MADMAN

Strange Adventures of a Psychology Intern

Instructor Manual

John Suler, PhD


Nurses Station
observation
(un) Locked Door
unit Entrance
Isolation Room #1
Isolation Room #2

Instructor Manual for
Madman: Strange Adventures of a Psychology Intern

John Suler, Ph.D.

This manual offers ideas on how to integrate the novel *Madman* into classroom activities. In these descriptions, I will refer to my *Teaching Psychology* manual that contains a wide range of resources (available in my collected works at johnsuler.com). *Madman* and *Teaching Psychology* concentrate on issues concerning mental health and illness, counseling, psychotherapy, interpersonal relationships, and personal growth, which applies not just to clinical courses, but many other courses as well. Some of the activities in this manual focus specifically on the novel, while others use *Madman* as a springboard to other learning experiences described in *Teaching Psychology*.

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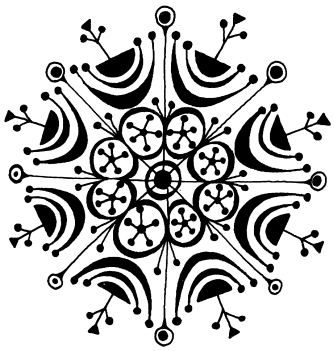

Topics Explored in the Novel

The Profession of Psychology

- the lifestyle of the psychology graduate student and intern
- the various motivations for becoming a psychotherapist
- life in a psychiatric unit of a teaching hospital
- the relationships among mental health professionals
- the training of the psychologist vs the psychiatrist
- the culture of psychoanalysis
- the significance of coffee among professionals
- how the psychotherapist relates to family and friends
- publishing in psychology
- burnout among professionals

Mental Health and Illness

- defining normal vs abnormal
- the prevalence of mental illness
- the interpretation of psychological tests
- the DSM and the process of diagnosis
- the mental status exam
- depression, schizophrenia, cognitive & borderline disorders
- personality styles (compulsive, schizotypal, narcissistic, etc.)
- stress reactions, insomnia, suicidal symptoms & assessment
- the role of family relations in mental health
- dreams and dream states
- catatonia and amnesia
- identity, selfobjects, and the sense of self
- ambivalence and conflict
- the concept of secondary gain

Mental Health Treatments

- inpatient vs outpatient treatment
- treatment of patients with severe psychiatric disorders
- psychoanalytic therapy
- analytic neutrality, transference and countertransference
- ways to conceptualize the role of the psychotherapist
- the role of confidentiality in psychotherapy
- mistakes psychotherapists make
- biological treatments, such as medications and ECT
- the effects of labeling
- the therapeutic aspects of journaling and fiction writing
- the therapeutic aspects of free association
- the therapeutic aspects of transcendent experiences
- computerized psychotherapy
- the I Ching as an eastern approach to personal growth

Psychological Theory

- psychoanalytic drive theory, behaviorism, Jungian archetypes
- the debates among different psychological theories
- biological vs psychological explanations of the mind
- neuropsychology and physiological reductionism
- psychophysiological measures and lie detection
- scientism and the limits of science in understanding the mind
- artificial intelligence

Discussion Questions

- What's it like to be a psychotherapist?

Many students comment that they have read about or seen movies and TV programs about psychotherapy from the perspective of the client. But now they are able to envision how the psychotherapist feels about it? What are the pros and cons of doing this type of work? Did students gain some new insights into the inner thoughts of the psychotherapist?

- After reading the novel, do you think you would want to be a mental health professional?

Discuss with students what inspired them about the novel, and what might have given them pause for thought about becoming a mental health professional. What indeed are the rewards as well as the stresses? I wrote *Madman* to give my students a realistic glimpse into the lifestyle of a psychologist working on a psychiatric unit. After reading it, many students feel inspired to become a mental health professional. Others are not so sure, usually because they think the work might involve too much responsibility and stress. I remind students that I exaggerated the pressures experienced by the intern Thomas Holden in order to create a dramatic story. A mundane workday of the typical psychologist wouldn't work well as a novel! Nevertheless, being a psychotherapist is a complex professional career and can sometimes be stressful.

- What's life like on a psychiatric unit?

Madman is a realistic depiction of life on a psychiatric unit. Encourage students to discuss the purpose of the various activities on the unit, like morning report, intake interviews, community meetings, and grand rounds – as well as how the structural design of the unit affects the patients and staff (e.g., center circle, isolation rooms, interview cubicles). Encourage students to discuss how the environment in *Madman* differs from the usual Hollywood versions of "the mental ward." How do private, state, and teaching hospitals differ? Some of the students in your class might have visited or worked in psychiatric hospitals. Ask them about how those places compared to the hospital in *Madman*.

- What are the roles of the various mental health professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, psychiatric nurses)? How do these professionals relate to each other?

