

Echoes of Schizophrenia: Anti-Psychiatry and the Fragmented Self in the Works of Lessing, Roethke and Pinter

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Abstract

This study explores the depiction of mental health in recent English literature, focusing on schizophrenia through works by Doris Lessing, Theodore Roethke, and Harold Pinter. Utilizing the theoretical framework of anti-psychiatry, the analysis identifies themes based on character analysis and the authors' histories of mental health issues. The study concludes that authors like Lessing structure their work around ideas prevalent in the Counterculture movement. One main theme observed is the use of splitting and multiplicity as defense mechanisms by characters. In Lessing's works, schizophrenia is portrayed as a split in personalities and multiplicity. The splitting of the self, considered a defense mechanism by anti-psychiatry, is explored, though sometimes unsuccessfully. Another significant theme is illness serving as a source of inspiration for the authors' works. Authors like Roethke, who faced mental health issues, drew inspiration from their experiences, reflecting a broader trend where authors incorporate personal trauma and experiences into their characters. The final theme observed is the social transgression and oppression experienced by schizophrenic patients from caregivers, healthcare professionals, and family members. Particularly in Pinter's works, mental health patients are depicted as degraded and discriminated against, facing oppression and transgression from external sources.

Keywords

Splitting, Multiplicity, Defence Mechanism, Anti-Psychiatry, Social Transgression and Oppression

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextual Background

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of schizophrenia and its various

manifestations in literary texts from the modernist and postmodernist periods, grounded in the critical theory of the post-Kleinian English school on psychosis. Schizophrenia is defined as a condition primarily characterized by a disruption in the “normative” use of language and a disorder in the formation of verbal thought (Ritunnano & Bortolotti, 2022: p. 953). The primary objective is to establish a critical framework for interpreting and decoding schizophrenic language in literary texts, examining the contributions of both psychiatry and literary hermeneutics to its understanding.

This study attempts to analyze the relationship between the schizophrenic process and the creative process itself. It aims to theorize a “rhetoric” of schizophrenic discourse (Ong, 2022: p. 23), analyzing the recurring tropes and structures reflected in literary works. Additionally, it seeks to propose a critical basis for the literary and linguistic aspects of schizophrenic writing, focusing on themes such as the initiatory journey through madness and the psychological or metaphorical double, reflecting the concept of the divided self, as described by R. D. Laing (Ferguson, 2021: p. 59). In schizophrenia, this division of personality is understood as a defense mechanism that, when elaborated in literary form, produces characteristic linguistic and thematic resources that make up the “schizophrenic language” (Perrotta, 2020: p. 5).

The literary corpus chosen for analysis includes works by three authors from America and Britain, spanning different genres: novel, poetry, and playwrighting. These writers inherit the tradition of modernism, characterized by a high degree of linguistic, thematic, and conceptual experimentation. Specifically, Pearson, Rennick-Egglestone, and Winship link modernist literary sentiment with certain cognitive and expressive characteristics of schizophrenia (Pearson, Rennick-Egglestone, & Winship, 2022: p. 58). This study focuses on authors who follow the Modernist tradition in their works: Doris Lessing (British novelist), Theodore Roethke (American poet), and Harold Pinter (British playwright and screenwriter). The analysis aims to examine the features of schizophrenic language in the works of these authors and identify the social and cultural factors influencing their writings. Specifically, for British authors, this study attempts to relate their work to the cultural context, considering it not only as a political movement but also as an example of the Counterculture in relation to mental health issues and their treatment. The analytical bases adopted in this study draw from the “anti-psychiatric” ideas of R. D. Laing, David Cooper, Aaron Esterson, and others (Morgan, 2022: p. 361).

1.2. The aim and Objectives

Mental health issues have increasingly become a topic of discussion and concern in contemporary society. Literature, as a reflection of societal attitudes and experiences, plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of mental health. This study aims to explore how mental health is represented in contemporary English literature, focusing on specific authors and their works. The objectives are:

- To identify and analyze the portrayal of mental health issues in selected works of contemporary English literature with a focus on schizophrenia.
- To examine how characters and narratives in the works of different authors from different genres reflect schizophrenia.
- To explore the cultural and social contexts influencing the representation of schizophrenia in literature by authors such as Lessing, Roethke, and Pinter.
- To assess the potential implications of literary representations of mental health for readers' perceptions and understanding of mental illness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Anti-Psychiatry

The basic philosophy of anti-psychiatry is that illness is a physical concept, and therefore cannot be applied to mental disorders as they do not show any type of physical pathology. For proponents of anti-psychiatry the notion of mental illness is a series of attitudes and behaviours that the individual is forced to adopt, and which are judged with a number of specific cultural and social criteria that consider them “not -normative”, and, therefore, sick and deviant (Morgan, 2022: p. 365). The main claim of anti-psychiatrists is that “madness” cannot be extrapolated from its environment, from the complex social and cultural networks and from Western civilization itself, which with its hierarchy and social mores can precipitate emotional instability and alienation in its most vulnerable members, those incapable of solving the double binds that “homo socialis” has to face daily (Burston, 2020: p. 164).

