University of Glasgow

Hamilton, Anne (2015) *A world of their own? The novel and the total institution.* PhD thesis.

http://theses.gla.ac.uk/6787/

A WORLD OF THEIR OWN?

THE NOVEL AND THE TOTAL INSTITUTION

ANNE HAMILTON

BA (Hons), MSc, MLitt

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

SCHOOL OF CRITICAL STUDIES

MAY 2015

Abstract

A World of Their Own? The Novel and the Total Institution is an exploration of the sociological concept of the Total Institution with particular reference to its relationship with English literature, followed by the presentation of *Chasing Elena,* an original novel. The term 'Total Institution', attributed to Erving Goffman (1961) encapsulates an environment in which a large number of individuals participate in an enclosed and formally administered way of life. *Chapter 1* of the critical text defines the Total Institution and sets the scene for *Chapter 2,* which examines selected literary texts that feature life in all-encompassing institutions and considers Goffman's 'moral career of the inmate' in terms of the experiences of the fictional characters. *Chapter 3* is a literature review reflecting upon Goffman's work. It expands the model and metaphor of the Total Institution and includes my original interpretation of the concept called here the 'New Total Institution'. *Chapter 4* offers a close reading of contemporary literary texts in which this new interpretation is examined for strength and sustainability when applied to a belief system, a social structure and an isolated physical environment respectively. *Chapter 5* considers the relevance of the (New) Total Institution, initially, in terms of the family. It then highlights specific groups of people who live in constrained and constraining circumstances: those affected by domestic abuse, and displaced persons such as refugees. *Chapter 6* turns to the relationship between the (New) Total Institution and the novel, looking at the choices and experiences of the writer and the reader. It goes on to describe the ways in which the (New) Total Institution has informed the writing of *Chasing Elena.* Finally, this novel is presented in its entirety.

List of Contents   **Page**

Acknowledgement

Sincere thanks to everyone: family, friends and colleagues, who has helped me in so many different ways, to complete this thesis.

My academic supervisors, Dr Elizabeth Reeder and Ms Zoe Strachan, have been an invaluable support.

A World of Their Own?

The Novel and the Total Institution.

Prologue

In 1958, Annie and Zita entered St Bride's Home.[1] Bridey's was a West of Ireland boarding school for the rural poor, run by an order of Roman Catholic Sisters. With the gate locked behind them, the front door was opened for the first and last time; the list of rules they were told to memorise stated 'no servant, tradesman or child will enter or exit the main entrance at any time'. Also off limits were the parkland in which the house sat, unapproved lay visitors, baths (except by weekly rota) and refusing food at meal times. Underlined was the exhortation: 'never to address, or look at, any of the Sisters directly until invited to do so'.

This would be Annie and Zita's home for the next ten years.

In 1998, they looked back on two lives, lived side by side, behind the same four walls and the same locked gate. It was a life lived together but never shared. A life lived together that drove them so far apart they began to deny one another's existence. Annie's personal memoir reflected mental cruelty and physical chastisement, Zita's an indifference that was strict yet benign. Both believed the other to have been brainwashed.

By 2008, the matriarchal four walls had crumbled alongside the nuns' reputations. St Bride's was ripe for development into luxury apartments but the recession came and

---

[1] Annie, Zita and St Bride's are pseudonyms. Throughout the 1990s, drawing on my social work background, I worked in a voluntary capacity with women who had, as children and young people, lived in a variety of homes and schools run by religious orders based in Ireland. A number of such organisations were under investigation for child abuse and cruelty relating to incidents spanning the 1950s-1980s. Annie and Zita's life stories are their own, enhanced by the composite testimonies of other girls from one particular institution. They ate, slept, studied and worked together and generally agree, were hardly out of one another's sight; their descriptions of accommodation and living environment tally. Yet, some allege systematic mental and physical abuse. Others recall a strict, utilitarian regime which was stable and not unkind; they repudiate any allegation of abuse. This is, in itself, an interesting example of the Rashomon Effect; contradictory interpretations of the same event by different people.

nothing happened. Annie and Zita, older now – one divorced, one widowed – knew exactly what they would do with the building. Annie wanted it pulled down and the debris scattered across the vast park denied to her during a decade of misery. Zita hoped An Taisce would restore the mansion to its former glory and regenerate the park where she played on Holy Days and Holidays.

Their dual beliefs bring to mind a quote from Ken Kesey's (1962) novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*: 'But it's the truth even if it didn't happen' (p8). Either way, for Annie and Zita, St Bride's Home and their experiences inside it, made it a totally encompassing institution.

For me it is the physical embodiment of a Total Institution.

Chapter One

The Total Institution Explained

Erving Goffman, sociologist of the renowned Chicago School, first detailed the term Total Institution[2] in an extended essay: 'On the Characteristics of Total Institutions' in *Asylums* (1961). *Asylums* was one of the first sociological examinations of the social situation of the in-patient in a psychiatric hospital. At its most fundamental, Goffman's definition of a Total Institution is:

> a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life (Goffman, 1961, p11).

The significance of the Total Institution, he continues, is two-fold:

> Total institutions, then, are social hybrids, part residential community, part formal organization, and therein lies their special sociological interest. There are other reasons, alas, for being interested in them, too. These establishments are the forcing houses for changing persons in our society. Each is a natural experiment, typically harsh, on what can be done to the self (Goffman, 1961, p22).

Whilst the term is a sociological construct, it resonates across the arts and humanities. It is my belief that the field of English literature, both fiction and creative non-fiction, provides an alternative framework for considering the theory and legacy of Goffman's Total Institutions – analytically, sociologically and in terms of literary texts themselves.[3]

---

[2] The insertion of capital letters for Total Institution is mine. This is employed for the sake of clarity.

[3] This is essentially a literature-focused essay rooted within a sociological theory in which Goffman's theories (and other related sociology) will, necessarily and without compromise, be simplified and summarised. With careful exceptions, the emphasis will be, as it was for Goffman, on the world of the inmates in a Total Institution rather than the world of the staff.

The key to the concept is the inmates' or residents' disconnection to the outside (home) world; the encompassing or total character of the institutions is symbolised by detachment:

> the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, cliffs, forests or moors (Goffman, 1961, p16).

Goffman identifies five categories of Total Institution:

1) Institutions which care for the incapable and harmless (e.g. care homes).

2) Institutions which care for the incapable and potentially harmful (e.g. mental hospitals and isolation units).

3) Institutions which protect wider society from potential danger (e.g. prisons).

4) Institutions which carry out some technical, work-like or educational based tasks (e.g. boarding schools).

5) Institutions which are designed as retreats from the world or training stations for the religious (e.g. convents and monasteries).

In spite of their variations in philosophy and function, Goffman believes that Total Institutions share a number of central features of the inherent common, formal and guided life that contradict the basic social arrangements of a society in which:

> the individual tends to sleep, play and work in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an over-all rational plan. The central feature of total institutions can be described as a breakdown of the barriers ordinarily separating these three spheres of life (Goffman, 1961, p17).

Such features are designed to ensure stringent authority and control over inmates. These can be summarised as:

1) All aspects of life are carried out in one place, under one single authority.

2) Batch-living, wherein each phase of the resident's daily activity is conducted in a group setting. Every member is treated the same and each is expected to do the same thing at the same time.

3) Daily routine has an inflexible schedule, formally imposed by a regulatory body.

4) Activities are combined into a single rational plan, allegedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution.

In turn, such characteristics allow the 'handling of many human needs by the bureaucratic organisation of whole blocks of people' (Goffman, 1961, p18). This – irrespective of necessity or effectiveness – has significant implications:

1) By moving people in blocks/groups, their supervision becomes a process of regimentation based on surveillance rather than guidance or inspection.

2) A small supervisory personnel oversees a large number of residents.

3) There is a clear split between inmates and staff.

4) This is 'echelon' authority whereby: any staff may discipline any inmate; corrective sanctions are applicable across the board; misbehaviour in one sphere of life has repercussions in any or all others.

In addition, the Total Institution is incompatible with:

1) Family – whilst the family is frequently considered as a contrast to solitary living, the more relevant contrast is with batch-living. People living, working and sleeping in any residential settings are inclined to experience difficulties in sustaining meaningful domestic existence outside (says Goffman) and in a Total Institution, inmates are actually required to suppress connections to their home life. This ultimately acts as a negative force on society, even if the stipulated aim of the institution is rehabilitation.

2) Basic work-pay structure of wider society – since there is no division between work life and social life, the authorities must provide the inmate with all necessities; the inmate has limited money and few choices.