Undergraduate students might know very little about the differences in training and professional responsibilities among the various mental health professionals. Graduate students might know very little about the "politics" of the profession. Encourage them to discuss what they learned about these issues from *Madman*. What happens in other hospitals and clinics might be very different. How so?

- What's your psychological analysis of Thomas Holden?

The story unfolds through the eyes of the psychology intern, Thomas Holden. Ask students what it was like living in his shoes. How would they describe his personality, motivations, self-concept, and conflicts. This is a "coming of age" novel, so what psychological transformations are occurring in Holden? What causes him to fall apart, and then recover?

- *What's more important in mental health: biology or psychology?*

During the novel Holden often ponders this question about whether biological or psychological factors weigh more heavily in determining human behavior, and whether biological or psychological treatments for psychological problems work best. What are the arguments made in the novel about this issue? What do your students think about this topic and what conclusions can be drawn from psychological research?

- *Is the madman a therapist, or is the therapist a madman?*

The title of the book suggests that someone is a madman. But who? Obviously, some of the patients, but what about Doe? Is he really mentally disturbed? How do we define normal and abnormal? And what about Holden himself, who seems to be decompensating during the course of the novel? The relationship between Doe and Holden addresses this interesting question about who's the therapist and who's the madman. Might Doe be a wise but quirky old man, maybe even a kind of Zen master, who is trying to help Holden? If so, how is he trying to help Holden? Encourage students to talk about those situations in which psychotherapists might be the "madman" while the clients might be the therapists. Issues about countertransference and mental health problems among psychotherapists will be important in this discussion.

- *What are the limits of psychology and science?*

Throughout the novel, Holden questions just how much we can know about the human mind using the traditional approaches of psychology and science. What do students think about this question? Encourage them to talk about whether psychology and science can solve problematic issues concerning morality and spirituality. There are elements of eastern philosophy that surface throughout the novel, and eastern philosophy claims that reason and rationality have their limits. What do your students think about that?

- *What's reality and what's fantasy in the novel?*

As a person who enjoys movies and books where reality blends with fantasy (in such movies as *The Matrix*, *Total Recall*, and *Vanilla Sky*), I wrote *Madman* in this style. Encourage students to discuss these ambiguities – for example, how it's hard to determine when Holden is awake or dreaming, and how at times he seems to be hallucinating. Where do his thoughts and journal entries end, and where does "reality" begin? These ideas can lead to interesting discussions about how the distinction between reality and fantasy is not always as clear as we might think. When and how is reality psychologically "constructed" by the mind?

- *What about all those loose ends?*

Students often comment about the "loose ends" at the conclusion of the novel. What happened to Doe, the journal, and the woman in the cafeteria? I intended the story to be somewhat open-ended and therefore open to interpretation… a kind of projective test. Ask students what they think about Doe, the journal, and the woman. Tell them there are no right or wrong answers, but instead only answers that reflect their own attitudes and beliefs. The students will surprise you with some very interesting ideas! (Note: in the last chapter there is a hint that the woman in the cafeteria reappears. Some students are pleased to see that)

Activities and Exercises

- *Identifying Mental Disorders and Personality Types*

Several types of mental disorders are portrayed in the novel, including paranoid schizophrenia (Richard Mobin and Rachael Finski), a borderline personality disorder (Cheryl), a cognitive disorder (Mr. Tennostein), depression (Elizabeth Baso), and an impulsive disorder (Kathy Mummon). There are also a variety of personality types illustrated, such as narcissistic (Dr. Stein), compulsive (Fred Cooling), schizoid (Dr. Lloyd), schizotypal (Jon), and passive-aggressive (Ron).

Ask students to apply DSM criteria to the mental disorders portrayed in the novel. Ask them to identify the features of the various personality styles using either DSM criteria for personality disorders, or the reinterpretations of those criteria as personality styles (as in David Shapiro's book *Neurotic Styles* or Nancy McWilliam's *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis*).

For spin-off activities, see the exercises "Diagnosing Mr. Smith," "Shades of Abnormality" and "Personality Disorders" in the in-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual. The exercise on personality disorders includes a handout summarizing the features of these disorders.

- *The Intake Interview and Mental Status Exam*

During the novel we see Thomas Holden conducting an intake interview and mental status exam. Ask students to identify the types of information a clinician tries to obtain during the intake interview, and the kinds of mental functions that are assessed in the mental status exam. Provide students with the traditional criteria for doing intakes and mental status exam, or have them find this information online. How does Holden's techniques compare to these criteria?

- *Mental Health Treatments*

Ask students to identify the various types of mental health treatments that are mentioned in the novel (medications, psychotherapy, ECT, etc.). Which types of treatments seem most appropriate for which types of problems? In the In-class exercises section of my *Teaching Psychology* manual is an exercise "Mental Health Treatments" that encourages students to match up a particular type of treatment with a particular type of mental disorder.

