

INTRODUCTION

Rarely has fiction resonated so vividly to the intellectual concerns of the day without self-conscious sociological flourishes as that produced in the United States in recent years. This fiction reveals a transformative power which enables it to convert intellectual ideas into literary structures and finally into profound human experience even in the works of the so called Fabulists. This experience seems to be predicated on the same insights which inform books like William Whyte's The Organization Man, Vance Packard's The Hidden Persuaders, Michel Foucault's Madness and Civilization and Discipline and Punish, Hoderick's Equality and Violence, R.D. Laing's The Divided Self, Erich Fromm's The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness and Escape to Freedom, Christopher Lasch's Narcissism and Culture, Rollo May's Power and Innocence, Hannah Arendt's On Violence, Alvin Toffler's Future Shock and Third Wave, Erik Erikson's Identity: Youth and Crisis.

There are also other features which give this fiction a certain global relevance. These works represent the social ferment of the sixties and seventies not as the result of an historical accident but as a mode of intellectual and sensuous reality founded on a creative encounter with contemporary American culture. The most basic question this

study seeks to determine is, what happens to the structures of madness and violence as the fictional form evolves from a realistic and symbolic to the fabulist mode?

We begin by rejecting the hypothesis that recent American fiction is a deranged response to a deranged world. There are extreme situations which inevitably lead from realism and naturalism to abstraction because the writer has to evolve a suitable form to contain his sense of disorientation. The tendency towards abstraction also reveals that violence and madness are made problematic through a comic-cruel duality inscribed in the formal structure.

Just as there is a movement in pre-war fiction from contemporary history to myth, in post-war fiction one moves from contemporary social realism to questions of the fictionality of fiction. Unlike myths fabulation does not help contain violence. On the contrary, violence and madness get not only highlighted but ramified. Fabulation enables the writer to present violence and madness in a heightened form. The treatment of these themes is relatively direct in the works of the realists and gets more and more complex as we move along the continuum from the realists to the symbolists and Jewish humanists till finally, in the works of the fabulists it is extremely varied, disorienting and exhilarating - specially in Pynchon.

Fabulation shares many traits with surrealism and the fabulist form does not contain chaos. "Let others bring order to chaos", says Vonnegut, "I would bring chaos to order instead... we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos..."¹ Fabulation provides a useful matrix for the extension of the meaning of madness and violence. It enables the writer to transcend the limitations imposed on these categories by convention so that they can be made more horrifying.

Unlike the mythical structures which contain violence and madness by assimilating them to myth, in fabulation there is no such assimilation as their area of signification gets connotatively underdetermined. Whereas myths tidy up the problem, fabulation exacerbates it, specially that brand of fabulation in Hawkes and Pynchon where the surreal exaggeration results in comic cruelty.

The role of fiction has changed from the purely aesthetic one as in Joyce to a diagnostic one and that is why there is so much utopianism of one kind on the other, so much contemporary history also even in Hawkes who is otherwise such a lyrical writer. Fabulation questions the very validity of contemporary civilization.

The work which anticipates recent American fiction and keeps one foot in mythopoeic forms is Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner employs the old - Biblical, Greek, and Shakesperian

structures - but also incorporates modern forms like inter-subjectivity. Fabulation creates a world that we might inhabit in future and uses icons of pop culture and utopia. Its rhetoric, therefore, has to move towards the transverbal from the purely verbal. The fabulist fashions a rhetoric which, to borrow a formula from Todorov, has two essential levels of verisimilitude; one is verisimilitude as discursive law and, verisimilitude as mask, or "a system of rhetorical methods tending to present these laws as so many submissions to the referent".² The artistic vision of the fabulist functions as prophesy. Kermode³ claims that American fabulists are expected to provide a literary structure that would explain the structure of today's society, thereby functioning as prophesy. Prophesy can also be fulfilled retrospectively as demonstrated by Kermode in Genesis of Secrecy.⁴ Fabulation is an attempt to help us adapt to the space age future. It seeks to shock us before the future can.