There is a caveat. Goffman stipulates that none of the attributes listed are fully exclusive to Total Institutions, and none seems shared by every one of them. However, each Total Institution exhibits the majority of the elements, the majority of the time, and to an intense degree.[4]

---

[4] A note on totalitarianism: it might be argued that there is nothing more 'total' than a totalitarian world but there is a key difference between a sociological Total Institution and a totalitarian state. In the latter, society

The Sense of Self

Until the point of admission to a Total Institution, potential residents are members of a home world. There, they take for granted a way of life and daily round of activities. They have a 'self', and they have relationships and supports that allow this self to survive. This is, in Goffman's terminology, their 'presenting culture'.[5] However, the new inmate must disassociate with the home world and undergo a series of experiences that affect this sense of self. He or she will be dispossessed of his/her former role(s), stripped of all existing networks, and thus, the self will be systematically, perhaps unintentionally, mortified. This will ultimately lead to disculturation (loss of or failure to re-acquire habits needed in the home world) or un-training, and this separation can be permanent. It happens whether or not the inmate's entrance is voluntary or forced; in the former, the individual will already have begun the process of withdrawing before s/he enters.

This requirement to see him/herself in a new light, effectively requires a re-organisation of the self. Goffman calls this the 'moral career' of the inmate. Broadly speaking, it comprises: 1) mortification, 2) privilege system, 3) internal culture, 4) coping mechanisms, 5) rehabilitation and re-socialisation.

Mortification Process

Frequently a humiliating process, mortification is an immediate exhibition of the power held by the establishment. This begins with a standard admission procedure. From form-filling and medical and psychological examinations to photographing, bathing, hair-cutting, and

---

as a whole is – generally – dystopian and whilst there may be dissenters or a counter-culture, totalitarianism is the way of life for society. Examples of such worlds are readily available in classic literature: most famously, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). To contrast, in Goffman's Total Institution, it remains *against* the norms of wider society for individuals and/or groups to be bound by the constraining ideologies.

[5] It is for this notion of presenting culture that Goffman excludes orphanages (that is the traditional from-birth/very young institutions rather than the modern concept of the children's home) and foundling homes from his five categories 'except in so far as the orphan comes to be socialized into the outside world by some process of cultural osmosis even while this world is being systemically denied him' (Goffman, 1961, p23). Annie and Zita's home, St Bride's, never defined itself as an orphanage, rather an institution for rural female children living in 'desperate poverty' and/or 'of incompetent parentage' in which the girls would be trained to domestic service and a life of moral goodness.

issue of uniforms, to instruction of rules and assignment of quarters, entrants are 'trimmed' or 'programmed' to fit the administration of the institution. Names may be changed, and possessions confiscated or limited, standardised or substituted. Immediately, inmates are expected to join an established routine that is, at best, unfamiliar, and is generally unwelcome. In this way individuals are slowly stripped of self-identity.

As part of mortification, inmates are subject to 'contaminative exposure', which may be physical or interpersonal. In the home world, people control their bodies and their belongings. They can, for example, determine when and what to eat, when and how to bathe, and choose with whom to mix. Inside, such choices are removed. Goffman says: 'a total institution is like a finishing school, but one that has many refinements and is little refined' (Goffman, 1961, p45).

Privilege System

This comprises three elements: 1) the house rules, 2) a small number of defined rewards or privileges that are offered in exchange for obedience to authority and 3) punishments for breaking the rules.

Privileges in the Total Institution are less indulgences than the absence of deprivations. Built into the system is the opportunity, for example, to achieve a better (or worse) job or a nicer (or less pleasant) place to sleep. The notion of release from the establishment, too, is overt – certain behaviours will be known to increase or decrease the proposed length of incarceration.

Internal Culture

Learning the internal culture helps inmates 'survive' mentally and physically. At its core is a recognised language or 'lingo' shared amongst the inmates and understood, sometimes used, by the staff. In addition, there is the folklore of the institution, the understanding of ranks and officials amongst the staff – essentially 'insider knowledge' – and information about comparative establishments.

There is a system of 'secondary adjustments' or 'practices that do not directly challenge staff but allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means' (Goffman, 1961, p56). Examples include cigarettes, a private space for time alone, extra or different food; whatever an inmate can do or get for both personal pleasure but also to provide him/her with evidence 's/he is still his/her own person'. Since institutionalisation often implies some kind of personal failure or some sort of behaviour or belief that is/has been out of the ordinary, an inmate often develops 'a story, a line, a sad tale…' (Goffman, 1961, p66), which explains or excuses his/her placement.

Residents, too, will be aware of 'messing up' or engaging in forbidden activity (fighting, drinking, disobedience, escape attempts), then getting caught and receiving punishment that includes an alteration in privilege status.

Finally, to counteract the feeling that life inside is time wasted or destroyed or taken from one's real life, Goffman identifies 'removal activities' such as games, dancing and films:

> voluntary unserious pursuits which are sufficiently engrossing and exciting to lift the participant out of himself… If the ordinary activities in total institutions can be said to torture time, those activities mercifully kill it (Goffman, 1961, p67).

Coping Mechanisms

Transient social support networks, inclusive and exclusive, often develop amongst some of the inmates some of the time, certainly in terms of the 'them (staff) and us' phenomenon, but Goffman suggests there is little group loyalty. To manage the tension between the home world and the institutional world and in attempting to adapt to mortification processes and internal culture, inmates employ specific techniques as coping mechanisms. These are:

1) Situational withdrawal – the inmate ceases to interact with anyone else. S/he appears to withdraw attention from everything other than events immediately

concerning his or her body. Goffman notes the psychiatric label for this is as 'regression', often viewed as irreversible.

2) Rebellion (also called the 'intransigent line') – challenging the institution and its totality by refusing to co-operate with authority.

3) Colonisation – internalising the formal institutional view of the external world and coming to the conclusion that one is better off inside. Tension between the institutional life and the home world collapses, creating a relative personal freedom based on the 'maximum satisfactions procurable' (Goffman, 1961, p63) within the institution. Colonisers may pretend to their fellow residents that this is not the case so that they still 'fit in' but equally are likely to 'mess up' if there is any indication of release.

4) Conversion – taking on a moralistic and disciplined line, apparently adapting the official, staff view of oneself, and trying to act the role of the perfect inmate. The convert is always at the disposal of staff.

The combination of these alignments is known as 'playing it cool' and is what most inmates actually do to enhance their chances of coping, surviving – and getting out.

Rehabilitation and Re-socialisation

Total Institutions often claim to be concerned with rehabilitation: 'resetting the inmate's self-regulatory mechanisms so that after he leaves he will maintain the standards of the establishment of his own accord' (Goffman, 1961, p69), but according to Goffman, this claim is rarely realised and the effects of mortification and reorganising processes are not long-lasting. Former residents quickly resume life in the home world and the tribulations of the institutional world recede. Where the experience was a positive one – boarding school, religious retreat, a training programme – graduates may well share their experiences and stay in contact with each other, other leavers may not be so forward or so confident. In fact, release is often both longed-for and a source of anxiety, and disculturation and stigmatisation are significant issues. For some, the shadow of the Total Institution is permanent.

Chapter Two

The Total Institution in Literature

Erving Goffman was writing in the 1950s and 1960s, when large, bureaucratic institutions designed to detain or rescue, were in their heyday. At the time *Asylums* was published, inside the Irish institution of St Bride's, Annie and Zita were eleven years old and in the midst of their own 'moral careers'.

I have described the new code of conduct they were expected to adopt on arrival. In addition to the hierarchical demarcation of roles, there were strict limits on personal choice involving food, hygiene, free movement and friendships. Zita, on reflection, argues that they were children, already unwanted, uneducated, without voice or purchase. In entering St Bride's they lost nothing yet gained the security of a roof, routine and discipline. Annie denounces the whole experience as an attack on her basic human rights; childhood's fundamental powerlessness made it all the worse. Either way, both are products of the Total Institution.

Where would Goffman stand in this debate? After a close reading of *Asylums*, and his other works, particularly those concerning the presentation of self and on stigma (Goffman 1956; 1963) I'm inclined to believe he would stand up and be counted with Annie and her outrage, and then sit down and point out to Zita, gently, that hers was exactly the opinion the hierarchy had sought to instil within her.

Loved or hated, the physical structure of St Bride's Home is the stuff of ghost stories, of nightmares, and of a curious nostalgia. Hollywood would have cast it as a traditional lunatic asylum; the National Theatre, dependent on the proclivities of the director in residence, as a dystopian back-drop to JB Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* (1945) or as the ill-fated Manderley in du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). That the thrill of dark, forbidding and forbidden recesses – of physical settings and of the mind – has universal appeal to reader imagination is evident in so many earlier works of literature. Consider the architectural Gothic horror of the parodies of *The Castle of Otranto* (Walpole, 1763) or *The House of the Seven Gables*

(Hawthorne, 1851) and the locking up of the first Mrs Rochester in the attic of Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre* (Bronte, 1847).

It will be, then, no surprise that the whole concept of the Total Institution – the inmate experience within the structural framework – is widely represented in modern literary texts; to quote Goodman (2013): 'Anyone who has read Asylums and seen the film, One flew over the cuckoo's nest, will not fail to make the connections between the two'. Furthermore (I will return to this point in Chapter 3) Goffman himself makes liberal use of fiction and memoir to demonstrate his own arguments.