The term “anti-psychiatry” serves as an umbrella for a group of psychologists and psychiatrists who, during the 1960s, challenged the established psychiatric norms. It does not appear until 1967, in David Cooper's book *Psychiatry and Anti-psychiatry*. By the time this term entered the sphere of countercultural discourse, however, the theoretical and practical foundations laid by phenomenological philosophers such as Thomas Szasz, Gregory Bateson, R. D. Laing, and Cooper himself had already been established (Beveridge, 2022: p. 435). Anti-psychiatry emerged from the dynamic exchange of ideas between Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, and North America. However, its influence extended beyond these regions, permeating through political and social climates to cities such as Milan, Brussels, Paris, and others (For instance, the Heidelberg clinic in Germany emerged under the influence of the alternative communities advocated by antipsychiatrists) (Balbuena, 2023: p. 1309).

Despite its character of opposition to the norm, which draws from its countercultural roots, anti-psychiatry as a fight against normative psychiatric practice is not born from its margins, but from its own core. This movement is always postulated by members of the psychiatric community as an attempt to reform these institutions, since the objectification and lack of humanism in the doctor-patient relationship makes psychiatry become part of the problem, and not of the solution to mental illness (Serra, 2023: p. 149). This stream of thought,

which tended towards systematization, began to show greater interest in the motivations behind symptoms rather than the symptoms themselves. It emphasized the descriptive nature of investigation into the patient's unconscious psyche. In the years that followed, there was a notable shift in focus towards dynamic and functional criteria, moving away from mere symptom descriptions and categorization. This change was influenced, in part, by the disappointment within the field of biological psychiatry, which struggled to uncover new causes and effective treatments for psychiatric disorders. The "medical model" criticized by anti-psychiatrists (Burns & Hall, 2021: p. 198) assumes that schizophrenia and madness in general have physiological origins within the individual himself. Building on this idea, the focus shifts towards organizing a cluster of symptoms into what are termed "syndromes," seen as reflections of underlying health challenges. Different therapies are then tailored to address these syndromes, ranging from medication to electroshock therapy, and in some instances, even lobotomy. Laing offers a critical perspective on this approach, commonly known as the medical model. He argues that it tends to valorise behaviour conforming to societal norms as inherently positive, while labelling deviant behaviour as pathological. This, in turn, equates conformity with mental well-being without accounting for the potential destructiveness of the social systems in question (Balbuena, 2022: p. 316).

The role of anti-psychiatry and alternative communities, which had the support of important thinkers and cultural leaders of the time, also finds expression in literature. Doris Lessing, Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, and Peter Shaffer are among the authors who embraced anti-psychiatric principles, and their works will be analysed in our study. During the 1970s, the anti-psychiatric movement lost much of its virulence, becoming homoeopathically absorbed into the system. Even today, it is not difficult to find its influence in a more understanding attitude towards mental illness and greater empathy towards the patient (Maggiacomo, 2023: p. 38). Organizations such as the Philadelphia Association still exist, dedicated to training psychotherapists with an empathetic approach to mental illness. On the other hand, as the radical ideals of anti-psychiatry were gradually embraced and understood, their perspectives on the societal and environmental influences shaping mental illness offered a crucial counterbalance to overly biomedical approaches. This evolution helped prevent the reduction of mental distress to a mere chemical or biological occurrence (Ferguson, 2021: p. 69).

The fundamental thesis of anti-psychiatry is, as used in the analysis section of this study, the rejection of the deep-rooted concept of mental illness as a mere biopsychic abnormality, and the effort to find its origin in a historical-social and cultural context. Traditional medical models and treatments, particularly psychiatric hospitals, are rejected on the basis that they deepen social alienation rather than facilitate healing, fostering environments that perpetuate and entrench behaviours labelled as deviant (Mahoney, 2023: p. 98). Consequently, these closed institutions are supplanted by a range of alternative communities, as previously mentioned. The perspective shifts from viewing the psychotic individual

as an object to be fixed and reintegrated into society to recognizing them primarily as human beings, victims of a pathogenic system deeply entrenched in societal malaise. This system compels individuals to confront a series of contradictions and irresolvable conflicts, leading to their maladjustment or “madness” (Double, 2020: p. 478).

This “madness” is nothing more than a label applied to what is seen as a social deviation, which serves so that mental institutions and traditional psychiatry, in the name of the family and the social group, after disturbing the subject, declare him sick and annihilate it through a series of aggressive treatments that, with the excuse of integrating, homogenize. Psychiatry is another form of social oppression similar to other institutions of patriarchal society (Family, School, Capital, State, Police, etc.) (Bleakley, 2024: p. 253). Schizophrenia is, therefore, a consequence of the repression and double binds perpetrated by the family as a micro-social representative of a broader society, and which very often leads to institutionalization. Psychiatry is a mechanism that reinforces repression, a type of institutionalized violence, consensual and accepted by society. This label, mental diagnosis, is arbitrary since it depends on the socio-temporal values and cultural ideology of the moment, and the definition of normality would therefore vary from one group to another (Snelson, 2021: p. 78).