The extreme cruelty done to characters in mythical stories are counterparts to what man apprehends as natural phenomena. In fabulation extreme cruelty has no rational structure behind it. It is meaningless in the semantic sense and is in keeping with other arts like aleatory music. "Fabulation" in a way is a misnomer because it is a structure which merely mimes the structure of a fable which has a moral truth. But the frame of the fable is employed not to rationalize

violence but to release it. It is employed to destroy order and meaning.

A parallel shift from realism to abstraction is detected both in Pre II World War and post war fictions. These shifts are viewed against the intellectual background which includes seminal works on violence and madness produced in recent times by scholars like Erich Fromm and Michel Foucault. The frequency of violence as an actual physical act decreases and violence gets internalized in Faulkner. This change is paralleled in post II World War fiction where violence gets assimilated to imagery in the works of Malamud in particular. In semi-fabulation violence becomes a collective activity. The model is Germany where the whole nation is involved in mass violence and madness. This violence is transferred to present America.

In semi-fabulist fiction the individual is up against the violence inherent in the culture and he struggles to set himself free from this. In fabulation the struggle is given up and the individual becomes a cypher as entropy sets in. Here madness and violence are the most easily recognizable cultural codes alongwith sex. Also in the works of Heller, Hawkes and Pynchon the comedy seems to be fraught with a sense of cruelty in the Artaudian sense.

To use Northrop Frye's⁵ analysis, realism can be considered low mimetic till we move to the ironic mythical plane but

fabulation replaces the mythical. Irony is possible in Semi-fabulation because some norms are still present. In fabulation the ironic perspective shifts from character to rhetoric and to what Frye calls the mythical allegorical romantic mode. And though irony is largely a rhetorical feature in Barth, in Pynchon's and Vonnegut's fiction irony is not elided. Only in Hawkes does irony seem to vanish under pressure of unrelieved cruelty. The difference is that in fabulation the allegory is not didactic. In the traditional allegorical structure, again, what is abstract is personified while in fabulation what is real is abstracted.

Faulkner mines the broken consciousness of Benjy at the age of three. He evolves a linguistic technique whereby the disjointed thoughts of Benjy are simulated. But what the modern writer does is to present madness not as an individual action but as a general chaotic activity in a panoramic sequence. One is allowed to look at not just a group of people gone mad, but nations gone mad, cultures gone mad. That is why contemporary history is used by Pynchon and Barth as frame. History is a perspective from which it is possible to look at not just a character but a period.

The feeling one gets is akin to looking at a new culture whose codes are utterly alien. The incomprehension is created by alienating the reader, estranging the cultural codes, by making the abnormal seem normal. Since all the known modes of

representing violence have been exhausted by the mass media, writers have to find unfamiliar ways and fabulation provides these. As Zaverzadeh says:

unlike the novel of the industrial age, the post bourgeois novel favours the technique of "collage" for the organization of experience rather than "plot". Collage, typographical enactments, and innovative uses of paginal space are in more accord with contemporary man's exposure to the multilayered nature of experience in the new age and the ambivalent attitude that experience engenders in defiance of being compressed into an epiphanic whole.⁶

What fabulation also does is to make this violence seem routine and not horror-provoking in the ordinary sense. The fabulists make fun of violence to reveal the horror lurking everywhere. Comedy and cruelty are not matters of sensationalism but a way of evoking horror without following the old method of repelling through fear of violence. This new kind of violence creates terror through comedy. The ideas of Fromm, Arendt and Honderich seem to find in the works of the fabulists fictional models of profound imaginative power.

Fabulation enables man to look at violence from a fresh perspective - the old methods of mimesis, the appeal to moral categories are useless. The attempt is to resensitize the reader to violence, the aim of the rhetoric is to recondition the reader so that he can be made to feel the moral implications of violence.

Madness as a category is made incarnate in the very form of fiction. The intention of people like Vonnegut is not to create a sense of order as in Eliot but to make people trust madness.

