

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

Australian Psychoses

Women's madness and colonial psychosis

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in English and Australian Studies**

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ABSTRACT

Representations of madwomen in fiction written by women have engaged feminist theorising since the 1970s. Within the terms of that engagement, critical madness discourse has located patriarchy as formative in the construction of women's madness. Themes of women's madness and patriarchal oppression resonate in works by prominent Australian writers Christina Stead and Kate Grenville. Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) and Grenville's companion novels *Lilian's Story* (1985) and *Dark Places* (1996) are linked by themes of incest, madness and violent family dysfunction. Both writers intervene into the politics of women's madness, locating it as a product of the patriarchal family. The family is emblematic of the Australian nation as the site for the production of gender norms and gender relations of power. In addition, Australian patriarchy has been shaped by colonialism and colonial forms of nation-building and national meaning-making that position whiteness and maleness as the privileged forms of national identity. I argue that the exclusion of women from narratives of national identity constitutes a form of colonial paranoia that circulates in the national Imaginary of 'settler' societies, to structure the rigid gender and racial divisions that characterise Australian national formation. Discourses of 'race' and Eugenics used by *The Man Who Loved Children's* Sam Pollitt, and Albion Gidley Singer, the abusive father of *Lilian's Story* and *Dark Places*, to rationalise their mistreatment of women and children are symptoms of colonial psychosis. This is played out on the bodies of the women who challenge it, with devastating effects for Louie who in *The Man Who Loved*

Children, attempts to murder both her parents, and for Lilian, who is incarcerated in a mental asylum for ten years. In situating women's madness as a product of the madness of the fathers who govern them, I intervene in a critical absence in the theorising of women's madness, locating the production of Australian masculinity as a site for colonial psychosis.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed

Date

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