

Terrible Dreams
Sinclair Beiles and Madness

Madness, as a personal and social experience, features a great deal in Beiles's life and writing. Information as to his actual diagnosis – what it was he suffered from, was treated for, and what this might have been like for him is sparse, and tends towards the sensational. Everyone seems clear on the fact that Beiles was 'mad', but vague on what that might have entailed, or what part of his behaviour was madness. We can gather from his poetry that he was at times anxious about his mental health, that he suffered repeatedly, not constantly, from depression, that he detested being hospitalised but he did occasionally feel that he needed help to function to his satisfaction (he seems less concerned about functioning to society's satisfaction), and that he was very conscious of the stereotypes, myths and constructs about madness in society and in literature, engaging them in various ways.

In 1975 an interview conducted by Michael Butterworth for *Wordworks* was introduced with: "The following interview with Beiles took place in London on 14/7/75 shortly after he had completed a lengthy in-patient treatment for mental disturbance at Bowden House" (Butterworth, 1975: 5). The delicate phrasing of the cause for Beiles's recent whereabouts is in itself interesting, seemingly wanting to titillate the reader with the promise of an interview with a 'real madman' while remaining sensitive to Beiles's 'condition'. The conversation, however, is more forthright, encouraging Beiles to speak about his illness and treatment. He speaks of "conditions inside an asylum [being] ideal for a poet" (Butterworth, 1975: 7) because of

the lack of personal responsibility living in the clinic. Somebody would arrive with a tray for my breakfast...and take it away again. Somebody would come and make my bed. I felt I was in a very congenial environment. The people were responsive to poetry – sometimes out of boredom, sometimes out of their own madness (Beiles in Butterworth, 1975: 8).

Asked "how do you cope outside, then?" Beiles responds:

Well, I cope with difficulty. All sorts of things like washing, and all the chores of living like cooking and buying a chop and things like that, I find alien to me. But this time out, I'm trying to spend my time out altogether, and not go back.

Do your mind me asking how your personal 'madness' started?

It's a chemical thing...

It's always been with you, has it?

Yeah...

Has it always manifested itself in the same way?

More or less...headaches, and at the same time very low spirits...Now I think I've met a really good shrink, and the pills he gives me to live on really keep me good...he reckons I'll be off them in two years.

Does that mean you may be cured?

Yes, I think he reckons I'll be cured. (Butterworth, 1975: 8)

In another article his illness is attributed to participation in a work of installation/performance art by the Greek artist Takis: "in a less than salutary experiment, in 1960 Beiles suspended himself in the air as part of an art installation in Paris with the help of electromagnetism...he dates his manic depression from this ill-guided work" (Black, 1994: 35). The article continues,

Beiles lived happily for part of the 1960s in Greece, where he became friends with the surrealist poet Nanos Valaoritis. His Greek residence ended abruptly, however, during the military government when he insulted a colonel. After six weeks in detention, Beiles was taken before a judge, who inspecting Beiles' poems, and weighing the evidence against him, decided that he must be mad to write and act as he did. Beiles was found not guilty, but insane, and expelled from the country. (Black, 1994: 35)

This story has more or less been converted into legend, acquiring, as legends do, variations and confabulations. What remains constant is Beiles's trouble with the law, which more than likely had to do with his sometimes erratic public behaviour, and the subsequent acquittal on the grounds of insanity, which Beiles seemed to revel in and expand on in each successive telling of the tale. George Dillon Slater, a friend of Beiles's who was in Athens at the time, might have a more accurate version of events:

Sinclair was about due for a breakdown and at such times there was no stopping him. He had armed himself with two freakishly enormous carrots and was pummeling passing cars with them, in a not so random fashion. (This was to be one of his tragically classic breakdowns, devastatingly as surprising even as the one he experienced in Paris after Takis had 'flown him', levitating him electromagnetically in a piece of performance art.) He began walking across cars as they sat in gridlock; he kicked them and shouted at them in French...Eventually he broke off and strode up a side street, where, stoked by his incandescent brain fever, he confronted a formidable parked Mercedes-Benz. (Slater, 2009: 73)

What follows is, not unlike much of Beiles's writing, parody becoming farce. While vandalising the car Beiles was accosted by a patron of a nearby barbershop, who turned out to be its owner. Beiles attacked him, only to find that "when the man was pulled to his feet by a pair of terrified barbers, he saw that the man had two arms in slings: both being broken. And, as astonishingly, the man was a high-ranking officer in the Greek

navy, an admiral. As if this wasn't grim enough, it was during the time of the Greek junta, and he had assaulted one of its high officers" (2009: 74). Beiles's rescue from this skirmish plays right into his 'mad poet' persona:

Pandias Skarmagas was trained in law and a longtime friend and patron of the poet; he went straight to the police once he'd learned of the episode. It was mid-morning when he arrived and shortly later both he and Sinclair appeared before a judge. Pandias gave a variation of the crazy-artist defense, citing the tendency of intense creativity to bring out aberrant behaviour. The judge had some appreciation for Pandias' considerable insight and eloquence, and, remarkably, shared his concern for the arts. This revealed itself in the late afternoon, with the dismissal of the charges, largely due to the esteem the judge developed for Pandias during the course of the day...But the dismissal was contingent upon Sinclair submitting to psychiatric examination immediately upon leaving court or face a grave prison sentence. Pandias vouchsafed for Sinclair and he was held to the same threat of prison in the event of any delay in the ordered examination, so he hastily gathered his belongings and followed Sinclair out onto the street; when he got there Sinclair was not to be found. (Slater, 2009: 75)

In *The Beat Hotel* Miles relates that

Sinclair suffered extreme mood changes. He would see a van in the street and become convinced that it was filled with electronic surveillance equipment, spying on his every move. He had episodes of terror where he would refuse to leave someone's room in case he was murdered by his persecutors. Other times he would act goofy, smoking four cigarettes at once while walking down the street. (Miles, 2000: 175)

Such descriptions by those who knew him, what he said about himself and what he wrote, suggest that Beiles had bipolar disorder. A probable diagnosis and a sense of the accompanying subjective experiences are difficult, but not impossible, to reconstruct, at least to the extent of gleaning some insight into Beiles's illness.

Bipolar disorder (Bipolar I to be precise), known as manic depression when Beiles was first admitted for treatment, is a mood disorder "characterised by episodic and disruptive mood fluctuations" (Barondes, 1998: 1) – periods of depression alternating with others of elation and hyperactivity, known as mania. Both states can be overwhelming, interfering with the person's usual lifestyle, activities, and behaviour. Someone who has bipolar disorder is not constantly either depressed or manic – the phases seldom last more than three months (Betts & Kenwood, 1992: 460-462) and in between them people can carry on more or less as usual, although the disorder carries a high suicide rate. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, one of two similar systems of classification used by psychiatrists, describes bipolar disorder as a chronic, that is, permanent illness,

which can be controlled rather than cured. During a manic phase people become very active, have more energy than usual, and are expansive, euphoric, with an overemphasised elated mood, and impulsive behaviour, becoming angry if their actions or ideas are questioned. There is “inflated self-esteem or grandiosity, decreased need for sleep, pressure of speech, flight of ideas, distractibility, increased involvement in goal-directed activities with a high potential for painful consequences” (First, 1994: 328). During a depressive phase people tend to be lethargic, and lack the energy to perform their usual tasks. They experience feelings of sadness, apathy, and a loss of interest in life, as well as “decreased energy, tiredness, and fatigue” (First, 1994: 321). “Many individuals report impaired ability to think, concentrate, or make decisions” (1994: 322), which seems difficult enough even without the “sense of worthlessness or guilt” (1994: 321) which characterises depression.

Both aspects of bipolar illness can be experienced with or without ‘psychotic features’, that is, delusions or hallucinations, for instance, believing that one is disliked by everyone, or that one is a singularly brilliant and universally celebrated author when there is no concrete evidence of either. In the above passage Miles relates Beiles’s delusional ideas: “he had episodes of terror where he would refuse to leave someone’s room in case he was murdered by his persecutors” (Miles, 2000: 175). In other instances, his grandiose ideas and sometimes far-fetched stories in interviews, labelled as lies or “unsustainable myths” (Geers, 1997: 3), were not so much lies as grandiose aspects of manic moods.

In Beiles’s poems his depressions are compounded by the awareness that they will recur, as will his manias which, although possibly creatively stimulating, are also emotionally and mentally exhausting, and his actions during them are not necessarily as he would like them to be. His illness is exacerbated by his awareness that he is ill.