The allegorical framework in Elizabethan literature provided a norm for good and evil. Allegorical fabulation, on the other hand, releases fiction from the grip of the present, from contemporaneity and history and becomes a kind of prophesy, with the power to predict what is going to happen. As Kermode puts it, "what you want now is meta-novels; you want things which tell you about the structure of the present and therefore give you some power to predict what's going to happen next. You want the novel in fact to be a prophesy".⁷

Most historical novelists, says Honig, rely wholly on a "safely fixed version of authority".⁸ The fabulists do not follow this method. Honig also says, "Fiction and allegory must be simultaneous, a single creation. Both together must assert an integrated vision of reality; and this creative authority must be sustained within the work, not by any appeal to a body of doctrine outside of it".⁹ The allegorical method of Kafka and the fabulists has an integrated reality, not a body of authority outside the work. In traditional allegory it is outside the work.

On this basis, one can also make distinctions within a single author's work. In Vonnegut's Player Piano, for instance,

there is an external point of reference but in Slaughterhouse-Five the vision of reality is integrated so that fiction and allegory are simultaneous.

Honig says, "Kafka's localization is significantly deceptive, for it is really an emanation of the hero's own disabled consciousness".¹⁰ Pynchon's London, Vonnegut's Dresden have a historical background but there is a substitution of the requisite minutiae of historical verisimilitude by a personal vision.

Pre-war fiction shows, according to Fiedler,¹¹ a concern about living with the other - first the Indians, then the blacks. As Lukács points out, "here, individuals embodying violent and extraordinary passions are still within the range of a socially normal typology... For, in this literature, the average man is simply a dimmer reflection of the contradictions always existing in man and society..."¹² Post-war fiction gets assimilated to the other genocide. When we move to fabulation we find that not only this partnership between white and black man but between man and man has disappeared. Modern violence destroys Fiedler's and Lukács' pattern - it has become violence without motive.

When we consider madness we find that semi-fabulation, a category we shall explain in depth later, and fabulation reveal radical alternatives. In early post-war fiction the mad were treated like freaks, the scapegoats for society's

sins. Foucault¹³ points out that after leprosy was eradicated, madmen became society's scapegoats, substituting for lepers. In modern fiction society's neuroses are projected as madness and modern fabulists reveal the manner in which most cultural assumptions get perverted and seem to be a form of lunacy masquerading as Organization. The stealing of the teapot and the savage punishment that follows in Slaughterhouse-Five are a classic example.

The ideas of Foucault and Whyte converge on the organization of people. Here the madmen are members of the organizational families working for the common good. This becomes a metaphor for oppression - for a culture where the blacks are made to fall in line with white assumptions.

From very early times there has been a relationship between madness and the comedy of fools. We have it in King Lear to state the obvious. Dostoevsky once wrote an interesting letter to his niece:

There is in the world only one figure of absolute beauty: Christ... of all the noble figures in Christian literature, I reckon Don Quixote as the most perfect. But Don Quixote is noble only by being at the same time comic... The reader feels sympathy and compassion with the Beautiful, derided and unconscious of its own worth.¹⁴

The idiot has been modelled on Christ. The difference between the idiot, Benjy and the semi-fabulist characters is that the former are in the tradition of Christ and Don Quixote.

innocent and unself-conscious, while someone like Yossarian is a self-aware clown, assuming a positive schizophrenic mask in defence.

From these distinctly evolved individual mad characters of Dostoevsky and Faulkner and Steinbeck we go to the general madness of the asylum and air-force, till finally madness is displaced to the form itself. This is the Artaudian method of transferring madness to art in the kind of aesthetic chaos which enables the form to capture some of the essence of collective madness. The image of madness is transferred from the character to become an extended metaphor concerning the entire work. Fabulation adapts in this way to future shock. The relationship between a mad person and society is one of a lack of understanding - a foreigner failing to grasp the codes of an unfamiliar country. In the same manner modern writers try to disorient us because they confront us with an unknown future by taking us close to it. Through fabulation they suddenly flash it before us. Derridean decentering can be seen here as a means of projecting the future where all our present codes fail and so new codes have to evolve.