2.2. Representations of Madness (Mental Illness) in Literature

The analysis conducted in this study is alternate between two different, although complementary, definitions of madness: the clinical definition (with the reservations and qualifications introduced by anti-psychiatrists) and the literary definitions. In both assessments, this study considers that there are no blacks and whites in the border or definition of madness and sanity, but rather that in the very wide area of grey in which the literary works that this study has analysed move, it is difficult to elucidate when the line of insanity is crossed, and which parts are mentally pathological or bordering on normal (Netchitailova, 2019: p. 1513).

To thoroughly explore the complex issue of the relationship between madness and creativity (in the case at hand, basically literary), we must consider a series of initial considerations, to which we will respond throughout our analysis. Questions such as what can be considered “madness” within the literary work, whether as part of the author’s experience or as a reflection in his characters, or how far the study of the social origins of the characters’ psychoses can take us, are found in the basis of our “anti-psychiatric” approach to literature (da Cunha Koch, Coughlan, & Cannon, 2022: p. 128).

Our embrace of a critical-psychological lens in literature finds its roots in a profound connection shared by both disciplines: a relentless quest to comprehend the intricacies of human behavior. In literature, characters serve as vessels through which we explore the depths of human psyche, including those labeled as “deviant” in our examination (Haralu, 2021: p. 39). In this interdisciplinary journey, we attempt to uncover the symbiotic bond between literature and psy-

chology. Psychology furnishes us with tools to dissect characters, writing styles, and biographical elements, while literature offers authentic glimpses into human experiences. These literary creations serve as mirrors reflecting real-life personalities, illuminating various psychological facets (de Bie, 2021: p. 45). Our approach not only bridges the realms of literature and psychology but also celebrates their reciprocal enrichment. It underscores the profound interplay between storytelling and the human condition.

This study based its analysis on theories of the psychiatrist R. D. Laing, and on his consideration of madness as a “social disease”. It is evident that creative souls, the literati, possess a unique sensitivity to the internal conflicts arising from social contradictions and pressures. These conflicts would be reflected in the personality and psychology of the characters in their works. The authors’ extraordinary sensitivity to social and mental problems, which is distilled from Laing’s theories, does not only affect the composition of their characters and works. As Venn states, in authors there is usually a high degree of introspectiveness and spending a lot of time on self-analyses, which leads them not only to seek medical or psychological help more frequently. But this interest in the mechanisms of their own minds also pushes them to reflect a greater amount of data about their psychic functioning in the work, to reveal a greater number of autobiographical aspects in their works (something that we will see in authors with a diagnosed schizophrenic disorder, like Theodore Roethke). Only from this interest of the author in knowing the processes that take place in his psyche, with the popularization of psychoanalysis and the study of the psyche, this study explains the various authors who have populated the pages of the literary works filling them with mental crises and split narratives that reflect psychic divisions (Venn, 2021: pp. 128-135).

Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska proposes three lines of analysis in the literature-madness environment, suggesting the existence of three different, although related, types of “literary madness.” First of all, there is the label of “mad writer”, a notion that comes from Plato and his conception of creative frenzy of the poet. A poet is understood not only as someone who expresses himself through poetry, but in its original sense as a creator who is inspired (or even possessed by divine) to become productively mad. These “crazy creators” would include our authors Allen Ginsberg, Theodore Roethke or William Burroughs. A fundamental consideration when approaching this line of analysis is to point out how suffering from some mental dysfunction is not a sufficient criterion to consider an author’s work as intrinsically or literary interesting. Both circumstances are bound neither by a causal relationship, nor by any form of bijective or transitive association. Our study does not try to justify the creation of any mentally ill person as intrinsically valuable, but rather to study how there is extraordinary creativity in some of these authors, creativity linked to their psychic experiences, and reflected in literary works of extraordinary quality (Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska, 2021: p. 225).

The second category is that of the characters (diagnosed or not), who suffer

from a mental illness, and in which the pathological experiences that these authors lived or that obsessed them are reflected. The obvious danger of this line of analysis is to consider that behind the character's pathological experience lies a mental pathology of the author, falling into "autobiographical fallacy" (McKinnon, Scott, & Sollee, 2011: pp. 210-231). Based on the assumption that the artist who creates a work in which characters or expressions of madness appear, suffers, in fact, some type of mental illness (the term "autobiographical fallacy" allows numerous applications, related to the identification between character and author). As Ngwira states, there is an inflation in discourses of madness, precisely because of this identification between the creator and his/her work (i.e. characters). Among these authors fascinated and concerned by the topic of the psychic exploration of schizophrenics, but not necessarily affected by any mental illness, is Doris Lessing whose works are analysed in this study along with those by Harold Pinter. The common feature in both these authors is that the origin of the madness of their characters lies a series of social problems, that is, the conception of madness as a result of fractures of not only individual character, but as a reflection of deep schisms in micro- and macro-social systems (Ngwira, 2021: p. 10).

Some other interesting critical-psychoanalytic bases are those of Norman Holland (1989), who considers literature as a way of developing submerged fantasies of the authors, which are reflected in their works and characters (the considerations are based on this critical vision, not only in literary but also psychotherapeutic studies, of artistic and literary creation as a therapeutic weapon) (da Cunha Koch, Coughlan, & Cannon, 2022: p. 231). The studies of Leslie Fiedler, who follows a Jungian approach, and who considers art an escape valve for all types of psychic instincts, are also precursors of our critical paradigm: in these lines of study, and others similar, we will try to develop our paradigm of analysis.