Beiles was treated by, amongst many others, R.D. Laing’s colleagues Morris Schatzman and Joseph Berke in therapeutic communities around London. Laing was one of the foremost thinkers of the ‘anti-psychiatrist’ group, although he often distanced himself from the label. He and his followers were against formal treatment of mental illness,

advocating that psychosis is a potentially enlightening experience pathologised by modern society. One curious article in the Pretoria News notes that “Mr Beiles is living at the Hampstead home of Dr Morton Schatzman, one of the world’s leading authorities on drug addiction... ‘Dr Schatzman and Dr Joseph Berke have done wonderful things for me with psycho-analysis...as a result I am completely cured of my dependence on tranquilisers and sleeping pills and I hope that the personal problems which led to my being asked to leave my home in Greece are behind me’” (Beiles in [staff reporter], Pretoria News, 1973: 8).

To some extent all the Beats were, in part by choice and in part involuntarily, on the ‘outside’ of a society which demarcated very strong boundaries around itself. For them madness was just one of the more outward stops on a range of experiences and identities radiating outward from the heart of the American Dream. Breslin notes that Ginsberg, through “receiving his first impressions of social causation from circumstances within his family” might have conflated the radical with the insane because his mother was both “politically radical and clinically insane” (Breslin, 1987: 30). “In any case, the idea of madness as rebellion was from the outset far more than an idea to him” (1987: 30). Ginsberg’s ideology was very influential within the Beat group; his ideas and early experiences as well as his poetry were critical to there having been a Beat movement at all. Miles writes insightfully of Ginsberg’s sense of this spectrum of outsider identities, and the place of the Beat movement within this context. Miles sees Ginsberg’s legendary Blake hallucination as somehow central to the formation of his Beat identity and ideas:

This vision, or perhaps partial nervous breakdown, was to dominate his life for many years, strengthening his attachment to those outside society, the insane, the criminal, the rejected. For him junkies and thieves were saints and angels - “angelheaded hipsters” – and they became the subject matter of “Howl” as well as other poems. Allen’s own lifestyle also placed him outside normal society: he was homosexual, he used heroin and marijuana, and he was regarded by the authorities as a threat to the American Way of Life. For Allen Ginsberg the Beat lifestyle was not a pose; for him it was the only life that made any sense, it was the only life possible. (Miles, 2000: 54)

This last statement is to a great extent true of all the Beat writers, and perhaps what really drew them together – the fact that for all of them Beat was the only thing that made sense, the only way of being they could honestly carry on with, the only group identity which accepted them as they were and which was acceptable to them. The otherness, the

pathology, the ill-fitting yearnings and loneliness which drove them to write and do so in confrontationally new ways was genuine; it was the scruffy authenticity they doggedly clung to and sought out wherever they could – rural America for Kerouac, New York tenements for Ginsberg, Genet’s Paris for Burroughs, unwesternised Greece for Beiles. As for Ginsberg, for Beiles Beat was a viable alternative to desiring the straight world which had already rejected him because of his mental illness, and for other more subtle reasons as well. Beiles was Jewish, his family had moved from central Africa, he was politically liberal, more interested in poetry than the army, and was ‘eccentric’ even before he was officially ‘mad’. To start with he was not the average, or at least not the model, Apartheid-era young white South African man, and didn’t aspire to be one. Later on, having been hospitalised, he became officially ‘mentally ill’, he travelled and wrote instead of settling down to a steady job and a family, he used drugs (and proudly exaggerated how much he used them: “I used to be a very heavy marijuana smoker, smoking 35 to 40 pure joints a day. I had a big jar of it in my room” (Beiles in Holmes, 1994: 62). He might have experimented with homosexuality, as suggested in poems like ‘Pericles’ (*Dowsings*), in which a shoe-shine boy is addressed as follows:

O Pericles leave your corner in the brothel of Piraeus.
Your mother mustn’t pimp for you
With sailors any more.
Come to my villa. There will be nothing for you to do
Except eat loucum and be loving (21-25)

Although he writes in poems like ‘Terrible Dreams’ of “the mental hospitals” (8) as “enemy territory” (7) Beiles seems ultimately more opposed to the idea of psychiatry, the function it has in the system than all his experiences of it, some of which he describes quite positively elsewhere. It is more difficult to ascribe a particular outlook or attitude to writers like Beiles, or Carl Solomon, whose relationship to madness is personal, manifold, multilayered, and changeable, and who deal with it as writers, madmen, and patients, than to the other Beat writers who view it, although sympathetically, from a stylised and detached perspective. They might know what madness means to them, but not what it means to be mad.

Madness, variously interpreted, has an important presence in the Beat idiom. Ginsberg's *Howl* begins with "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness" (1), Kerouac's *On The Road* introduces its protagonists with "the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time" (11). 'Mad' is used often and loosely by many Beat writers, in the conventional sense and also to suggest an innocence of, or a way of being beyond, conventional socialised adulthood, as expressing "a sort of ultimate, innocent truth about man" (Foucault, 2009: 135). Madness is romanticised, almost sanctified: "the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown" (*Howl*, 326). It comes to mean different, that is, different from the average member of society, with the implication that this difference resides at the core, not the trappings, of identity. It means 'authentic', in the way that 'beat' means authentic, and starts to signify not just difference from the 'normal' but resistance to ideas of what is 'normal' as well. From these uses and connotations the idea of madness develops a set of meanings and a mythology of its own in Beat literature. This mythology draws extensively on the Romantic notions Beiles toys with in his poems, combined with the particular social circumstances and the ideology of the Beat writers.

Beat writing tends toward the "glamorization of madness – the promotion of madness as revelation, as political protest, as the higher sanity" (Phillips, 2005: 4). The idea is that anything unusual is positively nonconformist, even if it is so nonconformist as to be deviant or pathological. Difference is good, admirable, precious (because they saw it to be increasingly scarce), to be written about and experienced first-hand if possible.

Poems like Tuli Kupferberg's 'I Dreamed of a Bum Seven Foot Tall' are driven by anti-bourgeois ideals almost to the point of refusing to see the problematics of any other vantage point. The mad hobo in the poem becomes a symbol of counterculture, a figure of wrathful godlike vengeance and ultimately of salvation: "I dreamed of a bum seven foot tall/ that crushed the bourgeoisie to the cross" (1-2). The bum is so imbued with symbolism that he becomes a thing, a 'that' instead of a 'who'. The poem is unmistakably of the city, almost mapping, in insider's code, the social geography of New York:

Spartacus my tortured brother
If I should find you bussing crockery out of Bickford's
Or sunk beneath the 6th Ave El
Where it curves West 3rd Street into the twenties (5-8)

The poem seems as comfortable in Spartacus the Bum's sphere of the city as he is, and the poet feels able to read his secret language – not only of the streets but of the mad:

Give me a signal by your delusions
Hallucinate Rome! The centurions in trouble
They cast a flame in your antique face
And wrestle your eyes for tomorrow's longing (10-13)

For the Beats the boundaries between 'normal' and 'mad' which are so clearly defined by the straight world seem to blur somewhat. Since 'mad' is 'good' because it is 'different' everyone wants to be a little mad, to be an insider in the mad world. They took both a personal pleasure and a political interest in ignoring, negating, challenging, crossing and recrossing the us-them normal-mad /bad /other boundaries which were especially prominent in the time of their writing, and which, as Szasz points out, had constant political undertones and consequences for the individual (Samson, 1995: 78). This had partly to do with the real questioning of the validity of those boundaries, and an interest in what lay beyond them, partly with a defiant desire to trample on society's rules, and partly, as is the case with Beiles, finding oneself to be already straddling those boundaries.

Rather haphazard lifestyles, perpetual alienation and much drug use all served to bring the Beats a little closer if not to actual madness then at least to the social spaces it often inhabits. In addition to a dadaist 'craziness' at which writers like Corso often played, there is Ginsberg's early psychoanalysis, and what was probably Cassady's mania which so appealed to Kerouac as the basis for Dean in *On The Road*, and Burroughs's repeated heroin addictions and withdrawals, and his esoteric belief systems, as well as the group's close association with people who probably were mentally ill in the conventional/certifiable sense (Elise Cowen, Carl Solomon, Neal Cassady). These are more vulnerable personal experiences in which, as the price for nonconformity in a conformist era, identity and self-coherence, wellbeing and state of mind are questioned.