The kind of necrophilia which Fromm stresses and which, according to him, sets the tone of the culture of our time, may have something to do with fabulation because to a necrophile, human beings are mere objects.

The essence of fabulation is the nexus between violence and madness. But this can be seen in other writers as well, beginning with Flannery O'Connor through Heller to Vonnegut and Pynchon. Violence and madness are simultaneous, merely two faces of the same coin.

One of the functions of language as it is manipulated by these writers is to suggest this organic relationship between madness and violence. This we have sought to illustrate through the typology of imagery at the end of each chapter.

Violence does not emanate through interaction between character and situation nor is it motivated or durative. Violence seems to erupt at random. The randomness of violence and madness is connected to the form of the novel where history is shuffled like a pack of cards.

The main thrust of this project is in the direction of isolating common patterns, strategies, imagistic, structural and, to a certain extent, stylistic devices which formalize madness, violence and comic cruelty in works ranging from realism to fabulation. Therefore at the end of each chapter an attempt has been made to isolate the more startling images of violence and madness to indicate the change in the discursive technique.

Post-structural or semiotic theories will not be applied all the time. But whenever it is considered necessary some ideas from Todorov and Edward Said are adapted in order to

highlight certain thematic patterns which are not fixed but ever-evolving, in order to make certain distinctions, say between semi-fabulation and fabulation, clear.

In fabulist fiction the durative space is very short as Todorov would put it. The question raised here is what happens to violence which is so mechanically wrought - how can one make sense of violence which is not fraught with calculated malice? The result, of course, is comic because it is mechanical as in the Theatre of the Absurd. The prose of the fabulists has not much verisimilitude or external reality - even history is fictionalized - so we are dealing with what Barthes calls not readerly writing but writerly writing.

One of the common patterns detected is the use of carnal imagery. The other is the cinematic technique deployed to visualize violence. Joyce's effort in this sphere was based on the Eisensteinian technique, putting together stills, collage, montage. The symbolists - like Faulkner and O'Connor - use some of this. One finds certain links between *MASH and Catch-22 - for instance, the comic-cruel depiction of an operation in *MASH and the soldier in white in Catch-22.

The dream is another connection between fiction and film because dreams can be effectively produced in films and language can be exploited in such a way as to create the same effect in fiction.

The terrors of popular imagination explode in films and in Hawkes. Hawkes is the most cinematic. He takes a typical gangster film situation and then blurs its sharp contours. A Hawkes' book can be seen as a gangster film where the clues and motives are made ambiguous or do not exist and with characters who are turned into abstract entities. One may not know why someone is being killed but there is an exactitude in the killing. The victim goes through the gesture of doing something the oppressor does not like and the victimizer goes through the gesture of beating him up. The contextual background is made ambiguous, only the gesture remains.

We ~~are~~ also propose to evaluate this fiction in terms of the changing attitudes to madness and violence in society and the way this change manifests itself in the evolving fictional patterns. We are establishing a parallel between the fictional forms evolving from realism, that is how each succeeding generation of writers has modified its strategies to accommodate their immediate sense of contemporary violence, bearing in mind their predecessor's strategies so that connections can be discovered in works ranging from humanism to semi-fabulation and fabulation. We are concerned with the society reflected in these works, keeping pace with modern man's struggle or acceptance of new modes of violence thrown up under sociological and psychological pressures exerted by future-oriented technologies. This explains the tendency for hallucination in Heller and in fabulation with its utopian science-fiction mode of representation.

In critical studies of violence and madness what is missing is the evolutionary approach and the different fictional strategies employed by writers in their treatment of madness and violence. No one seems to have focussed on the cross-fertilizing relationship between madness and violence and the resultant comic cruelty in the evolving fictional form.