Following his precedent, it is to a selection of different but equally relevant novels, I will now turn.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) fits the prison category of Total Institution. After being a German prisoner of war in World War 2, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov is (incorrectly) accused of being a spy and sentenced to ten years forced labour in the Soviet gulag system.

Incarceration of a different type is demonstrated in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) set in a 'traditional' mental asylum. Chief Bromden, the half-Indian narrator has been a patient in an Oregon psychiatric hospital for ten years when Randall McMurphy arrives and challenges the system. Similarly, Marge Piercy's *Woman of the Edge of Time* (1977) sees Connie Ramos sectioned to a mental hospital, this time in New York State. Then, Peter Kocan's twin novellas, *The Treatment and The Cure* (2004) follow convicted felon, Len Tarbutt, through his stay in a maximum security hospital in Sydney.

At the other end of the Total Institution spectrum, Antonia White's *Frost In May* (1933) introduces nine year old, Nanda Grey. Nanda, the daughter of a Roman Catholic convert, is sent to the Convent of the Five Wounds, a boarding school demanding total obedience to the Sisters and to the RC Church. Next, the religious house itself is the location for Rumer Godden's *In This House of Brede* (1969). The story details the progress of widow and recent convert, Philippa Talbot, a successful forty-something career woman who enters the

Benedictine Monastery of Brede as a novice. Finally, Bernice Rubens's *The Waiting Game* (1997) is set in a care home where the well-off, well-heeled, elderly residents are overseen by an old-fashioned Matron.

Each of these examples of a Total Institution is fiction. However, supplementing the authenticity is their basis upon a real place and/or the experience of the author. Kocan's stories are fictionalised accounts of his own enforced residency. Solzhenitsyn drew on his personal experience of the Soviet work camps of his era. Kesey both worked as an aide in an Oregon mental hospital and underwent clinical drug trials to supplement his income. White attended a strict convent school called the Sacred Heart in Roehampton, and Godden had in mind the long-established and well-known monastery of Stanbrook with which she had a close familial history.

In the following discussion, I will use examples from these fictional texts to demonstrate Goffman's moral career of the inmate.[6]

Detachment from the Home World

The geographical locations of the novelised institutions are notable. The buildings themselves regularly sit in isolation and will serve as a physical barrier to connection with the outside world; they are often grim and foreboding to embody the despair of the potential inmate's journey there. In Piercy's *Women on the Edge of Time*, the protagonist, Connie Ramos' journey to Rockover State Hospital begins like this:

> Then the gates swallowed the ambulance-bus and swallowed her as she
> left the world and entered the underland of all who were not
> desired…Into the asylum that offered none, the broken-springed bus
> roughly galloped. Over the old buildings the rain blew in long gray ropy
> strands cascading down the brick walls. As she was beckoned out with
> rough speed, she was surprised to see the gulls wheeling above, far

---

[6] There are many further examples in the texts of the functioning and experiences of the Total Institution, and of the moral career of the inmate. I have chosen a brief and illustrative variety of those that, I believe, are the most enlightening. Also, for simplicity, I consider the moral career 'chronologically', that is, as life is experienced by a new resident first entering the relevant Total Institution.

inland, as over other refuse grounds. Little was recycled here (Piercy, 1977, p31-2).

Taken to a public mental hospital, Connie feels discarded by a society that has taken away her child and now her freedom. Like Annie and Zita, sent away for 'care and protection' (Care with a capital C), Connie's powerlessness has a further dimension. She is diagnosed psychotic, allegedly prone to violent behaviour and hallucination. A potential threat, Connie is being locked away to save her from herself and to save society from her. She has fallen between two of Goffman's categories: the mental hospital[7] and the prison.

In *Frost in May*, Nanda Grey's admission to school requires less of a physical journey. The convent is not geographically isolated but the deliberate distance from the front porch to the school quarters leads to a different world:

> Nanda and her father waited several minutes on the Convent doorstep
> before the flap behind the grill flapped up and down. After much rattling
> of chains and bolts the door was opened… (White, 1933, p16).

Nanda looks down a 'long stretch of white-washed walls and red-tiled floor' (p16) to where the portress's little room bears the notice 'no admission for seculars'. Beyond that, at the far end of the twisting and turning passage, there is a heavy oak door and beyond that, finally, will be the school corridor.

Brede Abbey, Rumer Godden's setting for *In This House of Brede*, is more traditional in its imposing and distant stature, outside of and looming over, the old town. Its bells punctuate the secular and liturgical hours of the day and its tower is a local landmark:

> From the air, it would seem that it was the Abbey that had space, the old
> town below that was enclosed… the Abbey stood in a demesne of park,
> orchard, farm and garden. Its walls had been heightened since the nuns
> came, trees planted that had grown tall; now it was only from the tower
> that one could look into the town… (Godden, 1969, p34).

---

[7] Such terms as 'mental institution' or 'mental hospital' or 'lunatic asylum' were the accepted terminology at the time of Goffman's research. Today, we would refer more respectfully to facilities that assist with mental health issues. Throughout this discussion a variety of terms are used, depending on context.

For all the new residents of all the institutions, the complete separation from their home worlds starts immediately. Being metaphorically if not literally, miles away facilitates the emotional distancing essential to this new way of communal, collective living.

Authority and Control: a common, formal and guided life

Having accepted that channels to the external world are greatly reduced, the inmate is required to bow to an echelon authority that emphasises judgment and constraint, and is closely linked to privilege and punishment – neither of which are necessarily logical. The first time Annie, at St Bride's, tried to run away, she was moved to a dormitory bed nearer the window, which leaked and blew a draught in all but the mildest weather. Similarly, one day, Shukhov, in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* feels unwell and decides to stay in his bunk. As a result, he is sent to the Warden and punished, not by the usual solitary confinement in the freezing 'hole', but by washing the guardroom floors.   This suits all the guards; it's a task universally detested.

Staff may offer care or guidance, but generally, surveillance and inmate compliance are prioritised. Authority, in the hands of the few, is absolute. When it is viewed as working well – everyone is getting along with minimal staff input – it is applauded (by authority); it shows the 'system' works. Chief Bromden, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* offers an example:

> Everybody on the ward is proud of the way the patients co-operate. We
> got a little brass tablet tacked to a piece of maple wood that has printed
> on it: CONGRATULATIONS FOR GETTING ALONG WITH THE SMALLEST
> NUMBER OF PERSONNEL OF ANY WARD IN THE HOSPITAL. It's a prize for
> co-operation. It's hung on the wall right above the log book, right square
> in the middle between the Chronics and Acutes (Kesey, 1962, p 17).

In reality, the patients have no choice. In case of dissention, the powers-that-be do not increase staff, they increase drug dosage and electric shock treatment as a means of control. The so-called Chronics and Acutes are treated as separate client groups and never encouraged to associate anyway. The former are tacit examples to the latter – if you do not behave yourselves, you will end up like us. Ironically, this plaque Chief Bromden describes

hangs directly above the ward diary, a book in which patients are encouraged to record information about one another's misdemeanours and lapses (also known as telling tales).

In Bernice Rubens's *The Waiting Game*, there is no opportunity for echelon authority; it is politely dictatorial. Matron rules The Hollyhocks Home for the Aged: residents, visitors, Mary, maid-of-all-work, and the Board of Trustees. Matron carefully selects her residents and she makes it her business to rummage through their rooms and find out their secrets. She maintains the upper hand and ensures – usually quietly – that each resident knows his or her place. The residents accept it all. They may complain *to* themselves but never *amongst* themselves for Matron is to be feared; it is she who controls movement to other, less palatable, institutions. Ultimately, her power is untouchable – she is the only one not 'playing the Waiting Game, a game that was no fun at all' (Rubens, 1997, p128).

Each of the fictional institutions has an overall, overt and legitimate plan or mission. Whether this is care, protection, education or punishment, the inmates undergo a parallel experience of totality and are guided towards a particular outcome. For myriad reasons, none of them is encouraged to stand out as an individual but to live and work for the collective good.

Incompatibility with the basic work-pay structure of society

The Benedictines of Godden's Brede Abbey are comfortable with eschewing their wealth, uncomfortable when money invades their contemplation. Settling to convent life, Philippa Talbot, a former businesswoman, is aware more than most of the difference between work for financial gain and work for the glory of God and facilitation of the community. When it comes to light that the former Abbess, beloved Dame Hester, has squirreled away finances and made promises of money she did not have, the Abbey faces turmoil and the whole work-pay ethos has to be faced head on – with far-reaching results.

At St Bride's, Annie remembers[8] that they never queried their jobs. They worked for work's sake, solely to avoid punishment, without any other compensation. Annie was always in the laundry; seemingly endless shifts of the hottest, back-breaking tasks. The girls moaned and fought privately, but rarely refused or rested. To do so always resulted in Sister Bernard's cane or the exhausting silent reflection – standing in front of the Blessed Virgin Mary, arms outstretched to mirror hers, for the length of a working day. The nuns called it an exercise in self-control and contemplation of personal sin.