- *Defense Mechanisms*

As psychotherapists very well know, we all use a variety of defense mechanisms every day to cope with anxiety-provoking thoughts and feelings. In the In-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual, I provide a handout that summarizes the most common defense mechanism, as well as a description of a group of students talking during lunch – a conversation filled with defense mechanisms that the students in my class attempt to identify. After guiding your students through this exercise, ask them to identity the defense mechanisms used by the characters in the novel. Encourage them to think about their own use of defense mechanisms.

- *Secrets and Resistance in Psychotherapy*

In the novel Holden talks about, and sometimes himself shows, various types of resistance to psychotherapy. Ask students to identify these forms of resistance in the story (e.g., forgetting therapy sessions, falling asleep during sessions, blocking, etc.). In the In-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual is a "Secrets and Resistance in Psychotherapy" exercise that encourages students to think about the sensitive secrets in their own lives, and what it would be like to discuss these things in psychotherapy. It's a fascinating and powerful activity.

- *Cognitive Distortions*

Holden often seems to fall victim to all sorts of cognitive distortions and dysfunctional beliefs. In fact, he even jokes about it. Ask students to identify these dysfunctional beliefs. In the in-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual is an experiment called "The Way I Think" that guides students through a collection of cognitive therapy exercises. You might also try the "I wish you health and happiness" activity that invariably makes students laugh while encouraging positive thinking.

- *Transference Reactions and the "Shadow"*

Throughout the novel, Holden sometimes perceives other people according to his own needs and expectations, rather than seeing them for whom they really are. He is showing transference reactions. In particular, he seems to be reacting to Ron, the psychiatric resident, as if Ron is what Carl Jung called the "shadow" – a part of himself that Holden tries to ignore or ward off. After discussing these issues with your class, try the exercises "Transference" and "The Shadow" in the in-class exercises of the *Teaching Psychology* manual. These exercises encourage students to think about transference and shadow experiences in their own lives.

- *Childhood Memories*

During the novel Holden describes various memories from his childhood. Ask students to discuss what these memories say about his life, personality, and psychological issues. In the In-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual is a "Childhood Memories" exercise in which students get feedback from their peers about the significance of a particular childhood memory that they bring to class.

- *Understanding Sleep and Dreams*

Holden experiences several dreams and dream-states during the novel. Encourage students to apply to the story what they might have learned about the importance of sleep and dreaming. What might Holden's dreams mean, particularly as indicators of the psychological transformation he is undergoing. Ask students to read "Working and Playing with Dreams" (available in my Collected Works at johnsuler.com). Encourage them to apply those ideas and dream interpretation techniques to the dreams experienced by Holden, and to their own dreams.

- *Personal Timelines*

One way to better understand one's life is to map it out on a timeline, like historians do in summarizing periods of history. Ask students to construct a timeline of Thomas Holden's life, and to discuss what it reveals about him. In the In-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual is "The Timeline Exercise" that guides students in constructing a timeline of their own lives. Try it with your students. The results are often both fascinating and educational.

- *Computerized Psychotherapy*

In the novel Holden interacts with the computerized psychotherapy program "Siggie." Such programs actually do exist, one of the most well known being "Eliza," various versions of which are available for free online, including AI chatbots. Ask students to try one of these programs. Encourage them to discuss how their experience compares to Holden's. What are the pros and cons of computerized counseling, psychotherapy, and mental health interventions? This question is a cutting-edge issue in contemporary psychotherapy. In the longer projects section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual I describe an activity for students using Eliza, including guidelines for writing a paper about their experience.

- *Eastern Philosophy and Western Psychology*

Elements of eastern philosophy appear throughout *Madman*. In fact, some of the events and stories told in the novel come from traditional Zen and Taoist literature. Ask students to read some of these classic tales in *Zen Stories to Tell Your Neighbor* (available in my Collected Works at johnsuler.com). Encourage them to discuss how these stories point to valuable insights into human nature and psychological transformation. How can eastern philosophy enrich western psychology and psychotherapy? I discuss many of these issues in my book *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Eastern Thought* (SUNY Press).

- *Using the I Ching for personal insight and change*

In the novel, Jon, the security officer in the parking lot booth, throws the coins of the I Ching in order to offer Holden some insights into his situation in life. In my psychotherapy course, my students experiment with the I Ching as a type of psychotherapeutic tool for better understanding themselves and some personal issue in their lives. The results of the exercise are always fascinating. In the In-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual I describe how you might try this activity in your class.

- *Transcendent, Peak, and Spiritual Experiences*

When Holden chases Richard Mobin out into the snowstorm, something happens to Holden, what some psychologists might call a transcendent, peak, or spiritual experience. In the In-class exercises section of the *Teaching Psychology* manual is a handout entitled "The Religious Experience: East, West, Everywhere" that summarizes the features of such experiences. Ask students to compare these features to what happened to Holden. Encourage them to discuss the significance of these experiences for people in general. Have students in the class ever had such experiences? Many do, but are reluctant to talk about it because it's not the type of thing people in western cultures are used to discussing.