Most critics have dealt with individual writers even in books which offer a panoramic survey of this form of fiction. Although our attempt is not to violently yoke different authors together, we are trying to produce a coherent vision which unites them.

In earlier studies writers are mentioned as having one predominant trait - Vonnegut is a science-fiction utopian, Hawkes is surrealistic. What we are going to say is that most of these writers - and specially the fabulists - create a sense of violence and madness through a comic vision which is relentlessly cruel. We will try to illustrate through imagery how writer after writer is trying to achieve a very serious vision by transforming this material into a comedy that hurts. This kind of comedy is different from satire which presumes a normal world somewhere. Greiner in his book on Hawkes, does come close to an understanding of what we consider the right way of looking at this comedy but seems somewhat off the mark in thinking that Hawkes' comedy produces a comforting vision: "He sees... the function of comedy as a saving attitude, a means to reacquaint us with the eternal

verities".¹⁵ However we feel that unlike Barth, Hawkes does not dilute cruelty by shifting the mood to the comic plane. And even when he does that, the comedy in Hawkes menaces one's sense of being instead of producing relief.

Although we began with certain hypothesis - unlike someone like Olderman who imposes The Wasteland pattern on all the works of this period - we have allowed the hypothesis to merely serve as a roadsign for a fuller exploration of madness and violence in recent fiction in relation to certain recurrent structural patterns.

In examining these works the procedure followed was one of direct analysis of image, theme, tone and the focus was on what the writer was trying to do with his material rather than the social implications in the work. We also offer a close reading of the text and an interpretation of imagery in relation to the twin themes of madness and violence.

The theoretical framework comprises theories about fiction and history, fiction and science, fiction and realism, fiction and allegory and fabulation. But the discussion of imagery reveals that the relationship between the verbal and the transverbal, the real and the unreal, is much more fundamental than the theories of literature and fiction.

The vitality of American fiction, Faulkner on, lies in the interplay between the verbal and the transverbal.

The emphasis on allegory in fabulist fiction reflects a growing devaluation of the individual in society. But unlike totalitarian societies where the individual loses his unique status through political or ideological conditions, in the so-called free world this state is lost through the control of mind by mass media, the homogenizing cultural peer group pressure, technological advances, scientific rationalism which stresses objective facts.

The theory we offer is that the relationship between society and fiction is not to be determined by assuming that violent fictional events imitate violent acts in society but that this violence affects the form of fiction itself. The range of fabulation is not to be determined by violence and madness alone. Fabulation is ^a fictional form which adumbrates these cultural experiences. Violence to form was committed by Artaud, Celine and Sade. According to Hassan (The Dismemberment of Orpheus)¹⁶ this violation is reflective of the contemporary disaffection with the neo-classical modernism of Eliot and Joyce but the moral sense of the sixties and seventies has its compelling image in Hiroshima, the Jewish holocaust and the breakdown of the old world order following the Second World War.

Instead of individuals we now have what Fromm¹⁷ calls the Cybernetic man whose compulsive act of transforming all living things into mechanical, has led to a new sense of fiction where collective violence is projected through the

destruction of the form itself. The form has exploded not because it is redundant but because the cybernetic man is an archetype with displacement rather than integration as his basic impulse. In works like Gravity's Rainbow we not only face the bogeyman of the future but the vampires of the past. Fabulation remakes history.

The remaking of history is not done to create correspondences between past and present but between imaginative past and imaginative future because the present is purely humanistic man-centred time. Time in fabulation is fabricated through the cloning of past and future.

Language, too, is an essential tool because as Hawkes maintains language is form¹⁸ or as Susan Sontag says, "language seems a privileged metaphor for expressing the mediated character of ~~art~~ art-making and the artwork".¹⁹

In Chapter One selected works of Dreiser, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and O'Connor are examined to demonstrate the different formal strategies employed by the first two and the last pair to contain their sense of violence and madness with Fitzgerald providing the link between the two groups. The typology of violence and madness in the first group of writers can be determined from a historical angle. In works of Faulkner and O'Connor the mode of representation is extremely durative because time is fractured and moments of violence and madness are internalized, moving along the trajectory of the subconscious.

