sacrifices.

violence of the court, does not: claiming that even if he hasn't *technically* killed the girl yet it doesn't matter, because he desires to see her harmed, and the identity it has bestowed upon him intrinsically craves disorder. It is a preemptive measure, the best way to prevent *them* from interfering with *us*. To prevent the breakdown of society the madman hearkens.

However, even by just acknowledging the paradoxes in the court's treatment of the narrator and pausing in passing judgment, the reader becomes similarly guilty. After all, we are colluding with a madman rather than with our *own kind*, cosigning his "utter contempt for the sanctity of family life, for all decent feeling."⁸⁰ It is a difficult position to be in, and only further complicates the reader's relationship to the narrator by introducing strained feelings of guilt. We feel sorry for him for being placed into this unfair trial, but we also find some guilty satisfaction in the confirmation of our doubts. We are confronted with the fact that we desired the diagnosis for our own pleasure, but did so without considering the reality of diagnosis and what it means when one is subjected to it. Again, guilt bubbles forth. Like in the dream sequences, this moment of suspension and conflict creates an opportune moment for the Theatre of Cruelty to strike. For, what we have just read and what we have just experienced is the difficult reality of the madman's existence: one subjected to disinterested violence, "alienated in guilt."⁸¹

I do not claim that Kavan was completely anti-psychiatry nor that psychiatry has no place in the treatment of the mentally ill. Instead, according to the philosophy laid out in Kavan's "The Case of Bill Williams," it approaches the patient from the wrong perspective. From a perspective of isolation, shame, and guilt—its cure administered with the aim of returning the patient to an idyllic, past state where they were 'pure.' But what if there is no past self to return to, if "reality [has] always been something of an unknown quantity," as it is with the narrator?⁸² Do we force a

⁸⁰ Kavan, *Ice*, 85.

⁸¹ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 183.

⁸² Kavan, *Ice*, 4.

haphazard cure upon them against their will? Kavan's answer to this is a simple *no*. Cure-based treatments do not act in the best interests of the patient themselves, but strive to fulfill the goals of the Social and the State machines: desiring the futurity and order that the schizo thwarts. In the case of the narrator, he does not want to be cured, and the ones that the court issues him, imprisonment and shame, do not work. If he feels no guilt about existing, then why attempt to instill him with it? Force him out of his allegiance with desire's flows and cause him to spiral into the realm of equally unproductive neurosis? Force him to recognize the Social's arbitrary Signifiers? And, worst of all, try and accomplish all this on the brink of the machines' total destruction? Simply put, it is a control mechanism: "Society has designed the universe of the machine [...] The units of Society are the parts of the machine, patented, docile; the well-adjusted. Bill Williams struggles for the universe of man, against the universe of the machine."⁸³ The court, in embodying the real-world ideals of the State and Social machines behind a facade of absurdity and excess, shines a light on a difficult reality once again. A reality that we have been upholding and propagating the oppression of the Other in the name of normalcy and order. But it is not a true form of order. Instead, it is one that is false, cruel, and disinterested: engineered by the State and Social machines as a byproduct of capitalistic urges; not to aid the individual or ensure peace, but to guarantee the futurity and reproduction of both machines. Again, the Theatre has brought the reader into contact with bare reality through the implementation of absurd, dreamlike imagery, forcing them to confront the cruelty that "things can exercise against us."⁸⁴

⁸³ Kavan, "The Case of Bill Williams," 97.

⁸⁴ Artaud, Antonin. *Theatre and its Double*, 79.

V. A Dream Figure, Inaccessible and Unreal

The narrator is not the only character negatively affected by psychiatry and the hierarchical structures it upholds, nor the only one whose experiences initiate the Theatre of Cruelty for the reader. The girl's personhood is similarly subjected to the disinterested violence of psychoanalytical reduction and disallowed from speaking in her own voice. However, unlike the narrator, whose oppression is sudden and contained, the violence done against the girl takes shape in both obvious and subversive forms that tend to not produce immediate impacts on either the narrator's desire or narrative movement. This lack of consequence is due to the narrator being the originator of the girl's victimization; a role manifested through his emphasis on and repetition of specific imagery, associations, and concepts that enhance the idea that the girl has a predestined, unavoidable fate of victimhood. Though these concepts often reveal themselves as paradoxical with only the slightest analytical probing, they are still potent enough to greatly limit the girl's characterization and self-expression within the text. Resultantly, she is rendered less of a character with her own personality, preferences, and goals and more of a shadow— a concept specifically engineered to allow the narrator complete freedom in his desire to possess her and use her to establish a sense of reality through her.