For Solzhenitsyn's Shukhov, subject to gulag regulations, the point of his incarceration is work. Forced, hard labour such that he and his fellows are constantly dreaming of a few days in the infirmary. Shukhov works hard, and is sometimes rewarded with a crust of bread or a warm at the fire. But he thinks hard too. Always plotting his next move, he works out strategies for gaining extra food, favours and friends in high places. Shukhov will not yield to boredom and the inevitable demoralisation and further mortification it produces, but even so, he realises, the way his life and work is structured is a form of control alien to his experience of the home world:

> During his years in prisons and camps he'd lost the habit of planning for
> the next day, for a year ahead, for supporting his family. The authorities
> did his thinking for him about everything – it was somehow easier that
> way (Solzhenitsyn, 1962, p51).

He may be underestimating himself – he is actually a master schemer – but in the camp he is planning or scheming only for himself. Re-learning the habit of thinking of others rather than competing against them, will be required to make him 'fully man' again, but right now, life may well be easier 'inside'. It is certainly simpler – it's about survival, life or death. The exhortation to consider the collective good may be implicit and on occasion, inmates might support one another. Ultimately though, each inmate knows it's every man for himself.

---

[8] As adults, Annie and Zita have written personal journals, recording their memories and reflecting on their childhood experiences. Throughout this essay, comments attributed to both women arise from personal communication (in a private rather than professional capacity) with them.

Incompatibility with the family

The implication here is that 'family' is a positive and stable phenomenon. This is problematic in itself (and a position I will debate in Chapter 5) and is soon recognised as such by Antonia White's Nanda. She finds herself at cross-purposes, the dilemma of school and home is quickly a twisting thorn in her flesh. The convent purports to revere the family structure, and Nanda has a loving family, but it remains second-rate for the Church and the nuns; Nanda and her father have converted to Catholicism, her mother has not. Therefore, Nanda is neither one thing nor the other, both in her parents' eyes and in the eyes of the school. For her, the boarding school and the Catholic belief system is a double whammy of a Total Institution – the ultimate, hermetically sealed environment with absolute and absolutely conclusive authority, particularly to a child. Inevitably, Nanda battles with her innate sense of self, which must, and will, change.

There are characters for whom the lure of an institution is precisely to throw off the shackles of their domestic arrangements. In *The Waiting Game*, the luckless Mrs Thackeray buries her abusive husband, and drives herself willingly to The Hollyhocks. It doesn't take her long to discover she has simply swapped one prison, one form of masochism, for another. Matron glories in the emotional distance of family life; her living comes from unwanted elderly relatives sent to her care, yet she exerts her power by needling the families when they do, under carefully controlled strictures – Mother's Day, for example, or looming deathbeds – pay their guilt-and-greed visits:

> Matron welcomed them in Reception. 'It's been a long time,' she said
> pointedly to those to whom it applied. 'I'm sure your relative will be glad
> to know she hasn't been forgotten.'

And:

> 'You know the way of course,' Matron said. 'Or have you forgotten? In
> case you have you'll find the names on the doors.'
> The visitors trooped up the stairs like a pack of admonished
> schoolchildren and Matron returned to her office (both Rubens, 1997,
> p168).

The residents are taught precisely whom they should favour and where their loyalties should lie, if they want a peaceful life.

Goffman believes that although individual living and family life are most often compared, the true contrast is between individual and batch-living. Certainly the dichotomy of individual versus collective is fundamental to the Total Institution. Overall, Goffman said, a Total Institution is a negative influence and experience. It encompasses the whole being and disregards dignity. It subjects the inmate to a regimented pattern of life that has little or nothing to do with his or her own desires or inclinations. As Robert Faggen says in his introduction to the 2002 edition of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest:* 'out of a whole population, only one will finally break through the glass to a larger world'.

For the adult Annie, that the residents of religious retreats have (allegedly) chosen to be there and are staying of their own accord is simply another form of brainwashing rather than freedom of choice. But whilst Zita would not argue over the status of these places as Total Institutions, for her they are founded on positivity: nobody herds a group of seminarians or novices against their will, nobody is dehumanising them. These incumbents make a community and each has a voice, which will be heard and then will accede to the greater good, in this case the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. To quote Thomas Szasz: 'the ruler looks in the mirror and sees a liberator; the ruled looks at the ruler and sees a tyrant' (p128).[9]

Discussing the Chapter of Faults – sessions of group confession – in Rumer Godden's novel provides an example of this wilful choice to commit to a greater good:

> Abbess Hester had been given to minutiae but when Abbess Catherine took her first Chapter of Faults, she had said, 'Let's have no laundry lists but real self-accusations, and not more than three. If you have ten faults choose the three most damaging to the common life.'

---

[9] I will return to this issue in Chapter 3. In terms of the *definition* of a Total Institution, Goffman himself might have suggested that this is something of a digression. Goffman did not differentiate between different types of Total Institution. He was a sociologist speculating on the collective experience in which it is the bureaucratisation of managing large groups of people herded, we might say, as sheep, which dehumanises people into the collective negative experience of the Total Institution. That certain individuals might not object and might even gain something from the process, is, in this sense, immaterial.

And:

> 'The Chapter of Faults had the effect of welding the nuns together and making them like one another (both Godden, 1969, p197).

Goffman – and Annie – might argue that this remains problematic because the community undercuts individuality and in doing so, assaults it – whatever the personal feelings of the religious sisters. One could, then, ask if the Benedictine's Chapter of Faults is any different to the ideological Therapeutic Community and its Group Discussion as described in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*:

> Help yourself and your friends probe into the secrets of the subconscious. There should be no need for secrets among friends… the nurse had opened up with, 'Now. Who will start? Let out those old secrets.'…she looked at her watch and said, 'Am I to take it that there's not a man among you has committed some act that he has never admitted?'… That triggered something, some acoustic device in the walls, rigged to turn on at just the sound of those words coming from her mouth. The Acutes stiffened. Their mouths opened in unison (Kesey, 1962, p44-5).

The inmates scream confession after confession, one outdoing the other. Self-control is thus gloriously swept away into group (lack of) control, which may be considered akin to evangelical zeal:

> I robbed a cash register… I tried to take my little sister to bed… I wanted to take my brother to bed… I killed my cat when I was six… I lied about trying, I did take my sister… So did I! So did I. And me! And me! (Kesey, 1962, p45).

Mortification and the Moral Career

The Total Institution is a new world, it requires a new way of living, and the inmate has the minimum of time to acclimatise. Think back to Annie and Zita's list of house rules. Simultaneously, their personal identifiers and possessions were catalogued and confiscated. 'You'll get them back when you leave,' the portress told them, folding their faded and darned summer dresses and tatty, greying vests and knickers around their only toys, a china

23

doll and a dented spinning top respectively. (Ten years later, they got them back). In exchange, they received serge pinafore dresses and wooden Rosary Beads, and only the latter stayed with them. The uniforms were communal; laundered fortnightly and returned at random so that a child might spend two weeks pulling at armholes that cut off circulation or hems that dragged on the floor.

Shukhov, chief protagonist in One *Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, has been stripped to the bone. Literally and metaphorically, mortification is what life in the gulag is about (and that is essentially his story: a snapshot of one day out of 3,653 that are largely identical). In the camp system, he is nothing except for his prison number, Shch-854. And he has to ensure that that is regularly re-painted so the digits are clear, if he doesn't, he is punished. Shukhov has so little that his few possessions are treasured; daily he hides his favourite work trowel so that none of his gang can take it.

Internal Culture

For Solzhenitsyn's Shukhov, evidence that he is 'still his own man, with some control of his environment' (Goffman, 1961, p56) lies in his breakfast ritual. For him, it is all about maintaining some level of human dignity, hanging on to the coat-tails of the self, not fully mortified in the degradation of work camp life. He is making his secondary adjustments:

> Then he removed his hat from his clean-shaven head – however cold it
> might be, he could never bring himself to eat with his hat on – and
> stirred the cold skilly, taking a quick look to see what kind of helping
> they'd given him (Solzhenitsyn, 1967, p23).

Shukhov has no control over what he eats – his words almost infer the porridge with more control than he has – but he stirs it anyway. It is what he can do, it is all he can do. There is no gulag rule about removing headgear and the mess hall is cold but he accepts that because civilised people remove their caps at mealtimes he must do so. He may have been stripped bare, but the camp has not, will not, take his integrity. Still, Shukhov is clever, he knows the ropes; he knows what he can get away with. Only he knows would he still remove his cap if it meant a day in the cells each time?

In a Total Institution with a more positive bent, residents are more easily converted to the internal culture. Rumer Godden explores this through her description of the second vow of the Benedictines, known as the conversion of manners. As Godden's characters in Brede Monastery discuss, it is about adapting to an entirely different way of thinking from the external world's and it:

> ...turns your ideas topsy-turvy,' said Hilary: self-effacement instead of self-aggrandizement: listening instead of talking; not having instead of having: voluntary poverty (Godden, 1969, p106).