Corso poses such mad/sane self/other questions to himself in 'Hello':

Am I the person I did not want to be?
That talks-to-himself person?
That neighbours-make-fun-of person?
Am I he who, on museum steps, sleeps on his side?
Do I wear the cloth of a man who has failed?
Am I the looney man?
In the great serenade of things,
Am I the most canceled passage? (6-13)

Corso's questions are Beat questions. Was the Great Rejection worth it? Is it madness or poetry to talk to yourself? Does it matter if neighbours make fun of you? Do you make fun of your neighbours for being straight and square and conventional? "Am I the looney man" – am I mad to others, am I mad to myself? And perhaps most significantly in the last line, "am I the most cancelled passage?" In other words, have I dropped out to the point of obscurity? Have I immersed myself in the outcast so much that it does not matter whether I am poet or hobo?

Beiles considers similar concerns in 'The Conspiracy', and for him too the boundaries become hazy under examination:

A conspiracy against us
Everything is a conspiracy
The grocer who wants to be cured of his
dermatitis
The frailty of our bodies
The sun
The light
Getting out of bed in the mornings
Our sex which cannot be satisfied
Which overwhelms us in the underground
And in libraries
A conspiracy of doctors
Who invite us to eat with mute children
Of Austrian mountains
Of getting lost
Of vigorous climbers
Who hug and kiss us
Of the society for the Prevention of
Schizophrenia
Of making love on turkish trains
O[f] parents who insist on dressing us up
In the clothes of their absent sons
Of typewriters with their metallic clatter
Of lost letters
Of Summer armpits.
We want nothing
Nothing of this life

We do not want children
We do not want our mothers-in-law
To buy us houses in London
We do not want to live on the rent in
Tangier
Make 8mm films
Pose in the nude
Attend cocktail parties in our honour.
This conspiracy is never ending
Spiro and I will die of it
But at least we will die together. (28-64)

What starts off as a clear us-and-them opposition, with a ‘conspiracy’ against ‘us’ by ‘them’, that is, “fathers who hate poetry and love history/ of weddings in the British Embassy/ in tailsuits bought by the parents of our mistresses/ of wealth impressed on us by fathers-in-law/ who treat us like underdeveloped countries/ for the honeymoon they even buy us underpants/ a conspiracy against us” (17-23) becomes a maze of impositions and inhibitions on an increasingly ill-defined identity. In this context “everything is a conspiracy”. Assistance and trespass, desire and dislike all become part of the conspiracy in which the speaker’s own boundaries are lost along with the us-them binary. The more unsure he is where he fits into his life’s events, where he stands in relation to others, what he values and wants or fears and avoids, the more sinister innocuous things become, until even sunlight must be either for or against him.

Carl Solomon’s ‘Report from the Asylum’ became, like its author, iconic amongst the Beats. In it Solomon relates experiences of undergoing insulin shock therapy. The text is a detailed personal narrative, at times lucid and at others elusive as it tries to describe the process of insulin coma, with an effect which seems surreal but is not surrealist in its construction. Like Beiles, Solomon is aware of Beat constructs of madness and how they are relevant to him. Yet contrary to the general attitude of the Beats, Solomon, though he relates terrifying experiences and is at times very critical of hospital staff, is not completely opposed to psychiatry. In his own terms, “my total rejection of psychiatry, which had, after coma, become a fanatical adulation, now passed into a third phase – one of constructive criticism” (Solomon, 1958: 138) from which the ‘report’ is assumably written.

In *Protest*, a 1958 anthology of Beat and related writing, 'Report from the Asylum' is introduced with the following passage:

Insanity – here is the ultimate retreat, more insulating than heroin, weed or bop. In a world where the “upward and onward” assurance of positivism always rings false, madness is the most sure way (next to death) of breaking the clock, stopping time, and splintering life into a stream of acutely felt sensations that impose no demands and bring no consciousness of guilt. (Feldman & Gartenberg, 1960: 133)

Madness becomes one of the escapes from the pressures of conformity, an option out of society, or at least an expression of the need to opt out of it. For the Beat writers it becomes a symbol of protest as well as freedom, of somehow having escaped being conventional. This is extended to the notion of being so intrinsically different and hip that one cannot be conventional as one cannot help being mad. This sort of thinking becomes crystallised a little later with the rise of the New Left for which “what defined people as potentially revolutionary... [was] their relative immunity, often acquired by the liberating therapy of art, to the ideological lie of ‘the system’” (Breslin, 1987: 16). In less politicised, more intuitive terms, this is what the Beats seek out as models of alternative living, and what madness represents to them. Immunity to squareness, unassimilability into the system, intrinsic nonconformity, and “refusal of acculturation” (1987: 29).

James Campbell writes of Solomon “who couldn’t recognise himself when he looked in the mirror” as having “an extreme reaction to the American-dream version of society: he made himself a piece of protest art; he adopted insanity as a form of revolt” (Campbell, 1999: 97). Using Solomon as an example, Campbell succinctly sums up the Beat perception of madness, Solomon’s in particular and everyone’s in general. Like them, however, he neglects to consider that not being able to recognise yourself in the mirror might be an experience beyond protest, more problematic than a reaction towards society, more troubling than not wanting to be like everyone else. Like those he writes of Campbell seems to underestimate the personal trauma and the involuntary nature of mental illness; indeed, the naïve though well intentioned injustice the Beats do their ‘gone crazies’ is not unlike the injustice they do to the ‘happy negroes’ of their literature. Both are a result of ascribing, or projecting, too vehemently, their own needs, desires and antipathies onto a cultural ‘other’ even though they do not agree with society’s othering of such individuals. Both madness and blackness as represented by the Beats are heavily

steeped in primitivist ideas as well as the notion that such people can (because those writing them feel they can't, and want to) transcend the shared emptiness of modern urban life. This is what Goffman describes in *Stigma* as the tendency to “impute some desirable but undesired attributes, often of a supernatural cast, such as ‘sixth sense’ or ‘understanding’” (Goffman, 1963: 16) to those, like the mentally ill, who are stigmatised by society.

Some people who have bipolar disorder, and Beiles seems to have been one of them, come to value their manic phases as times of increased productivity and inspiration which make up for the periods of debilitating depression. There is also a popular belief in the link between this type of mental illness and creativity, though it has not been conclusively proven, and to some extent the gain in creativity is likely to be countered by the loss of functionality. Beiles seemed to think that he was somehow ‘fated’ to his illness; certainly, it was an integral part of himself and his writing. It tormented him and he clung to it in equal measure.

The perceived link between art and madness is somehow entrenched in cultural thinking, and arises as much, if not totally, from external, that is, social influences, as explained by fervent critic of psychiatry, Thomas Szasz:

Because art is much older than psychiatry, artists have had a big jump on insanity. Indeed, artists, especially poets and writers, have always shown a good deal of interest in madness. As soon as psychiatry appeared on the scene, psychiatrists returned the compliment by showing a keen interest in art. Before long, it became a truism that there is a close – albeit mysterious – connection between madness and art. (Szasz, 1987: 220)

A recurrent theme in Beiles's work, both the semi-autobiographical poems and the more distanced theatrical pieces, is his loathing of involuntary incarceration on psychiatric grounds, into which he draws new-leftist political and sociological polemics. While this fits well into the Beat ideology, and more generally into countercultural anti-establishment discourse, for Beiles the origins of this sentiment are very subjective. Very simply, being hospitalised involuntarily, which often happens via the police or other authorities, is distressing and humiliating, and leaves one feeling frustrated and angry. Necessary or not, it is an experience of being forcefully and coercively controlled, and

having one's basic rights curtailed. Even without coercive hospitalization, being dependent on a system (about which Beiles was in any case ambivalent) for medication, with its assorted side-effects, or psychotherapy, which requires long-term personal involvement, otherwise risking one's civil liberties if one's behaviour causes an interaction with the authorities, is a difficult situation. In this context Beiles's bitterness is not irrational.

In his poems Beiles displays two prevailing attitudes about his mental illness. On the one hand there is his personal experience, on the other there is what he makes of it, how he uses it in the public sphere. His writing tends to bridge the gap between the two aspects, reconciling and confusing matters, in that it is simultaneously deeply personal and his chief mode of existence in the public realm. In addition, there is the way in which he allows the stylised public perception to influence his identity as a poet, and a mentally ill person, or uses it to shape these socially difficult aspects of his identity. He makes himself into a 'mad poet', a romantic melancholic suffering from "a fashionably dreamy sadness" after Keats (Porter, 2002: 45) or a manic court jester by turns. A social critic licensed to speak the truth like a wise fool, able to "give voice to darker truths denied to sober speech" (2002: 69) or a poet driven by what Plato termed "divine fury" (2002: 66) – these identities have roots far back in the past of literature and draw a believing, sympathetic audience. The "*mad artist*, like the *mad genius*, may be a creation of the human imagination; nevertheless, the figure of the insane artist, like the idea of insanity itself, now seems very real to most people" (Szasz, 1987: 220). There is no reason why this construct should appear any less real to people who fall into its scope – the mentally ill, or poets – and Beiles believes himself to be both under the auspices of the mad poet figure, prefacing *Deliria* with a quote by Heinrich Heine: "The madness of poets is the future madness of nations" (Heine in Beiles, 1995: i).

Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips notes that

when the mad have not been pathologised as dysfunctional and dangerous they have traditionally been idealised, if not glamorised, as inspired... 'The lover, the lunatic and the poet' are famously linked in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and not only there, because they are all transported and increased by their experience. In these versions of madness the mad, like lovers and poets, have privileged access to essential truths; they are the heroes and

heroines of what they can bear. Scapegoated and idolised as oracles and irritants, as geniuses and fools, as artists and frauds, they are represented as at worst provocative and disturbing, and at best uniquely illuminating. (Phillips, 2005: 40)

Beiles is aware of the social and political implications of (his) madness. He is particularly concerned with the power afforded 'normal' society and the control exercised by its institutions through the dispensation of the 'mad' label. But he also suggests the counter-power of those considered mad, the loopholes of an outcast status and the possibilities of freedom stemming from being viewed as irrevocably different. His writing reaches toward the notion of being mad as being intrinsically nonconformist, of being irreversibly other, through the use of various cultural and literary archetypes and traditions surrounding the concept, perhaps more so than the reality, of madness. Beiles steps outside of his immediate experience of his mental illness and is able to view and shape his public identity, using the perceptions of madness to variously attack and escape the system. He does not argue for his sanity, but for the insanity of the system which labels him thus, and questions the relevance of the polarised terms. He also draws attention to the shifting positions of power which make up and enforce such definitions and the actions taken by society towards the individual, and by the individual against society, which follow them.

The ideas about madness and society which were challenged during Beiles's lifetime, notably by the group known as anti-psychiatrists, open up a lot of contextual questions around him, his madness and his writing, and about how these should be read and understood. Despite what has been written about them and become of their work, the original anti-psychiatrists who began to question society's ideas about madness did not strictly speaking doubt that there is a phenomenon like 'madness' – their questions are about what exactly it is, or is not, why we accept changing definitions of it, who defines it and why, what functions it has in society, how we respond to it, and actively support its existence even as we shy away from the results; what we do about it, to it, because of it, regarding it. Their question was really what madness means; finding the answer to that deeply and problematically politicised, they sought to reveal the interplays of social power underlying a far too easily accepted, and not very well understood, social (rather than medical) idea. Szasz's famous assertion that 'mental illness is a metaphor' is not a

suggestion that it is *just* a metaphor. His contention is rather that what we call madness is far more complex – primarily in socio-political terms – than we readily suppose. He proposes that we should not take a set term at face value simply because it has been legitimated by the authority of medicine, to which, historically, it only partially ‘belongs’.

The “varied and controversial” (Porter, 2002: 209) ideas which gained fame in the 1960s as anti-psychiatry were basically the body of sociology and related writings, the sentiments and ideas shared by Erving Goffman, Chicago School sociologist, and author of *Asylums* (a study of total institutions), and *Stigma* (a study of stigmatization in western society); Michel Foucault, historian and philosopher who never really aligned himself with the group but whose work on the history and function of madness in society, explored in *Madness and Civilization* as well as other texts, was particularly important to the movement; Thomas Scheff, a disillusioned psychiatrist, Thomas Szasz, a sociologist, both of whom did extensive research and writing on the social role, origin and implications of mental illness; psychiatrist Ronald Laing, who, in collaborations with David Cooper, Joseph Berke, Aaron Esterson, Morris Szatzman and others established a number of alternative psychiatric clinics or ‘therapeutic communities’ and developed an esoteric scholarship of mental illness linked to existential philosophy; and Franco Basaglia, an Italian psychiatrist who pioneered de-institutionalization and community-based psychiatric care, with varied results.

Anti-psychiatry is mostly a combination of symbolic interactionist sociology as applied to psychiatry/ deviance/ public health/ mental illness, along with aspects of social history, a general distrust of authority and an insistence on basic civil rights and liberties, psychoanalytic theory more Jungian than Freudian, existential philosophy, as well as some more esoteric beliefs such as those informing the work of Laing and his colleagues. Crucially, all the thinkers in this group proposed that madness was not a “behavioural or biochemical reality” (Porter, 2002: 209) but primarily a social one, and as such involved in social politics on almost every level. From their perspective madness has to do with social cohesion and nonconformity, power and the ways in which it is enforced – basically that “psychopathology is socially constructed” and thus its existence in society

relies on “social modes of speaking, action and knowledge” (Hook, 2002: 2). The anti-psychiatrists argued that psychiatry is too vague a discipline to legitimately use the medical and legal power it has in society, and that what is done with and to those designated as ‘patients’ serves society more than it does those individuals. Accordingly, treatment with medication, shock and other therapies is more damaging than helpful, at best removing symptoms of madness but not addressing the underlying problems which are social and/or psychodynamic, “personal, social and ethical problems in living” (Szasz in Barondes, 1998: 37). In other words, the accusation is that psychiatry acts in favour of the system, facilitating the scapegoating and exclusion of the ‘mad’, (whose ascribed and/or learned ‘madness’ is social rather than biological) while pretending to be concerned with helping the mentally ill. Scheff contends that madness is learned behaviour which functions as a ‘sane’ means of coping with (and possibly struggling against) a ‘mad’ world. Laing went even further to suggest that psychosis could be an uplifting, enlightening growth experience, and thus “should not be pharmacologically suppressed” (Porter, 2002: 210).

Szasz outlines the problematic function of mental illness in society as follows:

According to the common-sense definition, mental health is the ability to play whatever the game of social living might consist of and to play it well. Conversely, to refuse to play, or to play badly, means that the person is mentally ill. The question may now be raised as to what are the differences, if any, between social nonconformity (or deviation) and mental illness. Leaving technical psychiatric considerations aside for the moment, I shall argue that the difference between the two notions – as expressed for example by the statements ‘He is wrong’ and ‘He is mentally ill’ – does not necessarily lie in any observable *facts* to which they point, but may consist only of a difference in our *attitudes* toward our subject. If we take him *seriously*, consider him to have human rights and dignities, and look upon him as more or less equal – we then speak of disagreements, deviations, fights, crimes, perhaps even of treason. Should we feel, however, that we cannot communicate with him, that he is somehow ‘basically’ different from us, we shall then be inclined to consider him no longer as an equal but as an inferior (rarely, superior) person; and we then speak of him as crazy, mentally ill, insane, psychotic, immature, and so forth. (Szasz in Goffman, 1961: 317)

Szasz’s statement suggests a casting out mechanism in society, an impulse to act on a perception of difference once it has been defined. This is not necessarily literal; it is at least initially a matter of perception and language. One can be cast out simply by being thought of as sufficiently different. He also suggests that to avoid this one must be able to pretend, to ‘play a game’ even if one is aware that this is in fact what is happening. Beiles

explores this notion in one of the untitled poems published in *Wordsworks* in 1975: “soon I began to think that whatever madness/ keeps people together is worth while/ man alone is frightened and can do nothing” (12-14). The refusal to play games, and/or the inability to do so is perceived as authenticity, a sort of ‘naked angelness’ for the Beats. In ‘Audience’ (*Ashes of Experience*) Beiles expresses this view towards a hungry street child: “to you I can read my poetry/ for you are already half-delirious” (4-5).

The notion of a society engaged in games and pretences in which people are coerced into fulfilling roles and obeying rules resonates with the Beat search for authenticity, and their belief that it may be found in madness. In a society in which, according to Laing, “sanity...appears to rest very largely on a capacity to adapt to the external world – the interpersonal world and the realm of human collectivities” (Laing in Phillips, 2005: 29) both individuality and authenticity can most likely be found underground because “this external human world is almost completely and totally estranged from the inner, any personal direct awareness of the inner world has already grave risks” (2005: 29). Being authentic, ‘baring your soul and brain’ as Ginsberg’s “angelheaded hipsters” (5) do in *Howl*, acknowledging the existence of your inner world, daring to show it to the outer world, even trying to reconcile the two in an attempt at integrity, is dangerous to the individual because it has no place in modern society. So like many other things which might be dangerous to the individual, and have no place in the straight world, it goes underground. The Beat guess that this sort of authenticity might be found on the outskirts, in the anomic nighttime mad streetcorner fringes of society, is not a bad one. Neither is Beiles’s hunch that something of value, something real in an over-industrialised world sustained on falsehood, lies in his poetry and his madness. The Beats do find, and so become concerned with finding, value, authenticity, and inspiration in the things (and the people who bear them) which society has discarded and banished.