The main concept utilized by the narrator to oppress the girl's presentation of self and identity is her supposed childhood trauma caused by a cruel and domineering mother. Mentions of the girl's mother and the victim mindset the abuse has placed her into are scattered all throughout the text, typically either mentioned in an offhand manner by the narrator or appearing in descriptions of the girl's behavior, especially when she is upset. The emphasis on the family, specifically the parent-child dynamic, is not a concept unfamiliar to psychoanalysis. In fact, the family is almost its founding myth, its key principle. Even though many contemporary

practitioners may scoff at the idea of the Oedipus complex, the phallus, or castration as described by Freud, Lacan, and their followers, it is not as if these ideas and the socially-prescribed family structures they represent have completely died and been replaced. In searching for a diagnosis and cure, the root of the disorder is still routinely traced into the patient's mythical past, into the childhood, for signs of their future disposition. Deleuze and Guattari describe this urge as an aspect of oedipalization, writing "Oedipus is an application, and the family a delegated agent."⁸⁵ In this case, the girl's mother prompts ideas of a warped Oedipus Complex or the "refrigerator mother" theory popularized in the 1950's— the climate of fear created by her cold, bullying demeanor producing the girl as a passive "victim."⁸⁶ However, these lines of reasoning are not ones that my analysis will adhere to. For, dialogues that foreground the mother's role in the girl's characterization, even placing her before the girl herself, are incredibly reductionist and actually only encourage further oppression of the girl's self-autonomy by the warden and narrator. I do not claim that serious mental disorders do not display symptoms in early childhood, but that, like with the narrator, Kavan is pushing back against reductive narratives and structures that cause those deemed ill or mad to lose their voices to the Social and State machines. In short, falling into the traps set by psychoanalytic thought and prioritizing the girl's supposed childhood trauma over her current character presentation only further enhances the narrator's claim to authority over her and leads to her violent oppression. A pattern that continues until the very last few pages of the text, where the model of reduction and oppression is finally broken and reshaped by the threat of certain annihilation and the introduction of true, meaningful human contact— an act which simultaneously serves as both the pinnacle of the Theatre of Cruelty.

⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 122.

⁸⁶ Kavan, *Ice*, 54.

The Imperialism of the Past

The girl's mother is introduced by the narrator as an expository tool meant to explain the reasons behind the girl's strange disposition and self-presentation. She appears early on in the text, mentioned in the very first description the reader gets of the girl: "She was over-sensitive, highly strung, afraid of people and life; her personality had been damaged by a sadistic mother who kept her in a permanent state of frightened subjection."⁸⁷ Immediately after stating this, he attempts to back up this claim of total insight into the girl's personhood by describing their shared past together, giving examples of her shyness and explaining how he had to "win her trust" by restraining his romantic feelings for her, for fear of scaring her away.⁸⁸ However, there is no mention of the girl herself speaking about the mother—the reader is instead expected to take the narrator's word and authority as truth—a trend that will continue throughout the entirety of the text.

This description precedes the girl's first actual appearance within the story; meaning that, instead of the reader being given the opportunity to meet the girl and draw their own conclusions about her personality, the narrator has instead taken a similar route as the court and explained her for us, dissolving any potential mystery or complexity involving her past. In fact, the addition of the mother as an all-encompassing explanatory tool for any aspect of the girl's character reduces the girl into a static, one-note, almost gimmicky character—every decision or word underscored by the mother's presence. The narrator makes no assumptions of growth or change within her character, but instead assumes that her trauma keeps her in a state of "childish" innocence and fear, unable to mentally progress into adulthood. This association with childhood and childlike behavior is repeated numerous times throughout the text, often in moments where the girl

⁸⁷ 6.

