

ABSTRACT

Female characters in fiction are often presented as existing within the confines of sexuality, marriage and motherhood. Like their real-life models, they are expected to conform to the image of respectability conferred by these activities. Any departure from conformity leads to social disapproval and punishment. Madness (even moreso than death) is the price paid by the woman who dares to rebel, to disturb the social definition of the "respectable" female. Women writers have sought to present female characters in the process of attempting to transcend this traditional definition to the extent where the imposed restraints no longer have power over them. Madness, therefore, becomes re-defined as a condition of infinite possibility for the woman who is not at ease within society's imposed definition. Disintegration and re-integration are necessary conditions in effecting change and madness becomes a metaphor of the experience. The texts are analyzed by focussing on the experience of madness as it parallels the female search for self-authenticity.