Complementing Szasz’s ideas, Scheff suggests that

mental illness is nothing more than a label applied to violators of particular social norms and conventions...Mental illness, termed ‘residual rule-breaking’ by Scheff, is a violation of particular cultural norms with no explicit categorization. If an act cannot be labelled conventionally as, say, criminal, sick, or moody, it is given the catch-all tag, ‘mental illness’. (Samson, 1995: 75)

The lumping of all things inexplicable into a 'madness' category accentuates the potential heterogeneity of madness. For straight society, the idea is to differentiate all things different (them) from everything the same (us). Given the all-accommodating function of madness in society, it is not all that surprising that the Beats attribute so many different things to it, or that they find so many different meanings in it. The more vague, indiscriminatory and xenophobic society's 'reject' category is, the more heterogeneous, fertile, and interesting it is for groups like the Beats.

In a particularly conformist society, there seem to more 'outcasting' labels with looser definitions (easier to get into, more difficult to get out of). In America and perhaps even more so in South Africa in the 1950s relatively minor actions could get one labelled as 'different', because society was intolerant and norms were rigid, just as one could very easily be labelled a communist, or many other forms of 'deviant'. Feeling an affiliation for the mad was not such a great leap from just being liberal. Madness, though perhaps one of the more radical departures the Beats took into nonconformity and the anomic, did not function for them in this context very differently from blackness or hipness or any other form of beatness. Going to Rockland (provided you could leave) was a bit like going downtown. Going mad was not that much more far out than going to Morocco, or Paris, or Greece. In a way these are all just variations on the nature and location of the furthest island.

What the anti-psychiatrists were "promoting was that the so-called mad had something to say, and that it was worth listening to and taking seriously. Instead of incarcerating disturbing people in diagnoses and institutions, they suggested that we should start wondering where we had got our ideas about normality from" (Phillips, 2005: 5).

The anti-psychiatrists of the 1960s, with their commitment to therapeutic communities rather than mental hospitals, and their understanding of mental illness as existential crisis rather than malingering or neurological disorder, had seen madness as a quest for personal authenticity. Their therapeutic project was not to get people back to normal, but to show them how the need to be normal had driven them crazy. (Phillips, 2005: 4)

These concerns are essentially similar to those prevalent amongst the Beats. There is a shared awareness of and interest in the politics of individuality, freedom, and control in

society on a micropolitical level. Their work constitutes a similar extent of departure from the norm of their field, as Beat literature strives to depart from the literary canon which it saw as irrelevant and even oppressive in its time.

The symbolic interactionist sociology of Goffman and others develops from the Chicago School, which was influential in the 1950s. The ideas and methodology of this school result in the labelling theory of Becker, which, although primarily concerned with criminal and other forms of deviance, arguably develops into, or in close relation to, the sociological aspect of anti-psychiatry. Symbolic interactionism and related ideas seem to lend themselves to literature through both their methodology and through their being concerned not with bettering or explaining society, but with an almost indulgent appreciation of subcultures and their spaces.

This group of Chicagoans finds itself at home in the world of hip, Norman Mailer, drug addicts, jazz musicians, cab drivers, prostitutes, night people, drifters, grifters, and skidders, the cool cats and their kicks. To be fully appreciated this stream of work cannot be seen solely in terms of the categories conventionally employed in sociological analysis. It has also to be seen from the viewpoint of the literary critic as a style or genre and particularly as a species of naturalistic romanticism. (Goulder in Downes & Rock, 1998: 184)

As we saw in the discussion of the *Sacred Fix* plays, Beiles's concerns are similar to the ones addressed by Goffman and others, though of course Beiles is an artist, and explores his themes within the means, possibilities, and potentials of literature, necessarily different from the means of other types of non-literary texts. Possibly this aspect of sociology can be useful in understanding Beiles and the Beat poets, as well as the social and intellectual context which informed them.

In the 1960s Laing and his colleagues, concerned not only with the sociology but more so the philosophy of madness and psychiatry, having questioned the biomedical approach to mental illness and criticised social and medical attitudes governing the treatment of the mad, "not only attempted to further dissolve the boundary between madness and sanity, but to reverse the hierarchical relationship between the two" (Samson, 1995: 77). In trying to dismantle traditional views about madness, they created a heavy mythology of their own around it.

In Laing's *The Politics of Experience* (1967) and Cooper's *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* (1967), sanity was attacked and insanity elevated. 'Normal' life was depicted as a form of profound alienation. As Cooper (1967: 93) put it, 'psychotic experience may, with correct guidance, lead to a more advanced human state but only too often is converted by psychiatric interference into a state of arrest and stultification of the person'. (Samson, 1995: 77)

Like the Beats, they attributed something great, something they themselves desired or saw as lacking in society, to the mad. They also seemed to be reverting to much earlier notions of the mad as wise, as possessing supernatural powers or as shamanic figures in society, which is perhaps better than the conventional view that the mad should be locked up and preferably lobotomised, but not necessarily a much more useful one, especially when the modern social context is taken into account.

Like the anti-psychiatrists, the Beats challenge the understanding of mental health, that is, the supposed opposite of mental illness, as functionality rather than wellbeing. From a slightly different angle, for the Beats the ability (almost 'naturally' coupled with the desire) to function to conventional satisfaction does not denote a negative or positive status, a problem or a success. For them madness signifies other things than social problems, failures or tragedies, and one's completeness and happiness does not depend on sanity. If anything, for the Beats the thoughtless consumerist conformist masses are more of a social casualty than the mad people they seek to confine and control. In such ideologies the ability to conform is not an indicator of sanity or value. To some extent the Beats do not fully consider the wellbeing of the designated mad, instead seeing madness as a social position or secular saintliness separate from or beyond conventional emotions. The mad in the Beat context are at times so symbolic that they are not considered properly human. The ways in which Beiles often makes a spectacle of his madness suggest that he employs this 'symbolizing' process on himself, just as he makes a spectacle of his exile.

In an analysis of Ginsberg's *Howl* Paul Breslin notes that through the "extreme position" (Breslin, 1987: 29) taken by Ginsberg in the poem, which is in many ways anthemic of the Beat movement, "the crucial difference between madness and rebellion is lost" (1987: 30). He points out that "the rebel *chooses* to rebel, being somehow able to make a choice between accepting the demands of society and rejecting them. But the mad go mad

because they cannot help it. Madness resists authority only in a minimal way” (1987: 30). Nevertheless, it is this potential resistance, however minimal, which the Beats build on. Perhaps their adherence to this idea stems from the recognition that although madness offers relatively little resistance against the authorities, it is more insidious, and so more effective in resisting the unofficial, less institutionalised authority of the system through social structures and norms. It is the undermining, escaping, defying, criticizing of these social powers, at which madness is potentially adept, with which the Beats were more concerned.

Although he points out that there are power systems in play, that “once classified as mad, one is no longer held responsible for understanding authority and is therefore excused from compliance with it” (Breslin, 1987: 30), Breslin himself seems to attribute little autonomy to the mad in this context, possibly because he is evaluating madness purely as a means of protest, without taking into account the mythology and poetic thinking which accompany it in Beat writing. Furthermore, he does not acknowledge that being “excused from compliance” with society can still be a position from which to critique it, that though less effective in terms of political strategy it is still a means of refuge from society, a way to escape its demands, to take one’s leave of its ideology. It is also a way of gaining a space in which one can behave, think, speak and write as one chooses, which can be impossible while maintaining a ‘sane’ status in society. The downside is that this space occupies an inferior position in the social structure, a position pitied, feared or detested, but maintained. However, if one rejects these hierarchical values along with other social conventions and regulations, one might be liberated from the sense of inferiority as well. Crucially, “a person devoid of all wants, indifferent to whether or not he lives or how he lives, cannot be coerced” (Szasz, 1987: 298). Indifference is a mode of freedom, if one can tolerate the loss of desire in exchange for the loss of fear.

In addition, there is the Foucauldian idea that “the talk about the vilified or abnormal, far from repressing or silencing these, itself constitutes them” (Burman, 2002: 223). In other words madness, by implication socially constructed, gains ‘air time’, though not voice, by preoccupying those who wish to suppress, control or eliminate it, and so is a protest of

sorts by its very presence. For instance, if mental illness is viewed as “social distress” (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2002: 158) its existence is an indicator of social pathology, and the systems in place to control it belie a social (and socially created) problem. Almost regardless of our interpretation of it, madness suggests an anomaly, a rupture in society, celebrated by some and feared by others.