⁸⁸ 6.

experiences great stress. For example, during the dragon dream, she is described using the following language: “Then a sense of fatality overcame her; she experienced a regression, became a submissive, terrorized child, cowed by persistent ill-treatment.”⁸⁹ She cannot just experience simple, straightforward fear at the threat of being thrown off the ledge to the dragon and being eaten— an understandable fear— but her mother has to be present in her reaction. She cannot cower like any child might, but she must cower like an abused child. These associations and reductions the narrator makes may not seem harmful to the reader at first. We are used to lines of thought such as these, where a fatal flaw in one’s childhood has lasting repercussions throughout the rest of their life, affecting the ways they react to stimuli. However, the fact is that the narrator, in adopting common threads of psychoanalytic theory such as the Family, is depriving the girl of her own will and voice. Children cannot make complex decisions for themselves, as they are not able to fully understand and grasp reality in the ways an adult can; they require the guidance and protection of a guardian. By embracing this language and utilizing it to describe the girl, the narrator is enforcing his will upon the story, creating the girl as a person unable to understand the world, who needs a keeper to watch over her. A role that then defaults to the narrator, enabling him to justify reinserting himself into her life even when she tells him to leave her alone. A reaction that is framed as not deriving from her will, but is instead a childish response, a consequence of her not knowing any better.

Additionally, the narrator claims that the girl’s trauma has resulted in her viewing herself as a “foredoomed victim,”⁹⁰ stating: “victimization in childhood had made her accept the fate of a victim, and whatever I did or did not do this fate would ultimately achieve itself.”⁹¹ This language simultaneously deprives the girl of both a present and future— the past now the only

⁸⁹ 56.

⁹⁰ 54.

⁹¹ 160.

aspect of her life that really matters in regards to her personhood. However, the girl herself does not exactly adhere to these boundaries placed around her character. Throughout their multiple encounters, the girl often reacts to the narrator's presence with hostility— pushing back against the caretaker-esque role he is attempting to fill and typically only “regressing” when she is threatened with physical violence. For example, in Chapter Ten, the narrator has once again traveled to an unnamed town on the brink of destruction to rescue the girl. When she refuses to leave, the narrator resorts to forcefully removing her from her home, slinging her over his shoulder, and carrying her onto an embarking ship with him. Once on the ship, she is extremely hostile to everything the narrator says and does, leading him to lose his temper and physically harm her for the first time.

I replied that I was trying to save her. Anger showed in her eyes. “That’s what you say. I was fool enough to believe you the first time.” In spite of all attempts to please her, she persisted in treating me as a treacherous enemy. [...] Now her protracted antagonism had its effect... She struggled... tried to hit me, to struggle up; but I forced her under... She cried out. “I wish I could kill you!” began to sob and struggle hysterically. I slapped the side of her face.⁹²

This fight and the narrator's decision to use bodily violence brings about the most pronounced and prolonged form of regression the girl experiences in the entire text. She refuses to eat, which causes her to grow emaciated and stumble weakly about the ship, her hair losing its sheen and bones protruding from her frame. This reaction, though subject to the same language as her other regressions— with the narrator referring to her face as childlike— is not the product of a past traumatic experience with her mother, nor is it passive. This reaction is current, directed, and extremely hostile. And yet, the narrator does not listen nor take true stock of her hostility— her

⁹² 129.

actions are still the immature, petty grievances of an unwise child. An association that has resulted in the narrator feeling comfortable in treating her as an *actual* child: prohibiting her from making her own decisions, seeing himself as looking out for her best interests in ways she can't comprehend. It is a hierarchical relationship, one unfairly weighted in favor of the narrator. Additionally, its dynamics, though implemented in service of his desire to possess the girl and root himself into reality through her, is actually deeply counterproductive. For, when exercising this authoritarian will against the girl, it is impossible to establish the reality he wants through her: the reality of true contact between beings.