Yet even when the apparent culture is embraced with zeal, the real meanings behind it may have to be learned, sometimes with difficulty:

> ...They are dear, good girls,' Dame Ursula often said of the novitiate – it did not matter which novitiate – 'If only they wouldn't be so ardent. They want to sleep on planks, go barefoot, which isn't necessary, but they won't use up a reel of thread, or make a pencil last, or darn a patch, which is necessary... (Godden, 1969, p107).

Goffman's work concentrates on the adjustments that the incomer has to make. However, new arrivals will always affect the existing dynamic of the institution. All residents will have to accept the changes incurred because implicit in Goffman's argument is that the status quo has to be maintained in order for the system to continue to work. At the Hollyhocks care home in *The Waiting Game*:

> Matron knew that there was always a certain unease when a new resident arrived. He or she was a threat to a closely woven circle, and a period of adjustment was entailed (Rubens, 1997, p6).

Goffman specifically references the emergence of a language as vital to internal culture. Jargon, in any culture, profession or social system, is an occupational hazard; a shortcut for the 'in-crowd' both to converse without effort and to lay claim to their position. It has always been prevalent in the medical world, and the examples in *One Flew Over the*

Cuckoo's Nest demonstrate use of both the jargon, understood by staff and patients alike, and how it can be used to manipulate the system and interpret behaviour.

When resident, Dale Harding, sarcastically shouts at an uncomprehending member of the public, 'Would you like me to decipher a Rorschach for you?' (Kesey, 1962, p204) all of his peers understand the term and the sentiment. References to the Chronics and their subgroups of Walkers, Wheelers and Vegetables, the Acutes, the Big Nurse, Shock Shop, and an OD Card, are endemic in Oregon State Mental Hospital. More general jargon, such as OT, PT, ET, WAIS, Wechsler and MMPI are (still) common across this category of Total Institution. Connie Ramos and Randle McMurphy could seamlessly swap places between Rockover and Oregon State and barely falter over the language. Back in St Bride's, Annie and Zita, along with their co-residents, were locally called the Brideys, which made sense throughout the County; what the County would have made of the girls' specific references to 'toots, The Last, lava and BVMs' is not recorded.[10]

Reward, Privilege and Punishment

Rewards, or privileges that are minor 'take-it-or-leave-it' pleasures in the outside world, become coveted treasures of institutional life. The carrot and stick with which staff casually acknowledge inmate obedience and acquiescence may issue a powerful reminder of their home world and the loss of their 'former self'. Thus, attempts to gain those privileges and rewards can become obsessional, first, with hours devoted to planning and plotting and secondly, fantasising about regaining autonomy over the coveted item once released into the home world.

The experience of Connie Ramos in *Woman on the Edge of Time,* is typical of the way in which the inmate, having internalised the rules and the overall culture of the Total Institution, begins to understand the privilege system:

---

[10] From Annie and Zita's recollections, these random slang terms referred to: crying (toots); the final meal before the rigid abstinence of Lent (The Last); menstruation (lava); and 'Blessed Virgin Mary save us' (BVMs).

> Fargo talked to her almost humanly. When Fargo was working, she often waited around near the glassed-in station and sometimes Fargo would ask her to sweep the floor or take a woman to the bathroom or hold a patient for an injection or sit with a patient coming out of electro-shock. Then Fargo would give her extra cigarettes… On that Wednesday she was sitting there hopefully… On her lap was spread yesterday's paper, a present from Fargo for cleaning up vomit (Godden, 1969, p80-1).

In most Total Institutions, privileges are not indulgences, they are the absence of deprivations. *In This House of Brede,* sees Philippa, the new Benedictine*,* in a double bind. Philippa is voluntarily a Benedictine, at her own behest there is no eventual discharge to her former life. So, whatever she and her fellow Dames hanker over must be forever, cheerfully, unfulfilled. Their three lifelong vows – stability, conversion of manners and obedience – require them permanently to accept the deprivation of worldly rewards:

> It was the little things that were Philippa's danger; things so little they made her ashamed… 'A cigarette. If only I could have a cigarette.' It had become an obsession; 'and a bath: if only I could have a hot bath' (Godden, 1969, p92).

There are times when what appears to be a 'privilege' to the outside world, can be the opposite within a Total Institution. In *The Waiting Game,* one such example is taking meals in one's bedroom rather than the communal dining room. This is seen not as an indulgence, a favour if a resident is feeling under the weather, it is a sign of the beginning of the end. Matron announces to the rest of the residents in a polite tone of euphemistic warning that 'Mr or Mrs X is having a tray in her room.' So powerful a message is it, that there is a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy, and the resident confined to his/her room usually does die.

Coping Mechanisms

In St Bride's, Zita lived in a singular way that was a mild manifestation of situational withdrawal. Even as a child, she knew that while she concentrated fully on discovering what the nuns (and via them, God) wanted of her and constantly trying to offer it to them, she had no space to let her memories creep in or opportunity to worry about the future. She, like Philippa above, might understand Shukhov when he muses that*:* 'The thoughts of a

prisoner – they're not free either. They keep returning to the same things...' (Solzhenitysn, 1967, p47).

In Peter Kocan's *The Treatment*, Len Tarbutt starts by employing the conversion alignment of coping. He has put himself in the shoes of the irreproachable*:* 'You want to show what a model inmate, you are. Dedicated. Eager to please' (Kocan, 2004, p21). He subsequently spends a significant amount of time wondering what is a model patient and whether the whole conversion theory is really one of entrapment:

> Then you get afraid you might be giving a wrong impression. You might
> be overdoing it. Showing "Obsessional Tendencies." Digging too much
> might be like cleaning windows too much. Two screws are sitting on a
> knoll, a little way behind you. You imagine what they might be saying
> (Kocan, 2004, p28).

In truth, as Goffman theorises, Len goes on to use a mixture of adjustment tactics over the course of his 'career'. Serving a seventeen year sentence in a psychiatric unit where he is labelled criminally insane, he is always second-guessing what his behaviour should be to demonstrate 'normal' – see above – but more importantly, he invents the Principle of the Outward View:

> It was just the idea that, to minimise the mental effect of being locked
> up, you had to minimalise the physical sense of it, so you'd try to keep
> open vistas in sight as much as possible. The sky is the biggest vista, and
> in MAX there was always the lake. The Principle of the Outward View
> was all about positioning: you'd sit outside rather than inside, near a
> window rather than far away from it. If you could <u>see</u> great free spaces
> you could project your mind <u>into</u> them (Kocan, 2004, p171).

Having moved from maximum security (MAX) to the mid-security ward, Len makes another interesting point when he says:

> It seems odd that you've never needed the Principle of the Outward
> View as much as you do now – in a ward without walls or fences (Kocan,
> 2004, p171).

When all coping mechanisms fail, the possibility of escape remains; either dreaming of it or making a real attempt at it. From the confines of St Bride's, Annie tried the traditional route of running away. In *Woman on the Edge of Time,* Connie's method is far more complex, in that she finds (creates/stumbles upon/is recruited by..?) an alternative world, a life-force from the future. Readers will develop their own opinions of it, but Connie knows it to be real and so it sustains, comforts, and most importantly, it stimulates her mind, which is being forced closed by institutionalisation.

Rehabilitation and Resocialisation

Whilst Annie and Zita were pupils (inmates) at St Bride's they lived within a physical environment that could barely be penetrated from the inside out or the outside in. Keys were as much a part of the Sisters' habits as was the crucifix. Doors and windows were locked and unlocked at every turn, except for the bathrooms which were without either. When Annie ran away she never got further than the back scullery and, when she was small enough, the turf hole.

Fifty years on, their memories of such physical inescapability equally represent the emotional inescapability. Annie and Zita's lives – their thoughts, experiences, loves – have been and still are molded by the institution in which they grew up; the building, the ethos, and the Church that underpinned it. And the evidence suggests that Goffman would largely concur with this viewpoint. It may not always be such an extreme reaction but the clue is in the *Total* Institution; totality is not going to be brushed off with the plaster-dust and shards of stone if and when the walls come tumbling down, not even if the institution in question has always claimed a concern for re-socialisation and rehabilitation.

In *The Cure*, Len Tarbutt experiences an example of this when he moves from a secure to an open hospital ward.   In line with his Principle of Outward View, he regrets leaving the structure of his previous placement:

> Now you're here and you just feel lost and lonely. There are too many
> possibilities here, though you don't know yet what they are. In MAX

there were so few possibilities, but you knew them exactly; they fitted tight around your life like the high walls. Even this stretch of dirt road seems too much… there was nothing in MAX to remind you of the world coming and going and so you got used to living in a kid of stillness that you only really sense now you're out of it…You'll never have that stillness in your life again. Unless you make a cock-up and get sent back (Kocan, 2004, p109).