In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault re-assesses the history of madness in society, paying particular attention to the various roles or functions madness (or the various things which have at some point been designated as madness) has had in society, and accordingly (or sometimes not) how it has been responded to. Foucault’s tracing of madness through the rigidities and ambiguities of legal, medical, political, religious, social and cultural history indicates how much it has been used as a floating anomalie, an empty vessel for the agendas, fears and desires of society, but it also suggests that both of itself and in its social role, it has a constant, though not consistent presence. It seems that madness has always been loaded with the concerns of others, even as the concerns of the actual or designated mad have been silenced, to the point of becoming attached to ideas of normality, existing as a binary opposite rather than having a life of its own. The realm of the mad is most often defined by the sane, as the shaping opposite of reason, normality, civilization, sanity.

The boundaries of madness have often been approached, as Szasz points out, mainly by artists. Almost inevitably, necessarily even, they take apart some notions – pejorative, mistaken, romantic, naïve or otherwise – while reinforcing others. The Beats are certainly guilty of this, as is Beiles himself, but in some ways he comes closer to bridging the gap between writing about and writing from madness, to some extent he defines madness (a part of it, an experience of it, for it is not the one merged residual concept society’s definition insists on its being) from within, from himself. The ‘mad poet’ is and is not just a social construct, the way madness is and isn’t a metaphor, and poetry is and also isn’t just art.

For Foucault the liminality and ambiguity of the mad are central to understanding madness in its social and cultural role. He points out that initially the asylum was not a medical or religious space, though both science and the church have been involved in it, but an extension of the poor-house, in other words, a dumping ground for the unwanted and dysfunctional. It is perhaps ironic that in the 1950s the Beats seek out other, less organised ‘social dumping grounds’ – the city centres inhabited by addicts and outlaws, for instance, as the site of contemporary madness, which for them has much more than a medical or legal definition. “The walls of confinement actually enclose the negative of that moral city of which the bourgeois conscience began to dream in the seventeenth century” (Foucault, 2001: 56-57). What Foucault refers to here is the actual physical confinement of the mental institution, forcibly removing the ‘inappropriate’ from bourgeois sight, yet keeping them within social consciousness to serve as a definable ‘negative’. The liminal and ambiguous character of madness helps to create a coherent society with a solid centre, both in terms of the city from which all the ambiguous, unassimilated undesirables have been removed and the “moral city” of social imagination. In terms of this imaginable city the “walls of confinement” can be imaginary as well, and it is beyond the barricades of middleclass ideals that the Beats go in search of an alternative to the continuing “bourgeois dream”.

The mad poet is “the melancholy malcontent, clad all in black, disaffected, disdainful, dangerous, yet brilliantly discerning and diamond sharp” (Porter, 2002: 67). Having a part to play, one which the audience readily understands through a history of real and staged literary madmen, might make the isolating and misunderstandable experience of ‘melancholy’ a little more bearable. Beiles fits the part, and so becomes trapped in it, as in ‘Scribbling’ (*Ashes of Experience*):

scribbled into
a corner
by fate.
imprisoned.
who can take pleasure
in the view of the city
from a high cell window. (1-7)

The active 'scribbling' of the title suggests that it is by his own writing, even as he writes the poem, that Beiles places himself in this corner. Though he ascribes the blame to fate, he also indicates that he is active in his imprisonment. Because for him being a writer is part of himself, and being mad is part of his writing, he feels trapped, imprisoned and isolated. He sees the world from "a high cell window", but it is how he must see it in order to write about it, and therefore to be who he is.

'Terrible Dreams' (*Ashes of Experience*) conveys a tone of fear and sadness, born not only of the author's depression, but a sorrow at its presence as well:

My condition is lamentable – to me anyway.
I keep a kind of old flying machine stability
On a cupboard full of drugs
And as I fly through the day
I can hear my nerves creaking.
I look over the side of the cockpit
And below I see the horrors of enemy territory
- The mental hospitals.
All I can think of is writing as much as I can
While a semblance of sanity and strength
remains for me. (1-11)

The first line, with the qualifier "to me anyway" suggests the loneliness of his situation, the isolation of "my condition". Beiles relates his instability by telling of the "cupboard full of drugs" he has to rely on, and even then he can "hear" his "nerves creaking". Most of all, he is scared, "in a pathetic fear of madness" and "aware of the fragility of his own situation" (Valaoritis, 1991: x). He writes of "the mental hospitals" which he views as "enemy territory" into which he must not crash in his "old flying machine" self. But although he hates the hospitals, he is also apprehensive about his fate without them, which he sees as inevitable: "while a semblance of sanity and strength/ remains for me". He believes that he will lose his sanity completely, and with it the ability, or strength, to write. With or without drugs and hospitals, he foresees himself deteriorating and dreads the course of his madness. That he feels the need to write "as much as I can" before this happens suggests how closely writing and sanity, writing and functioning, writing and identity are linked for him, a complex set of relationships which he revisits in other poems. For Beiles writing seems to be a way of maintaining sanity and balance, even as he draws his madness, especially his manic episodes, into his work.

In the second part of 'Terrible Dreams', he regains a sense of wry humour:

If some small magazine editor happens to
drop into your office
Or into your soup in the form of a fly when
you eat at
The arts laboratory
Perhaps you can pull out this work for his
consideration.
Tell him I have ter[r]ible dreams (16-23)

Beiles presents himself as a 'mad poet', to the "small magazine editor" as well as to the reader. He is aware of the stereotype he is invoking, aware that having "terrible dreams" could make his poetry more attractive to the right-minded audience.

The imagery of flight from 'Terrible Dreams' and being trapped above the city in 'Scribbling', the sense of being suspended and isolated recurs in 'The Unwilling Trapeze Artist', in which Beiles again sees himself precariously situated and struggling to maneuver, not so much to safety as along what he sees as his fated trajectory. In this poem he addresses his audience as "you down there/ as small as ants" (1-2). He tells them that

I did not choose this way
And there is no other
And there is nothing to commend me.
If the world was built
In the image of my own madness
If the world was a circus of clowns and freaks
Would the animals take care of us? (13-19)

He sees the progression of his madness as inevitable, and he suggests that "if the world was built/ in the image of my own madness" it would be "a circus of clowns and freaks", a harsh and bitter self-evaluation. Perhaps because of his belief in the fatedness of his life, and his acceptance of his mental illness into his identity, he writes

And so I am content
And I give thanks
To the generous souls
Who mount on stilts
As tall as the Empire State Building
To reach up to me
With glasses of steaming water [streaming?]
Nearly overbalancing
When they stretch out their hands

That I may sip revival
Through a long straw
While making this inevitable journey. (20-32)

Again, the speaker is metaphorically elevated, and the distance between him and those who help him is vast. There is a sense of being almost out of reach. Beiles is sincere, yet as the metaphor of the poem, a trapeze artist, indicates, he still views himself as a spectacle, an act put on for the public.

In a review of *Ashes of Experience*, Walter Saunders notes, with regard to what he terms Beiles's "engaged" poems, that "Beiles identifies the pressures of the industrial world with the iron will and heartlessness of totalitarian dictatorship" (Saunders, 1969: 20). Within this context, "resistance comes from individual creativity" (1969: 20). Of the 'engaged' poems in *Ashes*, the most strikingly so is 'Hitler Still Lives', in which Beiles rages against the authorities who imprison him on medical grounds: "They tossed me in a cell/ And returned to their newspapers/ And football coupons" (1-3). What is striking here is how unimportant, how negligible the speaker feels himself to be to those who are now in charge of him, his sanity and supposed wellbeing. His sense of powerlessness and vulnerability is clear in the way he is "tossed" into a cell. "They emptied my pockets/ and dressed me in a smock of coarse canvas./ they took me to a place" (9-11) – things are done to him, and he has no agency in what happens.