- *The Training of the Psychologist and Psychotherapist*

Coming right out of graduate school into his internship, Holden has quite a bit to say about the training of the psychologist and psychotherapist. Where are his opinions accurate, and where might they be biased? In the Books and Manuals section of my *Teaching Psychology* manual is a manual about graduate school in psychology. Encourage students to read through it, and to find other resources online about the training of the psychologist and psychotherapist. How does this information compare to what Holden says in the novel? Encourage students to discuss how this information applies to their own career plans.

Exam Items

Essay questions can be developed from ideas in the Activities & Exercises section. For example:

"What is the purpose of an intake interview and what types of questions appear in it?"
"Describe two patients in the novel, their behaviors and symptoms, and their diagnosis."
"Describe the pros and cons of a career as a psychotherapist."

Intended for undergraduate students, the items listed below are multiple choice and true/false questions. A short quiz using these items is often a good springboard for generating a class discussion about the book.

There are two types of exam questions about the novel. The first type are simply designed to see if students remember the most important events and characters in the book. If students read the book, they should not have trouble with these questions. If a question is about a character, it puts that character in context rather than expecting a student to know automatically who a character is. For example, there are no questions like, "Mr. Tennostein had a cognitive disorder." Instead, the T/F question might be, "Mr. Tennostein, the patient with a cognitive disorder, argued with Holden about math."

The second type of exam items pertains to ideas that Holden discusses psychotherapy, mental illness, and life on a psychiatric unit. When reading and studying for the exam, students should not focus on brief comments Holden makes, but if his discussion of some topic takes up a whole paragraph or more, students should be able to identify the major points he makes.

Some students are confused about how to study for an exam based on a novel. Describing the two types of questions as indicated above helps them significantly. For some of the items below, the page number in the novel is provided to indicate where that topic is discussed. Items without a page number pertain to ideas that occur at various points of the novel or throughout a chapter.

True/False Items

The training of the psychiatrist is very similar to that of the clinical psychologist. (false – p. 19)

Freud thought that physicians (medical doctors) are probably the best qualified professionals to conduct psychotherapy. (false – p. 20)

The role of the psychotherapist can be compared to a mirror, a shadow, and a barometer. (true – pgs. 40-41)

People become psychotherapists for one simple reason: they want to help people. (false – p. 42)

Sometimes psychotherapy is like treating a serious problem with a band-aid. (true – p. 62)

Psychotherapy could be compared to fixing the defects in computer software, as opposed to fixing the computer's hardware. (true – pgs. 83-84)

Historically, the discipline of psychotherapy tried to gain credibility and acceptance by adopting objective, scientific methods. (true – pgs. 91-92)

In the world of psychotherapy it sometimes seems as if any kind of activity might be considered "therapeutic." (true – p. 93)

Orthodox psychoanalysts would not think that it's a big deal to chat casually with a patient before the therapy session. (false – p. 97)

Although fully trained psychoanalysts think it's a good idea for psychoanalysts to be in psychoanalysis as part of their training, they do not think that it's essential and necessary. (false – p. 132)

Some psychotherapists believe that "crazy" people invite the psychotherapist to become crazy too, as a way for the therapist to really understand what their life is like. (true – p. 148)

Orthodox psychoanalysts believe there are very specific rules about how to conduct therapy and behave towards the patient. (true – p. 151)

Psychotherapists sometimes underestimate how important they are to a client, especially when clients say that the therapy is not helping them. (true – p. 169)

The psychiatric unit where Holden worked was a long-term facility where patients would stay for many months, or even years. (false – p.13)

During lunch Holden and the medical resident Ron debate whether mental illness is caused by biological or psychological factors. (true – pgs. 82-85)

Although social workers help outpatients, they do not work in a psychiatric inpatient unit.

Holden believed that Mr. Tennostein was still able to drive a car despite the fact that he had an organic brain disease. (false – p. 53)

Holden has no doubts about the value of science in understanding mental illness. (false)

In the hospital where Holden worked, there was very little competition or conflict between the psychologists and the psychiatrists. (false – p. 20)

Although Holden mentions various theories in psychology, most often he talks about psychoanalytic ideas that emphasize what's happening inside a person's mind. (true)

Due to being sick, taking a lot of cold medicine, and the stress of his work, Holden himself seems to break down psychologically. (true)

The incident with the movie "Jaws" revealed how the doctors give very little thought to, and rarely discuss with each other, whether a certain activity on the unit is helpful or harmful to the patients.(false)

The security officer Jon in the parking lot booth consults the ancient Chinese book known as the I Ching in order to help Holden. (true)

Holden loves being a psychologist so much that he never thinks about what it would be like to have a different career. (false – pgs. 206-207)

During the grand rounds interview, the patient John Doe points out to the unit director, Dr. Stein, that he has shit on the bottom of his shoe. (true – p. 267)