The internalization of violence and madness is achieved through their assimilation to image and rhetoric in the works of post-war writers referred to as Humanists in Chapter Two. These include Malamud, Bellow and Mailer. There is a recurring imagery of birds and animals of prey and an obsession with necrophily especially in some of the novels of Mailer. The novels of Malamud and Bellow examined here reveal an interesting polarity between negative imagery of death and destruction and positive imagery where even violent death signifies some form of human triumph.

Chapter Three is the axis of this dissertation where works of writers who are designated (somewhat arbitrarily perhaps) as semi-fabulists, are discussed. The humanist impulse persists in their works. But the humanist triumph is not naively worked out in the books of Heller, Ellison and Irving. Violence and madness seen as part of a vision given over to necrophilia produce the semi-fabulist form in Catch-22, Invisible Man and The World According to Garp. These writers have one foot in abstraction and one in contingent reality. This hybrid is not a compromise between realism and fabulation but an attempt to cross these two modes in order to dramatize modern man's predicament without losing poignancy. The hero plays almost a revolutionary role without being aware of it. Instead of assimilating him to the Adamic myth he must be seen as someone who assumes a positive schizophrenic mask to subvert language and reality controlled by necrophilous bureaucracy.

In Chapter Four an attempt is made to establish a nexus between violence, madness and comic-cruelty both in thematic and structural terms. The linguistic manipulation in the works of Barth, Vonnegut and Pynchon also indicates an organic relationship between violence and madness through the collapse of what Todorov calls, in a slightly different context, the durative space between cause and effect. The randomness of violence and madness has something to do with the form of the novel where history is shuffled casually. These writers explore the relationship between fiction and history and present the writer's predicament from the victim's perspective which accounts for the extremely cynical form of comic-nihilism.

Chapter Five deals almost exclusively with the major works of John Hawkes, a writer whose comic vision is relentlessly cruel. Relying less on the process of montage through embedding as in Barth or Pynchon and creating transverbal or kinetic structures, Hawkes assimilates to his vision the terrifying impact of mind-controlling media. His form adumbrates violence and madness in the manner employed by Artaud for reactivating the jaded sensibility of readers. In this work history is remade not only to accommodate future-shock, history is peopled as though retrospectively with cybernetic characters who fulfill certain destructive roles. This remaking of history is not done to create correspondences between past and present but to match an imaginative past with a fictional future, to rephrase Hayden White.

In the concluding chapter certain theories concerning open and closed forms are reviewed and rejected as being inadequate. Our conclusion is that in fabulation the allegorical frame does not hem in the material. The frame is a window or a looking glass which reveals that there is a seamless relationship between fiction and history.

NOTES

- 1 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Breakfast of Champions or Goodbye Blue Monday (New York:Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 210.
- 2 Tzvetan Todorov, The Poetics of Prose, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 84.
- 3 "Wrestling (American Style) with Proteus", report by Roger Henkle, Novel, 3, 3 (1970).
- 4 Frank Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1979).
- 5 Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- 6 Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 7.
- 7 "Wrestling (American Style) with Proteus", op. cit., p. 203.
- 8 Edwin Honig, Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 105.
- 9 Ibid., p. 93.
- 10 Ibid., p. 64.
- 11 "Wrestling (American Style) with Proteus", op. cit., p. 206.

- 12 Georg Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism", 20th century Literary Criticism, ed. David Lodge (London:Longman, 1976), p. 483.
- 13 Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).
- 14 From Letters to his niece (1868), Letters of Dostoevsky, trans. E. C. Mayne (New York: The Macmillan Company and Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1917), p. 135.
- 15 Donald J. Greiner, Comic Terror: The Novels of John Hawkes (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1973).
- 16 Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).
- 17 Erich Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982).
- 18 "Wrestling (American Style) with Proteus", op. cit., p. 203.
- 19 Susan Sontag, Styles of Radical Will (New York : Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 14.