It is hard to tell exactly what form of reality the narrator is seeking outside the general reality of the world's situation (destruction), as the reader only sees what realities he does not want: the ones he sees as wrong. In the aforementioned situation on the ship, the narrator became angry and frustrated when the girl chose to withdraw from the world, stating: "I no longer felt any desire, gave up talking to her, adopted the warden's silences as my own."⁹³ These feelings then carry over into the new town where they land and begin to reside, where the townspeople live in purposeful ignorance of the ice and instead choose to throw lavish parties and parades that fill the streets with music and dance. The girl adores this change in atmosphere, and adapts immediately: "She seemed different. No longer shy, she made friends with people I did not know, drew confidence from their approval, became independent and gay."⁹⁴ But again, this is not the reality that the narrator desires. He sees it as cheap and fake, only delaying the inevitable: "I could not remain isolated from the rest of the world. I... had to take an active part in whatever was going on."⁹⁵ This frustration leads him to become antagonistic towards her once again, and after a few days, he gets fed up and abandons her, deciding to rejoin the "theater of military

⁹³ 129.

⁹⁴ 134.

⁹⁵ 134.

operations,” which he accomplishes by joining a militia.⁹⁶ When she is allowed to act for herself, outside of her trauma or free from its associations, the girl becomes an incredibly different person. On the boat she is vindictive and hostile, and in the town she expresses herself by decorating her hair with violets and participating in parades. These are small glimpses, but they are glimpses into who she may actually be outside of her mother, outside of her trauma.

Though the reader does not experience the girl’s character outside of what the narrator offers us, I am comfortable in making the claim that trauma and fear are not the only defining aspects of her character. It is possible that the information he gives the reader is completely true, but there is no way for the reader to truly know. However, these aspects of characterization are also what make her most manageable for the furthering of the narrator’s desire, taking the focus off of his abuses by explaining fear as her “natural climate” and victimhood as her anticipated fate.⁹⁷ It also deprives her of her own voice, reducing her into the position of “child,” unable to make decisions for herself. Though these methods of oppression are more subtle, their use of psychoanalytical imagery and practices make clear the critiques they were meant to forward. By focusing on the girl’s past, it deprives her of a meaningful present and future—ones determined by her own decisions and voice, separate from her mother’s influence; a characterization pitfall I believe would have also affected the narrator had he not been a schizo, and had been given a past.

VI. Breakdown and Breakthrough

The reader, in witnessing the narrator’s numerous failed attempts to establish a connection to reality through the girl, has been engaged in a prolonged form of the Theatre of

⁹⁶ 135.

⁹⁷ “Fear was the climate she lived in; if she had ever known kindness it would have been different,” 54.

Cruelty. It is one that does not make itself apparent until the last chapter of the book, Chapter Fifteen, when the entire world is on the brink of total annihilation. Throughout the text, the narrator and the girl have been in close proximity with the idea of approaching death, both due to the inescapable nature of the disaster and the girl's numerous dream-deaths. However, Chapter Fifteen brings with it a new form of engagement with death. In his search for the girl, the narrator has finally overextended himself. Though he has traveled to towns on the brink of being destroyed multiple times before, each time he did so he also had a viable method of escape, whether it be by helicopter, car, or ship. This time, however, the blizzard is too severe, the ocean completely frozen over, and none of his contacts know where he is, if they are even still alive. The narrator knows this, and for the first time he is forced to confront the present reality of unavoidable death.

The crazily dancing snowflakes represented the whole of life. [...] In the delirium of the dance, it was impossible to distinguish between the violent and the victims. Anyway, distinctions no longer mattered in a dance of death, where all the dancers spun on the edge of nothing. I had grown used to the feeling that I was going toward execution. It was something in the distance... Now it suddenly sprang at me... no longer an idea, *but a reality*, just about to happen. The past had vanished and become nothing; the future was the inconceivable nothingness of annihilation. All that was left was the ceaselessly shrinking fragment of time called "now."⁹⁸

This act of acknowledgement finally forces the narrator to address the nature of his desire. He still desires, of course, but the immediacy of death has modified the desiring-machine. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari write: "Desiring-machines... continually break down as they run, and in fact run only when they are not functioning properly: the product is always an

⁹⁸ 177, emphasis mine.

offshoot of production... and at the same time the parts of the machine are the fuel that makes it run.”⁹⁹ Before witnessing the snowflakes and having his revelation about death, the narrator had once again utilized verbal abuse and physical violence against the girl to try and get her to leave her home and come with him. Once again, it didn’t work; the girl regressed and became mute, and the narrator only found himself in a state of extreme distress, no closer to his goal. The threat of death forces the narrator to acknowledge the shortcomings of these methods of control— he knows there is no way to ‘save’ her anymore. In this same moment, the desiring-machine, under the pressure of death, breaks and creates a new channel through which desire can flow: one that can circumvent failure.