Holden works with patients who stay on the inpatient unit, but he also does psychotherapy with outpatients, people who only come to the hospital for weekly psychotherapy sessions. (true)

Multiple Choice Items

"Ambivalence" refers to:

a. the ambidextrous skills in motor coordination
b. the positive or negative charge of a medication
c. having contradictory feelings about something * (p. 3)
d. being very close to psychotic
e. poor reality testing

In the novel Holden has a psychotherapy session with Cheryl, who suffers from a borderline personality disorder. Which of the following is NOT true about this type of disorder?

a. they are emotionally unpredictable and impulsive
b. they have a history of stormy relationships
c. their identity structure is weak
d. they are manipulative in their relationships
e. their childhood relationship with their parents was surprisingly healthy * (p. 101-102)

Which of the following was NOT a feature of the inpatient unit where Holden worked?

a. a "center circle" where patients could be observed by the staff
b. an isolation room where suicidal or psychotic patients could be locked in
c. a "calming room" where psychotic patients could take baths in order to calm down *
d. rooms where the patients would sleep
e. a nurses' station

One of the first things that happens when a person arrives at the psychiatric unit is what?

a. they are given medications
b. they are given a psychotherapy session
c. they go through an intake interview *
d. they are given a battery of psychological tests
e. they attend a community meeting

Which of the following is probably not true about suicidal patients?

a. you can always find a way to stop a person from killing him or herself
b. there are many reasons why people commit suicide * (p. 200)
c. psychologists have no specific questions in order to assess suicidal tendencies
d. a patient committing suicide can be a blow to the therapist's self-esteem
e. therapists buy liability insurance in order to protect themselves against lawsuits

What is the purpose of morning report in a psychiatric unit?

a. to allow patients to report their condition to their therapists
b. to allow mental health researchers to report their findings with each other
c. to allow the staff members to report on new patients and recent events on the unit *
d. to allow patients to discuss their problems with each other
e. all of the above are purposes of morning report

Community Meeting is when:

a. the staff meets with people in the neighborhood by the hospital in order to educate them about mental health
b. all the staff and patients gather together to discuss concerns about life on the unit *
c. people in the community near the hospital form their own self-help group
d. psychologists and psychiatrists meet in order to support themselves in their work
e. different communities join together to promote mental health in their area

Dr. Stein discusses the possibility that John Doe has an "as-if" personality. Which of the following is true about this type of disorder?

a. the person acts as if they are mentally ill, but they are not
b. the person acts as if they are Christ, Napoleon, or some other famous person
c. there are severe compulsive behaviors and obvious psychotic symptoms
d. they don't seem to have an identity of their own * (p. 268)
e. they suffer from eating disorders and pretend to eat, when actually they don't eat at all

A Literary Review by Merle Molofsky

Published 7/11/10 in the International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education IFPE

John Suler, Professor of Psychology at Rider University, who has written three other books about psychology, psychoanalysis, and Eastern religion, has written a novel that presents us with a breathtakingly accurate depiction of the challenges and disturbances facing psychology interns working in a psychiatric hospital short-term care inpatient unit. Why "breathtakingly accurate"? Because his focus is on the inner life of Thomas Holden, a clinical psychologist whose first person narrative captures the perspective and voice of a young, idealistic, hardworking novice lost in the bewildering labyrinths of hospital politics, professional competitiveness, frustratingly difficult and heartbreaking inmates, and his own intense conflicts.

Anxious, sleep-deprived, curious, perplexed, and charmingly open-minded, Thomas Holden encounters situation after situation for which his education hasn't quite prepared him, because clinical training does not necessarily prepare anyone for the pathology of their colleagues and institutions.

Accomplished writers choose their characters' names carefully, intending to evoke cultural associations. Some names are obvious choices: a character named "Joy" could be a delight, or, ironically, depressed, or a narcissistic extension of her parents. Other names are not so obvious. I have definite associations to the name "Thomas Holden," but I do not know if my associations match Suler's associations and intentions. Perhaps that is all to the good, in that the names indeed can evoke literary roots without necessarily being weighed down by them. *Madman* can be read as part of the picaresque tradition, novels about young people discovering themselves and the world. Thomas can evoke Tom of *Tom Sawyer*, Holden of *Holden Caulfield,* two of the most recognized soul-searching spiritual adventurers of American literature. Holden Caulfield had no tolerance for what he despised as "phoniness," a trait that seemed to him to predominate in most of the human race. Tom Sawyer had a dislike for meaningless rules and regulations, constrictions that limited both physical and emotional freedom. Thomas Holden has just about enough self-awareness, maturity, and insight to avoid complete melt-down and self-destruction in the face of "phoniness" and "meaningless rules and regulations." His depth of understanding, his compassion, and his love of psychoanalytic thought eventually get him through the hazing and contradictions of institutional "mental health" practices. (Acknowledgment: my thanks to the Literature and Psychoanalysis Discussion Group of NPAP, facilitated by Alice Entin, as Sunday June 27, 2010 we discussed the work of J.D. Salinger, particularly *Catcher in the Rye* and *Nine Stories*, and related the work to Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, inspiring me to write about the name Thomas Holden in this review.)