2.3. Major Themes about Mental Illness in Literature

Fragmentation, Splitting and Multiplicity

Within the context of literature that involves Schizophrenia the most common theme is division of oneself into multiple characters or self(s). This concept is also called double or doppelgänger. This notion has its roots in myth and folklore, appearing in numerous mythologies and legends from very diverse cultures. Given their archetypal, prelogical origin, the mental processes of division of the self that are shown in the form of doubles or twins do not have a logical background, in accordance with objective reality, but rather refer to primitive stages of consciousness far from Western Newtonian logic. The creation of doubles as a defence mechanism, and the projection onto them of desired or rejected qualities, is often reflected in literature connected with psychic exploration that reflects schizophrenic defences (also called psychic schisms, in which part of oneself is directly objectified through the imaginary production of a double) (Budny, 2022: p. 169). On the other hand, doubles are very often created

in literature unconsciously, and without the need to show mental breakdown, but usually with the intention of symbolizing ethical struggles between good and evil. In the authors who are the subject of this study, however, these doubles must always be understood as projected parts of a psychological whole, with various nuances that we will now face (Van Hove, 2022: p. 105).

As Van Hove states, doubling in literature usually symbolizes a dysfunctional attempt to cope with mental conflict. Enormous formal gains can result when endophysical conflict presents itself in the guise of a relationship between ostensibly independent characters in fiction. Familiarity, then, with the double or *doppelgänger* creates a complex and suggestive network of multi-references between literature, reader and experience of splitting of the self (Van Hove, 2022: p. 103).

Pinter, Shaffer, and many other authors use the literary canvas to project their selves in a series of polymorphic transformations, casting their inner experiences onto the world of page and stage. The protean artist, capable of adopting myriad forms (a topic we will discuss in depth when referring to Lessing and her work *The Golden Notebook*), thus voluntarily transforms himself into many selves, splitting into various aspects of himself, and identifying with the characters he creates (Park, 2022: p. 674). Moya Aguilar states that the main difference between the artist and the mentally ill is the ability of the former to present his creation in an acceptable way, to justify the survival of the irrational in the midst of our over-rationalized civilization. Literature gives form to the psychic reality of the split of the self, often adorning it with perfect symmetries that are due to the fictitious reworking of psychic material. The splitting and duplicity reflected in the literary work also present, on numerous occasions, a bias of torture (Moya Aguilar, 2020: p. 36). Olan, Lindy, and Richmond argued that literature begins with an effort to evolve ego-preservative strategies in fantasy. On the symbolic level, this study analyses many of the representations of the doubling or kaleidoscopic multiplication of the self as defences designed to protect the internal self, along the same defensive line that Laing encoded (Olan & Richmond, 2023: p. 33).

The inherent peril in adopting this defence mechanism of multiplication, fragmentation, and mirroring lies in the potential impoverishment of the ego. Rather than encountering consistent external stimuli that resonate with the original personality, the ego is tasked with assimilating a spectrum of reactions, sometimes from conflicting personalities, provoked by its actions in others. Moreover, the true self, the inner self, always remains in the shadows, protected like a chess king by the various pawns offered in gambit to the world, hidden behind a myriad of masks, thereby losing the opportunity for development and transcendence (Gladden Walker, 2023: p. 78). Hançer suggests that the mask, over time, has been worn so frequently that it has erased the genuine features beneath it, revealing not an authentic self but merely an empty spirit: the act of splitting it only results in its fragmentation and demise (Hançer, 2022: p. 38).

Social pressure, repression and creativity

During the emergence of Laing's psychiatric concepts in the United Kingdom

and their spread to the United States, Lavery identifies a parallel movement in sociology concerning the management of social deviance (Lavery, 2021: p. 79). The labelling theory finds its foremost proponent in Howard Becker, who characterises deviant behaviour—including mental illness, by analogy with crime or substance addiction—as behaviour labelled as such by society. Madness, as a deviation, maintain the defenders of the labelling theory, is the result of a process by which certain individuals and their actions receive the label of “deviant” within a broad social context, since they are on the margins of the socially accepted norms and values. Therefore, it is something that originates from the social sphere, and consequently, arises from collective action and interactions among individuals. Thus, its meaning must be sought within this matrix of interactions (Sboui, 2023: p. 49).

A fundamental concern shared by labelling theory and anti-psychiatry is the question of power dynamics: it is those in positions of authority who dictate what is deemed deviant versus what aligns with societal norms. The powerful, or those whom society legitimizes to decide, impose their definitions of normality precisely on those who do not have the power to justify their vision of the world and their actions, and thus the subject only has two options: blindly submit to said definitions, or develop one’s own identity, knowing that this can lead to social ostracism (Chowdhury, 2023: p. 98). According to Beardsworth the use of labels also perpetuates marginalization. Once a group of people has been defined as deviant, there is a tendency in themselves (reinforced by the, sometimes very intentional, society around them, or even their own family) to view themselves as deviant, which only reinforces the same behaviour for which they were labelled as deviant the first time (Beardsworth, 2022: p. 198).