His subsequent conversation with fellow patient, Julie, who is detained on a voluntary basis, goes like this:

'Don't you ever think of escaping?'
'No.'
'Don't you want to be free?'
'I'm only interested in being free in <u>here</u>,' you[11] say tapping your head.
'And are you?'
'Not entirely, but I've no reason to think escaping would help.' (Kocan, 2004, p185).

As the old adage (almost) says, you can take the individual out of the institution but can you take the institution out of the individual? Since the totalising experience essentially affects the sense of self and requires a re-organisation of it, then it seems unlikely. However, the strength of presenting culture and of the establishment's predisposition (or otherwise) to rehabilitation may equally tip the balance.

---

[11] This is Len speaking, he frequently uses the second person 'you' to refer to himself.

Chapter Three

In the Wake of Goffman

Goffman's *Asylums* is credited for its contribution to the understanding of the social aspects of mental illness, and for contributing to reforms in mental health care, for example, the abolition of large-scale institutions (Fine & Manning, 2003) and is frequently referred to as influential in the anti-psychiatry movement (Smith, 2002; Trevino, 2003). Above all, it humanises an often dehumanised group of people, and in identifying a system which he purports to affect fundamentally individual identity and the sense of self, Goffman initiates an interesting debate.

Although the term 'Total Institution' is usually credited to Goffman, Vienne (2010)[12] in particular, demonstrates how the time-line of the concept traces back to Goffman's fellow sociologist and sometimes mentor, Everett C Hughes.[13] Goffman (1961, p16) himself, attributes an interpretation of the term 'total' to a number of his forerunners.[14]

Since the 1960s there has been a modest proliferation of response to Goffman's work.[15] Of particular interest to me here, are the discussions centring on his methodology and writing style and on the potential expansion of the Total Institution as both model and as metaphor.

Goffman's Writing

Goffman has a broadly ethnographic approach to fieldwork. His research is, by his own admission, largely based on personal observation, insights and interpretation as opposed to

---

[12] Vienne considers the complex nature of the relationship between Hughes the teacher and Goffman the student, with Goffman a reluctant apprentice. Vienne analyses their respective writings to show clear links between their approaches, starting with Hughes' sociology of institutions prior to the publication of *Asylums.* He investigates allegedly 'missing' lecture notes of Hughes' that might well prove his genesis of the Total Institution.

[13] Documented in a memo Hughes wrote to Goffman several years in advance of the publication of *Asylums* (Hughes, 1957).

[14] Goffman (1961, p16) footnotes: Rowland Howard's 'Segregated Communities and Mental Health', *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, No.9, edited by F.R Moulton, 1939; and Amitai Etzioni's 'The Organizational Structure of "Closed" Educational Institutions in Israel', *Harvard Educational Review* XXVII (1957).

[15] See Bibliography for a general sociological literature review of texts relevant to Total Institutions.

quantitative data and experimental controls. It is often impressionistic; there is no supporting data or transcripts of interviews.[16] As such, the text is rendered interesting and chaotic in turn, and in sociological terms he has been called something of a Maverick for it. *Asylums* relies heavily on scattered and lengthy literary references to novelists and biographers, including Kathryn Hulme[17] and other authors, such as Brendan Behan, Herman Melville, George Orwell and T.E Lawrence.[18]

That this can be problematic is demonstrated by Smith (in Gordon & Williams, 1977). Smith, himself, uses the maritime vessel to describe the analytical problem of using the Total Institution framework to study institutional arenas that do not consist of inmates and staff. Whilst Goffman tacitly implies that ships (along with military organisations) are less closely in line with his model than mental hospitals and prisons, the Total Institution, for him, remains a useful grid to measure experience on a merchant ship. Smith, however, points out that Goffman was relying heavily on the fiction of Melville's *White Jacket* (1850) for his original maritime data, and this leads to potential inaccuracies; the 'modern' seaman is no longer an enslaved creature trapped in an all but floating prison.

I agree that Goffman is not always explicit in referencing his material as fiction or memoir, sometimes relying on the reader to note the citation. Also, his arrangement of, and reliance on, extended quotations is somewhat 'loose', certainly in comparison with experimental sociological methodology, and even ethnographically, where a more controlled edit would surely be employed. However, within his approach, I would argue that Goffman, knowingly or not, draws in both sociologist and lay reader (and the writer of fiction like myself who

---

[16] In addition, whether St Elizabeth's Hospital was representative of the 'asylums' he was describing has been questioned (Scott, 2011), as has the ethics of his 'undercover' – assistant to the physical education instructor – placement (MacSuibhne, 2011).

[17] Kathryn Hulme's biography, *The Nun's Story* (1956) is a novel that captures fully the notion of the Total Institution in the religious life for heroine, Gabrielle/Sister Luke. It would have been a natural choice to include in my discussion of Goffman's category of 'religious retreats and training centres' in Chapter 1. Instead, I chose the fictional *In This House of Brede,* primarily because it fits my remit of the novel and the Total Institution. Secondly, a significant proportion of Hulme's work is set in the Congo, a country also integral to Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, to which I refer to in later chapters and I wanted to avoid repetition. Thirdly, Goffman already quotes at length from Hulme in *Asylums*. Finally, Hulme's novel, (later a film) as an example of a Total Institution, is infinitely quotable and is best read in its entirety to do the concept justice.

[18] See Appendix 1 for complete references pertaining to these authors.

sees the appeal of a certain chaos) and invites him/her to 'join the dots' – as I do in this essay.

That Goffman does not explicitly differentiate between types of Total Institution, erroneously suggests, says Davies (1989) that Total Institutions are homogenous. For Davies and his predecessor, Samuel Wallace (1971, p2)[19] the issue is 'not which institutions are total and which are not, but rather, how much totality does each display?' Davies and Wallace would both prefer a precise spectrum of institutions ranging from 'open' to 'closed', along with classification of purpose (an end in itself, a task, or a transformation). In my view, they are, respectfully, missing a key point. Goffman has clearly defined his categories of Total Institution, and in so doing has given them, and all readers, the scope to make their own judgements exactly – I believe – as I have done here in Chapter 2.

Clearly, the Soviet gulag, described by Solzhenitsyn, meets the objective criteria of totality with greater obvious resonance than Rubens' care home, in which residents are officially encouraged to come and go, or White's boarding school, essentially a transitional establishment. Each of the novels I cite, as well as Annie and Zita's experiences in St Bride's, share the majority, but not all, of the structures and ideologies of Goffman's Total Institution, most, but not all, of the time. And, to the residents at the time, each is all-encompassing.

For me, the challenge in Goffman's work lies not in any such lack of differentiation or in his methodology or style but in his emphasis on the in-patient experience. There is no question that he discusses adequately the issues of presenting culture and resocialisation/escape but it is generally in terms of how they affect and are affected by (respectively) the period of institutionalisation. Given that his fundamental concern is how events and processes affect the organisation and reorganisation of the sense of self, I believe there is further scope in *Asylums* for considering these issues in their own right and potentially re-distributing their emphasis; seeing them as equally important as the in-patient experience.

---

[19] Compilation of papers written for the American *trans*action magazine, a journal which located social issues of the time and attempted to provide suggestions for change.

I draw upon my social work background[20] to corroborate this stance. In my experience, the Annies and Zitas of this world, the inmates and former inmates of the Total Institution, are likely to agree. The real Annie and Zita were sent to St Bride's with considerable 'baggage': offspring of a farming family dispossessed of their land due to an inability to pay the rent; a mother with mental health issues and an alcoholic father. They reacted differently to the institutional experience, and this in turn affected the ways in which they dealt with their discharges. At barely sixteen, Annie, narrowly avoided another, similar, Total Institution, the Magdalene Laundry[21] and Zita seriously considered (and eventually rejected) testing her vocation and entering yet another one, the convent at St Bride's.

Extending Model and Metaphor

Thus far, I have kept strictly within the confines of Goffman's definition of what constitutes a Total Institution, which at its core requires a large, residential setting. However, in the wake of Goffman, there is a body of research suggesting that the concept of the Total Institution can usefully exist without physical embodiment. Pushing further, I believe there is scope to discuss whether/how an individual may be totally institutionalised whilst remaining physically in his or her home world.

Having detailed Goffman's fundamental premise and located it within literature, these new, and I believe extremely significant, propositions will now preoccupy the remainder of this chapter.

Amongst the more abstract encompassing situations is Lark's (in Gordon & Williams, 1977)[22] work on the American slum. Lark seeks a model that incorporates the interactions between residents of the slum and representatives of the larger government and social system, in an

---

[20] I qualified as a social worker in 1993 and have worked in that capacity, in several countries and with a variety of remits, since that time.

[21] See Appendix 1 for media concerning the Magdalene Laundries. Made famous for their incarceration of 'fallen women', being a wilful teenager like Annie, branded a troublemaker from childhood, was often sufficient reason to be sent to a Laundry.