Suler's 27 chapter titles alert us to the themes with which he deals, the disjunctions and fantasies and dysfunctions that make up Thomas's day by day work week and day by day daydreams. In Chapter 1, "Up," we meet our hero, a not-so-up young man, mildly depressed, urging his broken-down Nova up a hill. Suler is hyper-sensitive to the nuance of language, the cueing of mood to word. Why would Thomas's car be a Nova? Thomas is a newly minted psychologist, serving an internship, and of course Nova means new. And in Spanish, no va means no go. Can Thomas get his recalcitrant car up the hill, or will his worry that it will stall come true? Can he get himself

jump-started? His attitude toward his internship is clearly and immediately articulated by page 2. “Internship. Doesn’t ‘intern’ mean ‘to imprison?’ We’re expected to work our butts off, all in the name of Training. It seemed more a grueling rite of passage than anything else – the establishment’s last chance to test the limits of the student’s psyche before welcoming him to the club.” And a few lines later, “Do unto others as was done unto you.”

Thomas’s introspection leads him (one page later) to say, “I love my work. I hate my work. There it is – that Old Ambivalence, the never-ending toss-up between contradictory feelings....” We become privy to all his ambivalences, his scorn of others and his self-doubt (for what is contempt if not a defense against low self-esteem); his desire to do well and his resentment that he is expected to please the powers that be, which is not necessarily his idea of doing well; his dedication to serving the patient population and his terror that he will fail them.

A significant part of Thomas’s problems is the tension among “mental health” disciplines, the rivalry and hierarchies regarding psychiatry and psychology, doctors and nurses, behaviorists and psychoanalysts. Thomas’s early musings, in Chapter 4, “Respite,” asks the question we all must ask, “What is the psychotherapist? A mirror, a shadow, a barometer, a good parent?” After explicating the possibilities, he speculates that “...the therapist at times may also need to be a real person, in fact, a substitute parent who offers what the patient needed as a child but never received....” (p. 41).

His desire to be a psychotherapist, to do depth work that is psychodynamic and psychoanalytically informed, comes into conflict with the rigidities and hierarchies of institutional life. Staff meetings and case consultations become arenas of competitiveness and hostility. Rivalries are personal and professional. Could the noble calling of “psychotherapist,” in the guise of psychologist, psychoanalyst, psychiatrist, be equally prone to corruption by ambition and unconscious motivation as any other profession? Thomas discovers again and again that the professional environment in which he is embedded is a hotbed of ordinary garden variety madness.

Thomas keeps a journal, and records his feelings and thoughts about his chosen profession and his actual experiences. His relationship to his journal is a deep love relationship; he says of his journal, “It was like an old friend, my mother, my shrink, my guru – all in one.” (p. 39).

His journal is his mirror, where he truly encounters himself, where he feels he truly exists, the ideal container, selfobject, good-enough object, He forms a twinship with his journal, which underscores how alone he is in the tangle of experience that is his internship, that is his life. I followed the exigencies of his journal- keeping with keen attention and bated breath, identifying with his need for self- knowledge and self-discovery through his own words, his own language, something he shares as well with his creator, the novelist John Suler, who evidently also loves language, and finds in words the nuances of meaning and associations that underly the psychoanalytic process. Young Thomas reminds me of myself when I was his age, and the many notebooks I filled (and ultimately destroyed). Somewhere in the archives of my poetry is a poem I wrote that began, “After losing three notebooks, I felt I was losing my mind.” Thomas’s notebooks indeed are his mind, and of course a key plot element is his relationship with his notebook, and the calamity of losing it. Thomas is struggling to stay sane enough, to keep a grip, to not “lose it.” His internship leads him to discover the madness of humanity, of others, of himself. Who is the “madman,” where does wisdom and sanity lie?

Perhaps one of the most engaging aspects of this beautifully crafted, engaging novel is Thomas's encounters with patients, and the stress, anxiety, bafflement, fear, resentment, and affection he feels. Early on he is traumatized by the death in a car accident of a recently discharged patient, and the dread that perhaps her accident was a deliberate suicide, and that he therefore was incompetent and responsible.

His other patients include an old man with what appears to be senile dementia, a violent schizophrenic, and a nameless, seemingly amnesiac "John Doe" who the rest of the staff seem to believe is seriously mentally ill, and who has the benign wisdom of a Zen monk setting koans for his new (unwitting) disciple Thomas Holden.