The model adopted by the sociologists who defend the labelling theory, when isolated in the interpretation of madness as deviant behaviour, conceives the most common psychiatric practices of the time (based on imprisonment or seclusion and the subsequent social annulment of difference through social “re-education”), as the actions of a power group legitimized by society to define what is madness and what is not, and adapt the behaviour of those labelled as sick to the social norm (Ryan-Bryant, 2022: p. 102). Laing and the anti-psychiatrists found numerous points of connection with these sociological ideas in their criticism of conventional psychiatry, especially in relation to hospital hierarchization and the dehumanization of the patient. In section four of this study, there is detailed discussion on how social pressure and oppression is applied on people with mental illnesses while discussing the works of Pinter.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Philosophy

This study adopts an interpretivist philosophy, aligning with the view that social phenomena differ significantly from natural phenomena and thus, require distinct research methods. Our aim is to explore how mental health issues are

represented in contemporary English literature, prioritizing human experiences, feelings, and perceptions. Given the highly subjective nature of these elements, a positivist approach, which relies on the objective methods of natural sciences, is unsuitable. Instead, interpretivism allows for a detailed and in-depth examination of each author's unique perspective, facilitating a richer understanding of the intricate ways mental health is depicted in literary works (Ma & Ma, 2022: p. 11).

3.2. Research Approach

This study employs an inductive research approach, which is characterized by making general observations and detecting common patterns and themes that ultimately shape and develop a theory explaining the research phenomenon. Unlike the deductive approach, which starts with existing theories and hypotheses to test their applicability, the inductive approach begins with observation and moves towards theory development. Given that interpretivism is often paired with an inductive approach, and considering the subjective nature of this study, a deductive approach is unsuitable (Proudfoot, 2023: p. 312). The inductive approach has enabled this study to identify common patterns and themes across works by different authors and genres, illustrating how various authors have depicted different aspects of schizophrenia in their literature.

3.3. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design, a natural choice for examining extensive texts such as novels, poetry, and plays. This approach facilitates the collection of rich, detailed data and allows for an in-depth analysis of how schizophrenia is represented in contemporary literary works. By focusing on non-numeric data, qualitative research provides comprehensive insights into the feelings and experiences of authors and their characters who grapple with mental health issues, particularly schizophrenia. While qualitative methods are often critiqued for their susceptibility to personal bias, they offer a nuanced interpretation that quantitative methods, with their emphasis on objectivity, may lack. Thus, the qualitative design of this study enables a profound understanding of the complex portrayals of mental health in literature, addressing the intricate interplay between authors' experiences and their creative expressions (Pilarska, 2021: pp. 64-83).

3.4. Sampling Technique and Data Collection

Since, this study is focused on recent literature in English therefore to ensure diversity this study adopted purposive sampling technique (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020: p. 11). Using purposive sampling technique, this study chose three main authors whose works belong to different genres and are acknowledged for high quality creative works. The selection criteria for authors in this study were based on research objectives. The researcher chose authors who are famous for their works

and quality as well as famous for including psychological issues in characters of their works. However, to ensure diversity the researcher selected one novelist, one playwright and one poet.

The first author selected is Doris May Lessing (1925-2013), a renowned British novelist and Nobel Prize laureate. Over her prolific career, she published more than 50 novels and numerous short stories. Lessing's work is celebrated for its exploration of complex social, cultural, and political debates, with a particular focus on psychological issues. This underlying focus is most prominently evident in her acclaimed novel, *The Golden Notebook* (Callaghan, 2021: p. 28).

The second author depicted is Theodore Roethke (1908-1963), the celebrated American poet, who garnered numerous awards throughout his career, including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Considered one of the most influential poets of his time, Roethke's personal battles with mental illness, particularly his nervous breakdowns, left a significant mark on his poetry and plays. His diagnoses of neurosis and psychosis deeply coloured his work, infusing it with raw and profound reflections of his struggles.

The third author selected for this study is Harold Pinter (1930-2008), a renowned British playwright and Nobel Prize laureate. Pinter was celebrated not only for his theatrical achievements but also for his activism against political oppression, which was a recurring theme in his works. He was known for his vocal opposition to wars and his pointed criticism of political leadership in the UK and the USA, particularly regarding conflicts in Iraq. With a repertoire of over 29 plays and 15 dramatic sketches, Pinter's versatility extended beyond playwriting; he also excelled as an actor, director, and screenwriter. Psychological themes and the experiences of individuals grappling with mental illness were common motifs in his works. Notably, Pinter himself faced mental health challenges throughout his life and adamantly opposed psychoanalytic treatments, viewing them as oppressive (Almansi & Henderson, 2021: p. 102).