When the narrator goes inside to see the girl again, the pair are on strangely equal footing; the narrator is unable to rationalize or utilize the structures of oppression and silence he has been weaponizing against the girl up until this point. By victimizing her, he is simultaneously victimizing himself, perpetuating the “curse” of his repetitive, cyclical journey.¹⁰⁰ The boundaries between them are blurred— each already-dead and desperate. This lack of “distinction” finally prompts the first conversation between the pair as equals, the narrator finally receptive to the girl’s words. In short, a channel of *contact* has been opened and the girl speaks:

“I don’t know why you’re always so horrible to me... I only know I’ve always waited... wondered if you’d come back. You never sent any message... but I always waited for you... stayed here when the others left...” She looked like a desperate child, sobbing out the truth. But what she said was so incredible that I said again: “It’s not possible— it can’t be true.” Face convulsed, she gasped in a voice choked by tears: “Haven’t you had enough yet? Can’t you *ever* stop bullying me?”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Kavan, *Ice*, 112.

¹⁰¹ 179, emphasis and ellipses original.

The narrator is taken aback, the girl having presented a “view” of himself he “much preferred not to see.”¹⁰² But he does not ignore her as before, nor does he become combative and push back against her words. Instead, he solemnly accepts the picture of his personality she has painted: becoming “ashamed” and wishing he could “somehow obliterate past words and actions.”¹⁰³ He looks over her: her hair, her skin, the soft spot where her pulse can be seen through the skin: all aspects of the girl that once excited his desire. But he feels no urge this time: he touches her skin but then lets his hand fall, solemnly promising her that he won’t “bully her any more.”¹⁰⁴ With these words, an aura of peace falls over the scene. They do not speak, but there is kissing, smiling. He holds her hand and she does not pull away. The narrator has finally recognized the reality of the girl, therefore also recognizing the reality of their relationship: the dynamics of oppression underlying all his actions. The realities that the reader can see, that the girl can see, but that the narrator— caught up in the structures of psychoanalytic and social repression, both of his body and mind— could not.

But now those structures are gone. The State and Social machines that upheld them obliterated, their officials, police, and courts buried under the ice: “Human life was over... the scientists wiped out by their own disaster.”¹⁰⁵ All that is left that contains any narrative importance is the girl and narrator, dead together in the car. Not afraid, but *at peace*: “I looked into her face, it was smiling, untroubled; I could see no fear, no sadness there now. She smiled and pressed close, content with me in our home.”¹⁰⁶ The dreams are gone, he has no need for them anymore; for the dream is first and foremost an exercise of desire, and he has achieved

¹⁰² 178.

¹⁰³ 179.

¹⁰⁴ 179.

¹⁰⁵ 181.

¹⁰⁶ 182.

what he wanted. The reality of human contact; or, as Artaud describes it: the “innocence of facts.”¹⁰⁷ Where he is not madman or Other, but human.

The absurd nature of the narrator’s ‘awakening’ through his acknowledgement of death and the sudden breaking of the story’s narrative patterns first enhances then disperses the suspension the reader has been engaged in throughout the entirety of the text— subverting the patterns of disinterested violence wielded against the girl and marking the definitive end of the dream-sequences. Here, in these last moments of the story, Kavan fully unveils the Theatre and urges the reader to embrace the potentiality of the schizophrenic.