In the always crucial (!) initial interview, Thomas asks his John Doe, "Have you forgotten what your name is?" and receives the response, "Forgotten myself, yes. And maybe you should do the same." (p. 206). We discover along with hapless Thomas initial interview question after question being met with provocative answer after answer, provocative in that each answer questions the assumptions underlying not only the question being asked, but assumptions underlying modes of perception and concepts of reality. Sample: "Tell me about your past." "There is no past." And then the ultimate riff on a famous Zen koan, ""Do you want to know what my face looked like before my parents were born?" (p. 207).

In the call and response of the initial interview, John Doe leads Thomas away from the obvious and into the realm of potential awakening, away from agreed upon protocols and toward the ground of being, until perhaps in what seems like nonsense to the sincere intern Thomas trembles on an awakening, sensing the possibility of relationship, a sort of Zen koans meet Martin Buber intensity that allows Thomas to experience both his humanity and John Doe's. Thomas tells us, "A gap had closed between us. I felt close to him, for some strange reason, like he understood – like he cared. In fact, I felt like crying." (p. 212).

Essentially, as Suler leads Thomas through the rigors of a psychiatric hospital psychology internship, both Thomas and the reader are led to wonder about psychotherapy as science or art, to observe the staff utilizing a full range of defenses as they engage with each other, and to become self-observing and self-reflexive, so that each event is about ourselves. The internship is a realistic, totally believable Magical Mystery Tour, and the vision is mystical.

It appears that all significant reality is rooted in the mystical. Perhaps there is a truth in the Homeric insight that whom the gods seek to destroy, they first make mad, but there also is a truth in the insight that madmen are God's beloved. During grand rounds, Rachel Finski, a patient who seems delusional and obsessional, complains bitterly and incessantly about her physical experience, that her "water is blocked," that her water does not flow freely, that water must be able to change from solid to liquid and back again,. She fears that the fire in her belly will go out. For her, water is the essence, and if the water can't reach her belly, the fire in her belly will go out. She obsesses about the neurochemical energy of her soul. And as she spouts her theories, the medical students are overwhelmed and lost.

Suler is versed in many mystical traditions. Rachel Finski sounds mad as a hatter, and almost as inspired as the great Persian mystical poet Rumi:

Today, I recognized that the jewel-like beauty is the presence, our loving confusion, the glow in which watery clay gets brighter than the fire, the one we call the friend.

(The Illuminated Rumi, translations and commentary by Coleman Barker, p. 55)

The madmen of *Madman* may indeed be mad, yet in their madness they also are in touch with an essential wisdom that the staff seems to need to neglect in order to maintain their equilibrium. To listen to what verges on word salad as if it had meaning can drive a believer in sanity mad.

Another wisdom teacher found in *Madman* is Jon, the security guard at the booth at the edge of the parking lot, who seems to have a special fondness for Thomas, perhaps recognizing Thomas as a seeker, a young man on a quest for something powerful and true, who is drawn to psychotherapy because of a mystical predilection not yet recognized and acknowledged. Jon is described as a former Berkeley philosophy student and countercultural radical, with a penchant for practical jokes that have hidden within them wry philosophical commentary.

Thomas comments early on that he never can outwit Jon, for Jon is a "master of passive-aggressive joking and one-upmanship." Eight pages into the story, Jon sets Thomas a riddle: "What happens when you mix a dyslexic, an agnostic, and an insomniac?" Answer: "You get someone who stays up all night worrying, 'Is there a DOG?'"

This is more than a cute gag, a spot of levity. This is what the bickering pedants on the staff need, a sense of humor that touches on the major concerns of humanity. Well, is there a DOG?

By page 114, much water under the bridge (pacem Rachel Finski and her blocked water), Jon is introducing Thomas to the I Ching, the Chinese Book of Changes that can be used in augury or as a guide for the perplexed, a wisdom instruction manual. Jon gives Thomas a brief guided tour through the theory of synchronicity, frames the concept of the I Ching as one of ambiguity leading to subjective interpretation, opposed to logical positivism. Jon insists that Thomas throw the coins used to consult the I Ching as oracle, Thomas asks of the I Ching, "How can I get over this sickness?", meaning his cold, but lurking behind the physical is the spiritual and emotional malaise that haunts him. The hexagram he draws is hexagram 44, Kou, Coming to Meet.

The hexagram is sketchily explained, Thomas gains no particular insight from the encounter, but once again his mind is being stretched by someone who, like the madmen he meets, like the John Doe Zen master he is about to encounter, does not fit neatly into the neat and tidy disarray of the medical establishment and the psychiatric institution.

What is Suler doing with his iconoclastic madmen? As they challenge Thomas, they also challenge the reader. We are drawn into Thomas's confusion through their taking him seriously by dragging him away from scientism and rationality into new potential, new possibility. The rational is not sane, and the irrational is not crazy.

