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Throughout the nineteenth century, degeneration theory associated certain behaviours and physical and psychological pathologies with a pseudo-Darwinian atavism of primitive traits and characteristics. One need only think of Émile Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, and particularly his 1890 novel *La bête humaine* (*The Beast in Man* or *The Beast Within*), to note the parallels between the

rise of uninhibited desires and irrational actions and the hereditary descent of man. The decline of reason—humanity’s defining value—and the rise of wild, animalistic abandon, apparently identifiable in criminals and ‘madmen’ (and to an extent also in women and certain races), demonstrated the fearful conviction that if humans had evolved *from* animals, they could regress to their former state too.

Today, of course, degeneration theorists are largely absent from official medical capacities, and suggestions of regression towards animal states are rare (although accusations of non-human states are worryingly rife in certain diagnoses).[1] Yet, fears of a ‘beast within’ remain strong in cultural discourses of affect and action. In contemporary autoethnography, metaphoric discussion of ‘the beast within’ determines discourses of chronic and invisible illnesses, including psychological illnesses and particularly depression, the black dog.[2] Cultural discourses of mental illness expose the intersections of human and animal, or culture and nature, in such a way that the subject’s liminality—neither human nor beast—jeopardizes biomedical and cultural interventions. Animalistic metaphors of psychological distress lead us back to the Ancient debate of mind/body interdependence and insinuate that mental illness is not to be treated but ‘tamed’ (Foucault 76).

Such a juncture of beast and man and psychopathology is apparent in Arto Paasilinna’s *The Howling Miller* (2007; *Ulvova Mylläri* 1981), a witty folkloric novel of constructed madness, individuality, and conformity in post-war Finnish Lapland. The novel’s protagonist, Gunnar Huttunen, arrives in a small Lappish village to take over the abandoned mill. He is immediately peculiar, both in his appearance—he is tall and, ‘when he walked, he took a stride at least one and a half times that of most men’s’ (Paasilinna 4)—and in his characteristics—entertaining local children with performances and animal imitations (7). Yet, Huttunen also suffers ‘long bouts of depression’ (6), in which he becomes sullen and silent, often disappearing into the forest, from where he can be heard ‘howling like a wild animal’ (9). Described from the outset as mad (8), Huttunen is ‘afflicted by an incurable mental illness’ (276) and confined to Oulu mental hospital where the doctor diagnoses ‘a manic-depressive whose clinical profile includes nervous fragility and neurasthenia. All the result of a war neurosis’ (102).

The novel demonstrates a Foucauldian framing of madness as a cultural construction. For the reader, Huttunen’s actions are clearly rational and reasoned, but his every move is subject to the narrative of another onlooker who twists the original scene and warps subjective interpretation into objective fact. Yet, *The Howling Miller*’s folkloric style also lends it a perspective on the cultural discourse of mental illness as the ‘beast within’. Huttunen is, in an archetype of Finnish literature, [3] close to nature and animals: he thrives in the forest; his name evokes the summertime pest ‘mosquito’ (in Finnish *hyttynen*); and his animal impressions, whether voluntary or otherwise, suggest an intimate knowledge of his surroundings. Huttunen’s ‘mental illness’ and his animal-like tendencies are inextricably interlinked, exacerbating his otherness and alienation from the rest of the village and heightening projections of fear. As the novel takes a final, fabled turn, Huttunen’s

psychological decline is captured in his metamorphosis into a wolf, roaming the forest and the village at night with only a dog for company (Paasilinna 276–281).

While clinical lycanthropy—a delusional belief in self-transformation into a non-human animal—has been accepted in Western medical discourses since the nineteenth century, Huttunen’s mythical lycanthropy reveals the dualism of *psyche* and *soma*. On the one hand—and reflecting a time when the wolf population in Finland had been decimated by hunting (Sandell)—this animalistic release reiterates the social anxieties that constructed Huttunen’s madness in the first place: he is monstrously other, ‘the negative of a normalized social identity’ (Bourgault du Coudray 4). On the other hand, lycanthropy idealizes the complete interdependence of mind and body such that Huttunen’s increasing psychological distress—whether medically or culturally constructed—undermines his humanity; correspondingly, his diminishing human characterization undermines his mental health.

In the witty irreverence of Paasilinna’s novel, there is an important critique of cultural discourses of mental illness. The persistence of Platonic thought in biomedical discourse privileges the brain—the site of *logos* or reason—as the defining organ of humanity and thus stigmatizes as non-humans those whose brains fail to function as expected. Paasilinna’s mythical werewolf brings into focus how mind/body dualism is too often conflated with human/animal dualism, leading to dehumanizing and ostracizing narratives of illness and disease. Yet, as posthumanist theory encourages us to blur the boundaries of what it means to be human, perhaps our understandings of mental health and mental illness will be correspondingly reformed.

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[1] Dementia, for example, invariably attracts descriptions of vegetative and non-living existence.

[2] See for example Irwin 1998; Johnstone 2005, 2008; Moore 2013; Kampmark 2019.

[3] A novel set in nature in post-war northern Finland is the ultimate Finnish literary trope. I thank my students for this observation.

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