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis techniques serve as powerful tools for researchers, allowing them to transform raw data into meaningful insights and interpretations. In this study, we chose thematic analysis as our method of data analysis. Thematic analysis is known for its ability to conduct detailed and critical examinations of text, presenting findings in a narrative format that highlights common themes and categories (Kiger & Varpio, 2020: p. 849). Through thematic analysis, we were able to uncover recurring themes and patterns within the works of authors and critics, particularly in relation to mental illness and schizophrenia. This process enabled us to craft a rich narrative, organized around individual authors, which we present in the following section.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Doris Lessing: Split and Multiplicity as Schizoid Defenses

According to Aryan the division into two or more fragments is the most com-

mon of schizoid defences. These are desperate attempts to maintain a certain personal “integrity” in the face of a family and social environment that is experienced as hostile. Doris Lessing’s novels take up this defence mechanism by analysing how women in the society of the 60s are forced to resort to internal division to find a possible way out of their situation within the social and family microcosm (Aryan, 2020: p. 39). In Lessing, however, rather than division there is fragmentation, since one cannot find pairs of characters that represent the split self of the protagonists, but rather different groupings of alternative and incomplete selves composed of couples, triads, and even groups of more members, in which each element represents a fragment resulting from the split of the original self (Pires, 2023: p. 89).

In addition to enriching the psychological analysis of characters, Doris Lessing’s work offers inspired reflections of multiplicity and fragmentation. Through a mosaic of literary styles, points of view, and voices, Lessing attempted to explore the theme of self-fragmentation, rendering it as an intricate composition of diverse perspectives rather than a monolithic entity (Liu, 2022: p. 67). For instance, Lessing momentarily halted the Martha Quest novel series to pen *The Golden Notebook*, perhaps simultaneously exploring themes and characters across both narratives. Both *The Golden Notebook* and *The Four-Gated City* can be viewed as cohesive wholes, each reflecting various facets of similar themes. This interconnectedness invites comparative analysis, allowing for exploration of differences, similarities, repetitions, and contrasts between the two works (Liu, 2022: p. 56).

It is precisely the concept of repetition that is a key idea in the different psychoanalytic formulations. In the specific context of anti-psychiatry, rather than repetition, one could speak of fragmentation and multiplication when addressing the splitting of the self. Each of the personality fragments resulting from the division of the schizophrenic, despite having their own peculiarities and representing different aspects of the original self, shares similarities and sometimes even exhibits symmetry. This concept is intimately connected with the idea of repetition; therefore, doubling can be observed. While Lessing is aware of the existence of an entire literary-symbolic tradition in the figure of the “double” (Chatterjee, 2023: p. 89), as a writer already immersed in postmodernism, and undoubtedly influenced by Laing’s notions, she launches into play with the concept of the double and blurs it, multiplies it and disseminates it, trying to discover its literary and (as Laing proposed) healing possibilities (Aryan, 2020: p. 79).

The concept of the doppelgänger, which began to be developed in literature in the 19th century, is inherently subversive, as it challenges the notion of the individual’s homogeneity and uniqueness. It dares to depict the individual as divided into two distinct parts, often representing opposing impulses, typically in moral terms of good and evil. However, the “classical” double is always masculine, and this is precisely the concept that Lessing sets out to radically subvert (Kumar, 2022a: p. 4952). Thus, in *The Golden Notebook*, we observe pairs of female

doubles (Anna/Molly; Anna/She), and male doubles of a female self, such as Saul/Anna, Tommy/Anna, or Nelson/She. In *The Four-Gated City* (which echoes many of the assumptions of the aforementioned work in its characters and structural organization), we also find pairs of characters with a duplicitous relationship (Martha/Lynda or Mark/Martha), and even “triads” (Martha/Lynda/Mark) (Boileau, 2023: p. 157), in which each element represents a different split part of the original self. However, none of her works feature pairs of male/male doubles, and the mere appearance of triads or groups of doubles transcends the classical notion of the *doppelgänger*, opening new possibilities for the interpretation of split personality (Kumar, 2022b: p. 10894). This challenges the humanist concept of an integrated and unified self, ushering in the postmodern notion of the subject as a social and cultural construct.

Therefore, in the works of Lessing, schizophrenia is presented as a split of personalities and multiplicity which coincides with anti-psychiatry. The splitting of the self is, for anti-psychiatry, a defence mechanism that, despite sometimes being unsuccessful, hides a possibility of cure. It is interesting to note how in *The Divided Self* by Laing and in the two works by Lessing considered in this study, (*The Four-Gated City* and *The Golden Notebook*), it seems that contradiction of personalities provide a basis for progression of characters. Indeed, in Lessing’s novels it can be observed that the main characters, Martha and Anna, not without certain reservations, contrast, relate, dialogue, even confront each other, with those others (Olaru-Poşiar, 2022: p. 68). Consider the following excerpt, “*And standing there, feeling herself [=Martha] (or rather, the surface of herself) to be a mass of fragments, or facets, or bits of mirror reflecting qualities embodied in other people*” (Quotation 371). Thus, the groups of doubles composed of two women in Lessing’s works maintain almost dialectical relationships with each other: united and apparently similar, yet intimately opposed. It is from this contrast, from the oppositional relationship between the differing aspects of both personalities, that growth arises.

4.2. Theodore Roethke: Illness as Inspiration

As discussed earlier, authors such as Lessing dramatize the theme of madness in their works, giving narrative form to the metanoic journey that Laing theorized. In this section the study focuses on another literary genre, poetry, more related to personal memory. In poetry, the boundaries between author and poetic voice are diluted. More specifically, in the case of Theodore Roethke many analysts observe a substantially biographical creation, which tries to reconstruct the search for identity that occupied the author’s entire life. The poetic voice and what is narrated are inextricably linked, and Roethke’s eventful mental life is, in this way, reflected not only in his psychic journey, but also in his poetic one (Armstrong, 2020: p. 303).