The angry debates and jockeying for power that the hospital staff are much given to form the backdrop for Thomas's musings on what is effective psychotherapy, what is of value. During the discussion period of Rounds the staff routinely use defenses like projection, warding off their own self-doubt by criticizing each other. Thomas takes the argument outside of the hospital into the wider intellectual world, chronicling the rivalry between orthodox medical psychoanalysis and psychology, the once megalithic medical establishment meeting its match in the "Goliath" of the American Psychological Association.

Again, early on Thomas cites Freud as saying that physicians are probably the least qualified to practice psychoanalysis, and that those immersed in liberal arts "resonate better with the psychological, emotional, and interpersonal issues that make up psychoanalysis." (p. 20). Suler's holy madmen may have more in common with the humanistic tradition from which certain psychoanalysts are drawn than the bickering staff of the mental hospital. But then again, given any sort of hierarchy, who wouldn't bicker? After all the self itself is divided, the superego nags, the id insistently demands, and the ego perseverates. Thomas is in constant conflict, constant turmoil.

Toward the end of the novel Thomas and his colleagues engage in a spirited discussion of John Doe's mental state, his "diagnosis," veering giddily and excitingly from a psychoanalytic "Theory of Everything" drawn from Freud's "Project" to cultural relativism to function versus subjective experience. Does functioning well in society mean mental health? Or does feeling at peace with oneself mean mental health? Can one be high functioning but miserable, or minimally functioning but fulfilled? Are Suler's holy madmen, brilliant former philosophy student Jon the security guard and John Doe the amnesiac homeless man actually pictures of mental health because they are fulfilled and at peace with themselves?

Thomas asks himself, why not be a fiction writer? "After all, writers are next of kin to us psychologists." (p. 216). He then speculates that characters in a novel are extensions of the novelists' personality. "The creator always leaves his imprint on the created." "Maybe, when combined, all the characters in a book make up one personality." (p. 217). Suler has Thomas explicate a well-known theory that writers (like all artists) use their fantasy lives to try to heal themselves. Is Suler forestalling criticism, or stealing the thunder of wise guy critics who would attribute such motive to Suler the writer? If so, more power to Suler. He takes charge of his fictional reality, he owns his own fantasy, and he gives voice to that which all of us believe, that our most creative acts are fantasy fulfillments, that our creativity is the craziest and sanest part of ourselves, and cannot be separated from who we are in our core. We make up ourselves, we make up the world, and we encounter the reality of others' fantasies, as our worlds collide, and occasionally, harmonize in the music of the spheres.

This is a most dramatic, engrossing, and intellectually engaging novel. Suler makes the challenges of beginning work as a psychotherapist, particularly with a difficult and demanding population, fascinating and recognizable. The story line moves apace, we identify with Thomas, who is both lost soul and seeker of the holy grail, and the intellectual debates are important and cogent. I hope Suler, and his alter ego Thomas, both write more fiction. I hope Thomas renews his journal writing, and Suler continues to teach not only with his academic writing, but with his fiction. Suler intends *Madman* to be not only a novel, but an instruction manual for psychology students. A teaching guide is available from True Center Publishing.

CODA: The day I began writing this review, I came upon an essay by Rivka Galchen in the New York Times Book Review of Sunday, June 27, 2010, "Pleasure Island," about my all-time favorite writer, Jorge Luis Borges. She writes....Borges quotes from an essay by [Robert Louis] Stevenson that makes the rather Borgesian claim that a book's characters are only a string of words. "Blasphemous as this may sound to us," Borges comments, "Achilles and Peer Gynt, Robinson Crusoe and Don Quixote, may be reduced to it." Borges then adds: "The powerful men who ruled the earth, as well: Alexander is one string of words, Attila another."

Thomas Holden may be a string of words, but perhaps when we resonate with a string of words even if they are "only a string of words," they are more than that as well. The moral integrity and emotional intensity of the string of words that John Suler put together to name and create Thomas Holden expresses the passion and beauty and anxiety of the quest for meaning and individuality committed psychotherapists experience and share with the people who they encounter in the transitional space that is the therapeutic experience. And as we do not ask of the baby, "Did you create the transitional object," as we do not separate the reality of the frayed, chewed up blankie from the fantasy creation, we do not need to separate the reality of the individual letters T-h-o-m-a-s H-o-l-d-e-n from the compelling, believable character. Nor do we need to separate the fictional character from the autobiographical memories of John Suler. We are and are not madmen when we believe in Tinker Bell and Thomas Holden.

-- *Merle Molofsky,*

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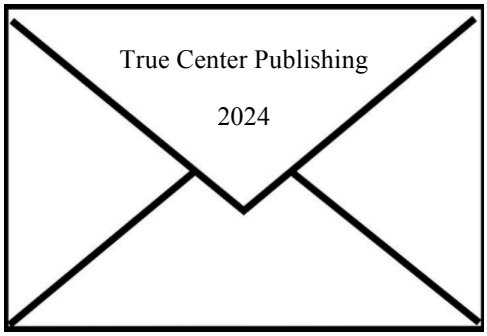
Co-editor, Other/wise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