[22] *Exploring Total Institutions* (Gordon & Williams, 1977) is anthropological in nature and conveniently collects together a number of relevant studies, largely of two types: the place of the Total Institution in wider society, and life within the Total Institution.

attempt to shift from analysing the slum (and comparable cultures of poverty) in terms of individual causation and personal blame.   In the slum, physical institutional barriers are replaced by physical and social limitations on mobility, and mortification arises via an unequal access to such basic human rights of health care and education. Lark believes that whilst it is not a perfect parallel, using Goffman's Total Institution as metaphor provides the required etic[23] framework with which to guide the workings of the slum. It 'replaces the notion of individual causation with one of the individual acting and reacting to situational and structural variables' (p129).

Williams's (in Gordon & Williams, 1977) study on seasonal, migrant farmworkers, contained in a residential camp, demonstrates another interesting variation on the traditional Total Institution. Rather than entering as individuals, stripped of their outside identities and having to construct a meaningful world in a setting peopled by strangers, migrant farmworkers are inducted with the same others each year. This transforms the character of institutional degradation in that it is shared with others, and others that are already known to you – you are humiliated and you watch the humiliation of others as they do yours. This distorts the home culture, which will have to be rebuilt outside each time when the season is over, thus concludes Williams, 'a migrant camp is perhaps a touchstone of what can be done to a culture' (p74).

Totalisation can, then, affect a sense of community identity as well as the sense of self – an important point to which I will return later in this chapter. Suffice it to say now, Annie and Zita's recollections provide another case in point. Every year in early spring, respectable former residents (those who had graduated to marriage, extended family, domestic service or other work training as opposed to any woman now institutionalised elsewhere) were called back to St Bride's in the parody of a homecoming that was, in effect, free labour for the annual spring clean. Since the invitation was really an obligation and the women were mostly locals, it tended to have a profound and unsettling effect on current inmates, former inmates and the neighbourhood; the shadow of the institution always loomed. Davies

---

[23] In anthropology and the social sciences, emic and etic describe two types of field research. Emic refers to work done from within the social group under examination and is from the point of view of the subject. Etic refers to work done from outside, from the point of view of the observer.

(1989) contends that many of these less tangible examples of Total Institutions (other examples cited in Gordon & Williams are ethnicity, slavery and ceremonial dance) stray too far from the definition to have any real meaning and he cautions that the term 'Total Institution' cannot be stretched with impunity.

He has a point, and certainly when grouped together in one text, it can feel as if Goffman's definition is being used to the most generalisable extremes. However, the authors quoted here all stress they are using the Total Institution as metaphor and it is their intention to challenge boundaries and perspectives. I would contend that in his criticism, Davies is being very literal in his own interpretation of what Goffman, and subsequent researchers, actually set out to do, and has perhaps missed the point somewhat. As Smith (Gordon & Williams, 1977) says:

> 'If I have needled the reader into exploring in a developmental fashion some unexpected utility of the TIM [total institution model] the paper will have achieved not only the effect which was intended here but, as I understand Goffman's presentation, his purpose as well' (p163).

The Total Institution and Concertive Control

Tracy's (2000) work on the contemporary cruise ship brings me back to the enclosed environment of the Total Institution – with the addition of Barker's (1993, 1999) notion of concertive control.[24]   This is of particular interest as, at first glance, the two concepts – concertive control and Total Institutions – may appear contradictory.

Unusually, Tracy concentrates on the experience of the staff not the 'inmate'/passenger and she observes how power, self-subordination, and the construction of self-identity are integrated with issues of 'emotion labour', a type of work wherein employees are paid to

---

[24] Concertive control is defined as control that is exercised by the workers themselves, who collaborate to develop the means of their own control by negotiating a consensus that shapes their own behaviour according to a set of core values, for example, a corporate or charity mission statement. It refers to the quite high levels of self-discipline that comes from strong identification with the (work) organisation by workers who are organised in teams. I suggest that concertive control is also applicable to 'involuntary' participants, who use it in exactly the same way as traditional workers.

construct a particular cheerful personality; employee emotion is not only a response to work situations but actually *is* the work. Therefore, Tracy states that the cruise ship is indeed a Total Institution but that significant elements of the control therein, are concertive: peer-led, and indeed, self-controlled.

Concertive control also preoccupies Shuler (2006) in her examination of the virtual office.[25] It manifests itself in employee loyalty and is, according to Shuler and to Tracy, often more powerful than direct and more obtrusive means of control. The organisation Shuler studies is an Evangelical ministry called HOPE, the nature of which demonstrates unique examples of control. Workers describe the culture in hierarchical terms, guided by the 'rules of right' (Barker 1999) under which their actions are observed by a higher power:

> the members of HOPE fervently believe that God is involved in their work, by watching, judging, guiding, and sometimes even directing the actions of team members. (Shuler, 2006, p5)…the combination of a panoptic view of God and a vocation that encourages blending work and home provides an additional portrait of a total institution (Shuler, 2006, p9).

If Shuler, like Tracy, concludes that Goffman's analysis captures the lives of HOPE members and of cruise ship staff, respectively, then it is reasonable that the same may be said of other organisations. Thinking back to the novels under examination in Chapter 2, the boarding school, such as that described in *Frost in May* (White, 1933) is a clear contender (I also discuss this in detail and from an alternative viewpoint in Chapter 6), as is the religious house, such as *In this House of Brede* Godden (1969), in which Barker's 'rules of right' must be inherent.

For Tracy, there is also a complex balance of power between 'inmate and staff' as, in addition to the usual authority line, passenger (inmate) expectations and feedback directly affect the performance review and work contracts of staff. Tracy uses Foucault's (1975)

---

[25]'Working from home' is Shuler's term. This can be misleading to the reader who imagines it literally – a person who works, alone, from a room in his/her own home. Whilst this is one element of it, it becomes clear that Shuler is actually speaking of 'working away from an actual, physical, traditional office'. It might be easier to think of her concept as 'working from a virtual office' which permits the worker freedom of movement to carry out their work in any non-traditional place.

perspective to demonstrate how managers/superiors, colleagues and passengers, take responsibility for disciplining themselves when living and working together. Barker (1999) draws on Foucault to define concertive control. In essence, these combined examples demonstrate a Foucauldian surveillance.

The Total Institution and Foucault[26]

No discussion of Goffman and Total Institutions, or of authority and control, can be complete without reference to the work of Michel Foucault.[27] Foucault's comprehensive writings on power and control are very closely aligned to Goffman's analysis of his Total Institution scenario, and of particular importance is the idea of surveillance.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault uses Bentham's eighteenth century panopticon as a metaphor for operational power and discipline in contemporary societies. The panopticon is an institutional building around a circular structure, with an inspection house in the centre for a skeleton staff to watch inmates around the perimeter. As such, it utilises an omniscient eye; allowing a single watchman (-opticon) to observe all (-pan) inmates of that institution without them knowing if they are being watched or not. In effect, it leaves the 'watching to the watched' in that the inmate needs to control his/her behaviour at all times – just in case. He believed it a prototype for prisons (as well as schools, day care, hospitals and asylums). As the Total Institution is described in literary fiction, so is the panopticon: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in his novella, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981) features the panopticon of Riohacha, where the Vicario brothers are incarcerated awaiting their murder

---

[26] This is a brief summary of Foucault's theories of knowledge and power, concentrating on the single dimension of surveillance, particularly the panopticon, and how it relates to the Total Institution. I would like to acknowledge the influence and breadth of Foucault's work, most of which is not referred to in this paper.
[27] Michel Foucault (1926–84) and Erving Goffman (1922–82) are near-contemporaries although they arise from very different backgrounds and philosophies and have very different targets and intentions. Their positions are complementary, not directly comparable and not competitive. A comparison of Foucault and Goffman is worthy of a thesis in its own right. In 1961, Foucault's *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la folie dans l'âge de la raison* (translated as *Madness and Civilization,* 1965) was published at approximately the same time as *Asylums*. Together with Ronald Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960) and Thomas Szasz's *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961) they are hailed as the cornerstone of antipsychiatry theory. Hacking (2004) suggests that Foucault's historical and philosophical 'archaeology' and Goffman's 'interpersonal sociology' are complementary in that: 'Foucault's research was 'top-down', directed at entire systems of thought and Goffman's research was 'bottom-up' – always concerned with individuals in specific locations entering into or declining social relations with other people' (p288).

trial; the Siberian section of Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) includes a critique of the panopticon prison system; and I will return in detail to Jenni Fagan's *The Panopticon* (2012) in Chapter 4.

Foucault's assertion is that any modern disciplinary power need not be physically enclosed (total), because it can utilise panopticism. This anonymous power replaces the need for coercion, and harnesses modern technological surveillance techniques: CCTV, tagging, tracking devices and mobile phones, possibly even social media. Allmer (2012) sums it up:

> The Panopticon creates consciousness of permanent visibility as a form
> of power, where no bars, chains and heavy locks are necessary for
> domination anymore (p22).