Almohammed and Mahmoud stated that Roethke’s poetry is completely autobiographical in the broadest sense and entails a compulsive and continuous reassessment of the nature of identity. It is an identity, as discussed in this study,

which is divided and split in the sense that Laing gives it, and whose difficult and risky reconstruction is poeticized in much of Roethke's work (Almohammed & Mahmoud, 2022: p. 880).

Roethke's treatment of autobiographical events in his poetry invites us to establish relationships between the moments of psychotic crisis that he experienced and the writing of his poems. For Almohammed, Younis, and Mahmoud the very qualities that made him a poet seem to have been the ones that made him ill, i.e. his sensitivity and his energy. Roethke's experience as a psychiatric patient includes five hospitalizations in clinics on two continents, several periods of sick leave due to mental illness at the different universities where he worked as a professor, and at least one series of documented electroshock sessions. The tendency to analyse Roethke's creative process in terms of and in dependence on his psychological process begins with Allan Seager, which specifically emphasizes the relationship between composition of *The Lost Son and other Poems* and as a series of psychotic attacks that he suffered during 1945 and 1946. In the months prior to its composition he was admitted to Albany General Hospital and the Leonard Nursing Home in Londonville, New York (Almohammed & Mahmoud, 2022: p. 27).

Throughout his "journey" as a psychiatric patient, Roethke received very different diagnoses for his illness. Initially he was considered manic-depressive; he was also diagnosed with both manic-depressive neurosis and paranoid schizophrenia (Komura, 2020: p. 59). The common label of manic-depressive was accepted by Roethke himself, who defined his manic phases as a condition in which he achieved a state of integration with the universe, a sense of oneness where all is one and one is all, which brought him closer to mysticism (Kalaidjian, 2020: p. 378). In any case, Roethke found himself in an almost permanent state of paranoia, characterized by delusions of grandeur such as the unrealizable plans he formulated during the three summers spent as a resident historian in Robert Crouse's Hartland Area Project. He also exhibited unjustified aggressive behaviour, particularly towards authoritarian figures, throughout his education and professional development (Hirsch, 2020: p. 44).

In any case, what is surprising and admirable about Roethke's poetic work is his ability to transform an obstacle like mental illness—along with the social ostracism and stigma it entails—into a wellspring of inspiration for poetically exploring the quest for identity. It is at this juncture that Roethke utilizes his madness and fragile sense of self to serve as a spokesperson for humanity. In moments of introspection, Roethke appears to find a silver lining in his illness, seeing it as a source of creative power for poetic expression (Lavery, 2021: p. 75). Consequently, in his notebooks, he articulates the sensations accompanying a psychotic episode and the subsequent poeticization of these experiences.

"I suppose it's a dangerous feeling of power that you get after a successful duel with death. For some reason this illness seems to have shaken loose powers. I am alive with ideas, some bad no doubt, but there is more vehemence, more energy, more contempt, more love" (Notebooks, 34, #52)

Despite the praise of this “new vision” that sometimes shines through in Roethke’s observations regarding the psychic exploration that permeates his life and poetic work, the poet was also aware of the high price he had to pay in exchange for these new visions. His second vocation, that of teaching, was frequently hindered by his recurrent psychotic attacks. For Roethke, teaching offers interesting parallels with what he attempts to achieve through the writing of his poems: he explains that teaching too intensely can lead to becoming overly immersed in individual psyches, resulting in an actual loss of identity (Lowenthal, 2023: p. 384).

During those periods, however, in which he was able to practice as a teacher, Roethke identified positive similarities between poetry and teaching. Both serve as the last haven for modern individuals to shield themselves from the imposed social order and the institutions responsible for its enforcement. Both avenues enable the creation of a new order from which individuals can cultivate their own authentic identities, not necessarily conforming to social expectations (Angelou, 2022: p. 2115).

4.3. Harold Pinter: Social Transgression and Oppression

Pinter’s work suggests the origin of schizophrenia in the unequal relationships established between the individual and society. Family and social expectations, instilled feelings from childhood of being destined to fulfill a certain “role”, condemn non-conformists—those who decide not to adapt to pre-established plans; those who, in a word, transgress social norms, thereby endangering the very existence of said society (Kırmızı & Yıldız, 2020: p. 102).

Within the theme of transgression, which concerns Pinter deeply, and its repression, madness is one of the author’s most exploited aspects. This is precisely because it serves as a clear example of how a powerful group (society as a conservative bloc) dominates individuals who challenge its existence. Thus, *Hot-house*, an early work by the author from 1958, which was not released until twenty years after its completion [in 1980], is set in a psychiatric hospital (Şarman, 2021: p. 29). Here, the staff attempts to dominate through force, leading to a growing spiral of violence and madness among the inmates, blurring the boundaries between sanity and madness for both the protagonist and the patients collectively. The presence of blurred borders in Pinter’s work illustrates the destruction of monolithic concepts, a recurring theme throughout his works (Dunjerović, 2021: p. 147).