He aligns the relatively insignificant, administrative authorities who have gained control of him with grand political ones, suggesting that they are all in effect the same, likening the police and mental hospitals to regimes like Nazi Germany, and accentuating how immense, overwhelming and frightening they are to the individual: "It was the time of shining black capes/ Sharp words and white batons./ The time of sirens and long black limousines/ Thugs on motorbikes like hoodlum pilot fish./ I told them Hitler was still alive" (4-8). In a way it is this comment which precipitates what happens next. As studies like Goffman's *Asylums* indicate, "the patient is in a no-win situation in the mental hospital because almost anything can be taken as symptomatic of mental illness" (Samson, 1995: 74). By telling them that Hitler is still alive as a way reacting to their

treatment of him, the speaker supports, in their view, the fact that he is mad, and therefore ‘invites’ their response to him – in a way he brings Hitler to life. The poem continues:

The place was full of poets
Singing odes to bullfighters.
They flung their words
Like carnations and roses
Into the arena
And were beaten with rubber truncheons
And their screaming brought the rain (21-27)

Beiles’s linking of poetry and madness, and his presentation of the poet as the persecuted individual, is revealing of his perception of himself in society. In this case the poets are presented as deranged, performing surreal symbolic actions, for which they are beaten. The linking of the rain and the violence meted out to the mad poets, the idea that “their screaming brought the rain” is interesting in that it suggests an invisible, uncontrollable metaphysical /spiritual link between them and the forces of nature. This affinity between them and the natural, or the authentic, is contrasted against the mechanical and artificial, with which Beiles aligns authority and control. What follows is a macabre but not unbelievable act of asylum protest by the mad poets/ poeticised madmen:

Undiscouraged they retired to the toilets
And floated groundnut shells in the pans
Or danced naked in pairs
Sporting their bruises like greasepaint
At a Fancy dress ball
Despite the television
Despite the drugs and electric shocks
The underground –
Born with the twilight
With cave painters and magic words –
Flickered on the walls like a lantern show
Fragile, embryonic,
Yet still resisting Hitler. (28-40)

The inmates protest “undiscouraged” in whatever ways are available to them, and one of their expressions of resistance is the use of their bruised bodies in a dance, a pathetic demonstration but one which allows them access to the natural, the real, the creative, all of which Beiles sets up in opposition to the industrial and authoritarian. Despite attempts to dumb them down and make them controllable, through “television/ drugs and electric shocks” the “underground” persists. This ‘underground’ is nocturnal – it is “born with the twilight” and taps into a Jungian notion of a ‘collective unconscious’ of a mythical past, a

ritualised spirituality and ancient creativity which features here as a community pre-existing contemporary society and its institutions.

Jung advocated that the collective unconscious holds “latent memories from mankind’s ancestral past” (Porter, 2002: 195), a sort of deeper, older, shared social subconscious, from which the archetypes informing much of our emotional and psychological lives originate. For Jung, the collective unconscious was also the origin of creativity, and could be discovered through art, as well as psychoanalysis.

The mad desperate protest dance in ‘Hitler Still Lives’ reaches this underlying life-force, the shambling of the brutalised ‘lunatics’ re-enacts and becomes some sort of ancient shamanic ritual, liberating, creative and sustaining. Although “fragile” (39), this underground archetypal strength survives and resists “Hitler” (40); that is, the brutal systemic social control which Beiles codes as ‘Hitler’ in the poem.

This underground force of creativity and resistance has, for Beiles, much to do with poetry. It is a personal configuration for him, but one which resonates with other ideas, notably the Jungian on the psychological front, and the romantic-revolutionary New Left /hippie ideology on the sociopolitical. It is to some extent a binaristic mode of thinking which groups the individual, authentic, mad, poetic, subversive, as having mythical ancient roots and being against and under fire from, but ultimately able to resist, all that is modern, brutal, heartless, authoritarian, systematised, and industrial.

A selection of Beiles’s poems was published in the British journal *Wordworks* in 1975. The six pieces, intended for a collection entitled ‘The Idiot’s Voice’, which was never published, appeared under that title alongside an interview. (The poems are untitled, so will be numbered in the order in which they appear.)

The second piece describes how the speaker, tired of being told that “the real life/ existed on the horizon” (2-3) “where at last we would find peace” (6) decides to end the horizon-ward journey. He “suddenly sat down in a barren spot/ and said this is the horizon” (8-9).

“After much argument” (10) he is left behind by the others, who are unconvinced by his assertion, “And soon I began to think that whatever madness/ keeps people together is worth while/ man alone is frightened and can do nothing” (12-14).

Essentially the idea is straightforward – it is scary being alone, so it’s better to stick with the group; it seems better to be a part of the society than to start an argument with it and be left behind. But the categories are inverted – it is not the argumentative madman who is left behind by the group, but the only sane man who “saw through their idiocies” (7) and the futility of their endless journey. He thinks that “whatever madness/ keeps people together” (12-13) might be worth indulging for the sake of security and productivity, though he does not understand it. Society is mad, he is sane, but manifesting this and arguing his point leads to being abandoned.

The third poem openly and viciously attacks the system, in particular as it is manifested through psychiatry – Beiles seldom loses view of the fact that the hospital is a face of the system.

The manufacture of paralytics
is one of our duties.
Dr. Knopf, working on the principles
of the blown egg introduced our
latest technique. A hole is made
on one side of the head as well as
the other and a tiny vacuum cleaner
is placed against one of the holes
sucking out the whole contents
of the cranium. And thus, paralysed
the blown eggs, as we call them,
are lashed together with copper
wire they form the basis of the
human battery the current of which
is used to recharge the emperor
and some of the courtiers. (1-16)

This satirical poem indicates not only Beiles’s loathing of the psychiatric system but also, even though it is exaggerated here, the immensity of the power it holds over individuals rendered anonymous, the force it is entitled to exert over them. Considered useless, they are subject to any form of abuse, and in a contradictory way are even used to fuel the hierarchical system of authority. If to be mad is to in some way elude the emperor’s

sovereignty, then to be de-brained and used as a macabre ‘battery’ “used to recharge the emperor” is a punishment which accentuates loss of autonomy and total servitude. In Beiles’s eerie mechanised society the metaphor of the disempowered giving strength to the figureheads of power becomes a reality – people are literally used to refuel the system which oppresses them.

The “blown egg” (4) idea is a nightmare vision of extreme psychosurgery; it is an exaggeration of the idea that the mad are made stupid to make them more controllable. The end result and main goal are to stop all ideas, delusional and otherwise; from a particular perspective to render the individual incapable of subversive, ‘wrong’ or nonconformist thought by force, since he was not able to shape his thoughts according to societal prescriptions of his own accord. Problem people are reduced, in this case in a literal way, to being things. In ‘Hitler Still Lives’ this is attempted through drugs and other forms of treatment, but whether through medication or surgery or just hospitalization, or even social perceptions, the point is the same, as is the experience of the victim. Individuality and subjectivity are under attack, negated to suit the rest of society, and his protests are all too readily misread as proof that this treatment is deserved or necessary.

The fifth poem also combines the dual evils of political and social power, placing the asylum as the pawn of their authority. “One midsummer/ on the train to moscow/ the whole ballet company got lost” (1-3). A search ensues, involving the police, because “this was mutiny, almost/ high treason as it was arranged that/ the company would be dancing before/ the president and other notables” (9-12). Once again Beiles brings the underlying politics to the fore: to escape, or become lost, or do what you want is disobedience to the authorities, and therefore an act of treason. It turns out that the ballet company left the train quite innocently and spontaneously, wanting to explore the countryside, which makes their escape all the more detestable to the authorities – they disregarded their role, seeing it as irrelevant to their desires.

What had happened was that the
company became enamoured of the
countryside when the train made

a stop between stations and had
in a body alighted and skipped
away through the fields, dancing
as they had never danced before
unconfined to the prisonlike stage (13-20)

They elude the police by “passing themselves off as gypsies” (22) which means that they are “not obliged to /show papers” (23-24) – they use the outcast role as a front providing the freedom of the unassimilated. Passing as designated vagrants, they can remain outside the realm of social control. But only for a while, because they are eventually caught “and for their unusual/ behaviour they were sent to a/ mental hospital outside Moscow” (26-28). The asylum is a punishment for “unusual behaviour”; it is a place for confining those who are too daringly or deviously free. Typically, the hospital is situated “outside Moscow” – mental hospitals are often outside of cities for logistical reasons, but also they are outside cities conceptually, on the fringes of sane, normal society. They are, according to anti-psychiatrist Aaron Esterson, “those places made to receive the malformed products of society, rejected, because having no commodity value they disrupt the smooth businesslike functioning of the system” (Esterson, 1970: 202).