That Fragment of Time Called “Now”

The girl and the narrator are able to have their first moments of true empathetic contact when everything has been destroyed— when the only thing connecting them is their raw humanity— the dual act of fearing and accepting death. Deleuze and Guattari describe this “mood of serene, pious, rare fatalism”¹⁰⁸ as an “overwhelming experience”¹⁰⁹ where the desiring-machine, having attained its ‘goal,’ creates a new machine. The “celibate machine” that gives “birth to a new humanity or a glorious organism.”¹¹⁰ The schizo spreads himself outward, devoid of ego; at the center “the desiring-machine, the celibate machine of the Eternal Return,” that brings him to “[consume] all of universal history in one fell swoop.”¹¹¹ He is all of humanity: a clean, celibate slate upon which all of human understanding can be placed— one defined by the universal fear of death and the perpetual human experience of always-already deadness. This

¹⁰⁷ “It seems to me that this mental “erosion,” these internal thefts, this “destruction” of the thought “in its substance” which afflict your mind are a result of the excessive freedom you allow it. It is the absolute that unhinges it. To be taut, the mind needs a boundary and it needs to come up against the blessed opacity of experience. The only cure for madness is *the innocence of facts*.” Excerpt from a March 25, 1924 letter from Jacques Riviere to Antonin Artaud.

¹⁰⁸ Artaud, “Letter to the Clairvoyante,” *Collected Works Vol. 1*, 94.

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 19.

¹¹⁰ 17.

¹¹¹ 21.

is the potential of the schizo when he is freed from the structures that wish to manage him and thwart his desire, and why his potential freedom is viewed as such a radical force. He embraces the potential of a new humanity— a celibate machine— a human multiplicity defined not by illness or borders or class, but by a “sense of the profound unity of things.”¹¹²

As in other instances of the Theatre, the reader is included in this profound experience. In acknowledging his abuse of the girl, the narrator has associated himself with the reality of the story, lost the dreams that were meant to further his desire, and has become simply human: unified with the girl and with all of humanity in death. This break simultaneously shatters the overarching suspension that the reader has been engaged in and fully lays bare the realities underlying the entirety of the text. The only time that the girl and the narrator are able to truly speak to each other and establish contact between themselves is when everything has melted away: the countries, the militias, the scientists who fashioned the thermonuclear weapons and the heads of state that launched them. Even more simple things such as ideas of productivity and labor have been left behind under the ice alongside the corporate structures that enforce them. And with them, the structures of oppression that had been influencing the pair, driving them both from each other and from themselves— oppressing and reducing them to mere objects. I believe that, through *Ice*, Kavan is arguing that the “tonic epidemic of madness” that must “blast all the machinery into smithereens” is *contact*; raw, human connection without the pretenses, hatred, and forceful reduction embodied by capitalistic State and Social machines— particularly the psychiatric machines that give their oppression reason and necessity. For, true contact cannot be made, and therefore true change cannot be made, when the urge to uphold hierarchy and division hangs over the relationship; something that the reader witnesses between the narrator and the girl. However, these changes can only come about when humanity becomes aware of our shared

¹¹² Artaud, Antonin. *Heliogabalus: Or, The Crowned Anarchist*. SCB Distributors, 2020, 41.

fatality, and the great unified organism of which we are all a part. Like the ice that buries the entire human race equally regardless of status, wealth, or accomplishment, we need radical unity, radical empathy that cannot be established without the dissolution of harmful Social and State structures.

This is not to say schizophrenics and psychopaths will fix society, or that mental illness is not often detrimental for the sufferer. Instead, it means that every aspect of the Social and State machines must be met with their antithesis. The antithesis of societal order is madness, which the reader experiences directly through the narrator during his journey. But the antithesis of the social order is also empathy, for its basic instinct is violence and division. The State trains soldiers, inspires war, creates nuclear weapons, erects borders; the Social provides it with bodies and affective force. Kavan prompts the reader to consider a new kind of unity through empathy—a radical force that reveals the flesh of the Other and opens the door to the only true reality a single individual could hope to grasp: the reality in others. It is a revelation that, without the aid of the Theatre, the reader would likely never be able to experience without coming close to death. *Ice* brings its reader into contact with the absurdity of the schizo, the violence of the social machine, and the totality of death; and, “in performance, cleanses the performer and spectator alike in its collective experience.”¹¹³ It is a powerful conclusion, and one that can only be reached without the desire to oppress both author and text under the weight of psychoanalytical and hierarchical thought.

¹¹³ Bermel, Albert. *Artaud's theatre of cruelty*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, 11.

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