Pinter’s entire production is full of examples of the domination of difference, which usually plunge the dominated into madness or death (death taken here not only in its physical sense, but also as a metaphor for the death of identity, of what defines the individual). Thus, in one of his plays, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1980) Sara’s socially deviant and morally transgressive behaviour causes her to be institutionalized, as she attempts to follow an idiosyncratic pattern of action. She clashes with the rigid morality and hierarchical order of the socie-

ty of the century in which she lives (Arora, 2023: p. 898). Pinter's protagonists can choose to socially self-immolate, letting society destroy their identity, or die (metaphorically, isolated from society) by openly defying the status quo. In his play, *The Caretaker*, Aston, one of the two protagonist brothers, tried during his youth to challenge the system, but society rendered him powerless (figuratively and literally) through psychiatric treatment applied to correct his deviations (Roberts, 2022: p. 155).

In *The Dumb Waiter*, there are two characters: one, Ben, accepts orders without questioning them; the other, Gus, asks questions, investigates, tries to find reasoning behind the orders he receives (which would refer here to social imperatives). As a result, the latter has to be arrested and destroyed because of his refusing to be a mannequin. This character meets the end of himself.

It is precisely the opposite option, that of submission, that ends up being imposed on the protagonist in another play, *The Birthday Party*. He is threatened by two thugs, Goldberg and McCann, from an organization that is never identified but symbolizes society as a whole (Ingham, 2023: p. 17). This organization, through its two representatives, attempts to impose its own law—socially accepted behaviour—without any explanation or reasoning, but rather through conformity to the existing norms. Stanley is compelled to relinquish his identity and become a mannequin, allowing the two members of the organization to mould him until he conforms to the collective pattern, acquiring uniformity not only in terms of behaviour and values, but also physically: hence, Stanley's appearance on stage in the third act becomes uniform with the others. In this way, the primary objective of the society, which strives to reproduce endogamously, is achieved—that is, to create individuals who lose all distinctive features and present themselves as clones unquestioningly adhering to social dictates (Ingham, 2023: p. 37).

The vitriolic criticism that Pinter directs against the system is rooted in his belief in the moral obligation of the artist, as expressed by his contemporary John Wain: “The artist's function is to humanise the society he is living in, to assert the importance of humanity in the face of whatever is currently seeking to obliterate that importance” (Knittelfelder, 2021: p. 55). In his works, Pinter attempts to demonstrate, sometimes bordering on the absurdity reminiscent of his teacher Beckett, the alienation and submission to the system. Through theatre as a form of denunciation, he seeks to raise awareness of the state of alienation in which individuals find themselves.

Another outstanding point of Pinter's characters' interpretation of the world is their inability to apprehend the world around them. This difficulty in approaching the world according to the parameters that are considered “normal” is a decidedly intuitive feature in the analysis of schizophrenia (Ingham, 2023: p. 120). Thus, Pinter's works present a world on the brink of collapse, relatively safe but with the continuous threat of unknown danger. In reality, Pinter's characters are divided between two visions of the world: that of facts, which does

not satisfy them, and that of meaning, which they cannot understand (De Ornellas, 2020: p. 751). The senses of time and place are dislocated, ceasing to form a coherent whole and struggling between contradictory memories that threaten to transform the present, which emphasizes the fragmentation of the world that Pinter's schizophrenic characters experience and the anguish that such fragmentation produces (Lévi-Strauss, 2020: p. 117).

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the depiction of schizophrenia in recent English literature, focusing on the works of Doris Lessing, Theodore Roethke, and Harold Pinter. Utilizing the anti-psychiatry theoretical framework and drawing connections to modernist and postmodernist traditions, this research identified several key themes, provided critical insights, and suggested implications for future research.

The analysis revealed that these authors frequently depict schizophrenia through complex linguistic disruptions and divided selves, aligning with anti-psychiatric critiques of conventional psychiatric practices. Schizophrenia in the analyzed texts is often portrayed through fragmented narratives and multiplicity of voices, echoing the anti-psychiatry view that such symptoms can be understood as rational responses to an irrational society. Authors like Roethke draw from their own mental health struggles, suggesting a deep connection between personal trauma and creative output. This supports the notion that mental health challenges can fuel literary creativity. The works reflect the cultural and social milieu of their times, with British authors like Lessing and Pinter embedding their narratives within the Counterculture movement and its critiques of mental health practices. This contextual embedding highlights the influence of societal factors on the portrayal of mental health issues.

The study underscores the importance of viewing literary works as both reflective and constitutive of broader societal attitudes toward mental health. By analyzing how schizophrenia is depicted in literature, we can gain insights into historical and cultural attitudes towards mental illness and the potential for literature to challenge and reshape these perceptions. Future research should consider comparative cross-cultural analysis, investigating how schizophrenia and other mental health conditions are portrayed in literature across different cultural contexts, which could reveal universal themes and distinct cultural attitudes. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining literary analysis with insights from psychiatry, psychology, and cultural studies could provide a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between mental health and literature. Expanding the literary corpus to include more diverse authors and genres could offer a broader perspective on the depiction of mental health issues.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest or disputes regarding this study. The

research was conducted independently, and the interpretations and conclusions are solely those of the author.

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