In the second of the ‘Selected Catastrophes’ in *Sacred Fix* Beiles writes:

there is a way of committing suicide
called poetry.
there is a way of taking a knife
and carving from the infinite nothingness of the sky
a solitary cell
in which one spends a lifetime pacing about
occasionally shouting messages
through the barred cell window
at indifferent passers by. (1-9)

The image is similar to that of ‘Scribbling’ – the poet trapped and isolated in a cell of his own devising, his own writing. Far from being articulate or expressive, he is reduced to “occasionally shouting messages” at indifferent strangers.

there is a way of trying to create a universe
with all its constellations
from the view of people scurrying by
in the rain with their umbrellas up,
a way of ruling a nation of shadows (10-14)

Beiles has lost faith in his ability to create – his attempts at transforming his perceptions into literature, into a poetic “universe” reveal only pedestrians in the rain; no longer an omniscient author, he is just “ruling a nation of shadows” – it is pretence, an imagined power. All his poems, his thoughts, are nothing but shadows, and he is painfully alone amongst them, unable to write himself out of his confinement.

there is a way of imagining
one possesses all the secrets of the soul
and that this gift will provide one with freedom,
a way of imagining all the sights
not yet photographed by the travel agencies,
there is a way of believing
one has special dreams
that one is an individual
a poet! (15-23)

Everything he thought he was – gifted, “special”, an “individual”, a “poet” - was imagined, a lie constructed around himself. What he thought were special poetic qualities have only enslaved him to his idea of himself. Poetry is for him a matter of perception, imagination, and action, and because of the way he sees, thinks, and writes, he can be no other way, cannot escape his mad poet’s identity, and with it the isolation he feels, the need to write himself further and further away from others.

‘Observation’, from *Dowsings* (1979), is a dense two-page prose piece which seems out of place at the end of a small and rather mundane collection of poems. It is written in a semi-ethnographic or modernist travel narrative style, and the subject matter is part paranoid imagination, part anti-establishment allegory, part surreal dream narrative. It begins: “During the new regime we were detained for observation. The walls of the nightclub ward were covered with rush mats and placed against them were the totems and grotesque figures of the island to drive out evil spirits” (1-4). ‘They’, whoever they are, are supervised by “two primitively dressed attendants who told us we were certainly mad by Russian standards and needed attendance from the ju-ju man” (10-12). In this fantastical tale Beiles is merging various historical reactions to, beliefs about, and treatments of madness, or deviance associated with (or for want of a better explanation designated as) madness. So the “new regime”, with its sinister political connotations and “Russian standards” bringing a cold-war dread to the scene, is effected by “primitively

dressed attendants” who provide totems and ‘magical’ objects as a means of assisting the “ju-ju man” in driving out the “evil spirits” of the mad. This indicates the ancientness of the oppression and confinement of the mad, it shows the new system to be as quaint and strange and superstitious as the old attitudes it supposedly replaces.

What follows is a surreal ceremony, partly constructed from various burial and other community rites, with flowers, a hearse, and ritual dancing all performed in front of the bewildered group of which the speaker is part. Possibly the funeral-like ritual is for this group, the ‘mad by Russian standards’ themselves, as afterwards they are moved to a cemetery-like place and left there:

Now we are in the high walled land of the dead, trying to catch butterflies with the fish trap and sleeping on graves at night. We eat the offerings made to the dead. We play a simple form of monopoly with the dead money scattered about. We are told that our fate partly depends on the British Commercial Consul and we know that he would hate to upset trade relations between the two countries. (26-33)

The burial ground functions as a prison or asylum – clearly they are not free and there is no easy escape. This space has symbolic meaning and function “in the geography of haunted places as in the landscape of the moral universe” (Foucault, 1984: 135). Socially they are ghosts, politically in a no-man’s land.

The metaphor of death, of being as though dead, has to do not with their own experience and physical state (they are clearly very much alive) but with how they are perceived, and how they are placed by others. They are so different as to not be living, so removed as to be dead, sent away like a ‘ship of fools’. Their fate has, as the mention to the ‘British Commercial Consul’ suggests, to do with politics and money. Even more pointedly, the reason for their being kept in this place and seen in this way is completely artificial and arbitrary: “As for the Russian diagnosis” (34), that is, that they are mad, “we know that it is acceptable to the Commercial Consul for the time being because likewise British trade relations are involved” (34-36).

Writing about the emergence of asylums in modern society, Roy Porter notes that “the keys of St Peter had been replaced with the keys of psychiatry. The instituting of the asylum set up a cordon sanitaire delineating the ‘normal’ from the ‘mad’, which

underlined the Otherhood of the insane and carved out a managerial milieu in which that alienness could be handled” (Porter, 2002: 122). The cemetery in ‘Observation’ is such a confined asylum space, and though it is surreal it is believable in that the geographical delineation, the involuntary confinement and the social demarcation of the mad are ingrained in the metaphor of the cemetery in the narrative. As Porter’s comparison between the gates of heaven and those of the asylum suggests, the mad, not dead enough to go to heaven or hell, but not normal enough to live freely, are confined in a liminal space, a sort of strange purgatory.

In a way, the cemetery-inhabiting ‘ghosts’ of ‘Observation’ are a metaphor for the fact that those labelled mad are not considered to be “(fully) human” (Szasz, 1987: 223) in the social sense, for, as Szasz, explains, two interconnected reasons. People perform their identities in the social sphere – “our life is inherently, inexorably social: We act in the double sense that we behave and we perform” (1987: 222). Our ‘selves’ are acted out before others, and to a large extent constituted by that performance. “To be fully human, a person must thus possess both the *capacity to act* and the *opportunity to perform* before an audience that legitimises him as capable of acting and worthy of attention” (1987: 223). A lack of audience delegitimises the act (talking to oneself is popularly disregarded as a ‘sign of madness’), or renders the person socially incapable of acting (people, especially children, whose autonomies, beliefs or ‘selves’ are grossly disregarded or violated sometimes resort to ‘elective mutism’). The usual reaction to mad people is to not take what they say or do seriously, to ignore them and/or their actions – deciding that a problematic person is mentally ill is a way of not listening to them.

Accordingly, a person can lose or be deprived of his humanity in two basically different, but complementary, ways: by lacking or losing the capacity to act in the sense of ability, which is why children, the very old, and the very sick are often not considered to be (fully) human; or by lacking or being deprived of the opportunity to act in the sense of performing on the stage of life, which is why the mentally ill are often not considered to be (fully) human. (Szasz, 1987: 223)

The ‘ghosts’ in ‘Observation’ are in this sense ‘not (fully) human’ because, due to ‘The Russian Diagnosis’ they have been deprived of the opportunity to perform themselves in society. Their ability to act, their agency, has been forbidden, and they have no more sanction to act (therefore to be) than the dead.

Another observation concerning the metaphor of mental illness as death, from a subjective rather than theoretical perspective, comes from Antonin Artaud, whom Beiles mentions in 'Terrible Dreams' ("I fear the fate of Artaud" (12) and Carl Solomon quotes in 'Report from the Asylum', noting that "Artaud had undergone both electric and insulin shock-therapies during his period of confinement which lasted nine years and terminated with his death in March 1948" (Solomon, 1960: 139). Artaud wrote: "I died at Rodez under electro-shock. I say dead. Legally and medically dead...I have my own memories of my death at that moment, but it is not upon them that I base my accusation" (Artaud in Solomon, 1960: 139). Solomon explains this as follows: "What he describes above was the experience of us all, but with Artaud and so many others, it stopped short and became the permanent level of existence: the absence of myth represented by the brief 'death' was accepted as the culminating, all-embracing myth" (Solomon, 1960: 140). Beiles himself was treated with electro-convulsive therapy, though did not consider it particularly effective, and tended to view it as an attempt to dumb down, even to completely obliterate the individual. He had more faith in drugs to control his symptoms, and especially in analytic psychotherapy as a possible means of treating (his) mental illness at its cause or origin.

Being considered otherwise useless, the banished 'ghosts' are put to work "keeping the graves neat" (49), with the result that "the ju-ju man pronounced that at last we were cured and as cemetery attendants we are now part of the proletariat" (52-53). Being workers, they are no longer insane. Being useful has brought them back to social life. However, "we are still prisoners" (53) and through an intricate and ridiculous web of trade and smuggling relations, they "cannot be extricated for the moment as any attempt to get us out might touch off a world war" (62-63) according the Commercial Consul. Being insane they are confined in a cast out 'dead' space of society, a cut off liminal space, unwanted but not free. 'Cured' they are the proletariat, again productive and therefore integrated, but trapped and imprisoned in their role.

In these texts madness features as Beiles's personal experience – predominantly one of isolation – or as a social concept, woven into Beiles's personal politics. He uses it to define himself as a writer, in ways which mostly subscribe to but sometimes differ from Beat ideology, and to engage in sociopolitical issues particularly relevant to when he was writing these poems.

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