The futuristic, omnipresent telescreens – surely prototypes of CCTV – in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Fo*ur (1948) are an excellent example:

> there was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched
> at any given moment…you had to live…in the assumption that every
> sound you made was overheard, and except in darkness, every
> movement scrutinised (p4-5).

Shuler's (2006) thinking is that the deification of Foucault's (1975) panopticon may well be unique to ministry or evangelical organisations, but actually – as Tracy (2000) points out in her example – it is not peculiar to religious groups. Secular organisations have their own versions of the panopticon which keep workers on track, and whilst old-fashioned gaolers do not exist, 'a subtle form of domination, a culture trap combining normative pressure with a delicate balance of seductiveness and coercion' (Goffman, 1961, p224) certainly does; supervisory guidance is reborn as surveillance.

The Total Institution Redefined

Over the years, Goffman's theory of the Total Institution has remained constant, but it is evident that his definitions have been reviewed and sometimes reframed, whilst continuing to pay tribute to Goffman as their catalyst.

Coser (1974) speaks of Greedy Institutions, which are not typically marked by external coercion but tend to rely on voluntary compliance and to evolve means of activating loyalty and commitment. They exert pressure on the individual not to make or to weaken ties with other, competing, organisations or persons. One example is the celibacy of a Catholic priest to limit family obligations. Coser distinguishes Greedy Institutions from Goffman's Total Institutions in that:

> There are evident overlaps between "total" and "greedy" institutions, yet these terms denote basically different social phenomena. Goffman focuses on physical arrangements separating the "inmate" from the outside world, while I show that greedy institutions, though they may in some cases utilize the device of physical isolation, tend to rely mainly on non-physical mechanisms to separate the insider from the outsider and to erect symbolic boundaries between them (Coser, 1974, p6).

He cites the Israeli kibbutz[28] as another good example, and a more modern incarnation might be the growing concept of reality TV, for instance, the Big Brother house.

Bauman (2000) refers to Liquid Institutions, which are not fixed in time and space but which flow and move through barriers, 'seeping into the skins' of their individual members', and Quirk et al (2006) to Permeable Institutions in the context of modern in-patient psychiatric care. They challenge Goffman's belief that a Total Institution must be largely closed and 'impermeable' to the outside or home world and suggest that the balance of power between inmates (patients) and their families and staff has now become more democratic.

Most recently, Scott (2011), still revisiting Goffman, takes a deliberately positive stance and defines the Reinventive Institution:

---

[28] See Appendix 1

a material, discursive or symbolic structure in which voluntary members actively seek to cultivate a new social identity, role or status. This is interpreted positively as a process of reinvention, self-improvement or transformation (p3).

These are Reinventive Institutions in both their design and in their effects. They may be religious, disciplinary, therapeutic, educational or virtual and her examples range from range from therapy and self-help clinics to spiritual retreats, academic hothouses and secret societies. Instead of hierarchical power, peer-to-peer monitoring and control is important. Similar to Tracy's and Shuler's phrase 'concertive control', Scott calls this performative regulation, and she, too, draws on Foucault. The inmate is formally free but there is tension between outside world and expected institutional allegiance.

Totalising Institutions in Contemporary Society

It is a curious aside as to what would Goffman make of his Total Institutions, and these subsequent re-definitions, in 2015. Times have changed since Goffman was writing, and sociology, a living science of society, essentially changes with them – a phenomenon to which his successors (above) are responding.

The Total Institution is now a feature of the leisure world; examples cited are package holidays (especially the All-Inclusive option), casinos and shopping centres, as well as Tracy's (2000) cruise ships. These may or may not meet the criteria of geographical distance; cruise ships generally do, shopping outlets and strip malls likewise. On the other hand, casinos and other shopping centres may well be central to a city. Either way, there is a physical detachment between these places and wider society, and an emotional one, which both encloses the individual in a location and bureaucratically administers them – however benignly – whilst they remain inside.

Individuals decide to go on cruises or to spend their free time in casinos or shopping centres where there is often no easily accessible exit, and/or a confusion of routes and options. In casinos and shopping centres there are few clocks and limited views of the sky. There may

be poor mobile phone reception and/or Internet connection – and a modern day definition of a Total Institution must surely include lack of access to social networking (which, in turn, is likely to be one of the modern mechanisms of control). Yet, the individual is a visitor not a resident, can leave any similar environment of his/her own free will, and it is not a long term or – hopefully – distressing experience.

Such places utilise concepts of totality to control one aspect of their respective clients, rather than their every action. For the period of time that the individual is within the specific physical environment, s/he is amongst a large group of people with a common aim, who are overseen by a smaller staff group, and is 'regimented' to the point of a timetable (cruise ships) or opening/licencing hours (casinos and shopping centres) and an expectation of behaviour (holidays, gambling and shopping).

Bureaucracy

But what of more permanent, bureaucratic and often critical 'advances' in society? Care in the Community is a significant contemporary social change. Primarily taken as referring to changes in mental health services, it is equally well applied to prison provision and the care of children and vulnerable adults. Large and impersonal psychiatric hospitals have made way for smaller, more localised community and out-patient initiatives, together with drug and psycho-therapies. There is a dearth of imposing buildings housing Total Institutions but as the work of Quirk et al (2006), MacSuibne (2011) and Goodman (2013) indicates, reviewing provision and ethos, 'totalising aspects' do still remain.

The UK penal system, incorporating original Dickensian edifices and award-winning new-builds, is probably the one remaining model of incarceration of possibly hundreds of people in one place at any one time. Even in this instance, though, the tendency is towards decarceration and as such a different type of control mechanism: prisoners on parole, on special licence, Community Service Orders and ASBOs, electronic tagging and curfews.

Orphanages (although it is important to remember that orphanages were not included in Goffman's definition) and long-term, institution-based children's homes such as those made

famous by Barnardo's and NCH have made way for small group family-type units for those in need of special care and/or control, with a preference for kinship or foster care wherever possible.

Bureaucracy – formal administration of large numbers of people – has scaled new heights in terms of the training and paperwork required to care for, and to be cared for. Admittance procedures are complex, rules are intricate and in the code that 'everyone is treated the same', a soft regimentation is implied. Often, appointments and meetings are made at the behest of the professionals, and service user inclusion is variable. The Data Protection Act ensures access to written records, but it is not a given, access must be applied for through correct channels. Certain Welfare Benefits are dependent on entitled individuals continuing to 'toe the line'.

The issue of institutionalisation then (even for those not traditionally institutionalised) remains hugely significant; it is the definitions and parameters of what that means in real terms that have altered. Any one of the examples cited is likely to have a significant effect on the sense of identity, of self, of any participant – be they voluntary or involuntary 'inmates'. I believe Goffman, writing now, would be evaluating, perhaps editing and expanding but not fundamentally changing, his own earlier works.

Within the contemporary review of totalising institutions, there is clearly growing acceptance that some encompassing environments and totalising experiences may be fundamentally positive in nature and increasingly more likely to be filled with a genuinely voluntary membership. I do not disagree. However, I also think that in modern society there remain fundamental and very different situations in which people are leading technically 'free' lives, who outwardly have the autonomy of personal choice, but in real terms – subjectively and often objectively – they are specifically constrained and (as Hughes, 1957, would have it) restrained. To cite three (simplified) examples: 1) belief system, 2) social structure, 3) physical environment.

First, is the influence of the belief system. Consider 'the church-goer' who is committed to involvement within a traditional belief system for reasons other than, or in addition to, faith

alone. When Goffman was writing, convents and other religious enclosures were the single faces of 'positive totalisation' (and even then it was sometimes grudging). For example, Daner and then Delaney (in Gordon & Williams, 1977) describe the more positive aspects of the encompassing environment and effects on the sense of self by looking at religious enclaves, Hare Krishna in the USA and a Buddhist monastery in Thailand respectively. Other groups – cults, sects and certain New Religious Movements – generally demonstrate the more negative aspects of the Total Institution. However, I am referring to 'ordinary' individuals who regularly and actively worship in mainstream congregations as part of their home world experience – but where it is possible that such attendance may be borne out of duty or fear.

Second, is the power of social structures (or bureaucratic, administrative or government agencies). I believe there is the so-called 'second class citizen' for whom modern society fails to offer equal freedom or choice compared with different population demographics in their wider home world. Being socially isolated within the immediate home world is akin to being a second class citizen (as above); living on the edges of a world in which participation for certain groups is limited. Lark's (in Gordon & Williams, 1977) study of the American slum is an example already discussed.

Ignatieff (1983) makes an interesting point:

> In practice the concept of the 'total institution' has come to be restricted to those institutions of the state – the asylum, the prison, the reformatory, the workhouse – which have analogous populations – the poor, the dispossessed, the unprotected and the stigmatized – and which have analogous functions – incarceration, deterrence and rehabilitation (p168).

Rosen (in Gordon & Williams, 1977) has a similar perspective:

> Outstanding among these total institutions is the public welfare system, but also included are the many "regimented" situations in which the poor are forced en masse to either wait for food stamps, spend long hours in unemployment offices, or queue up for substandard medical services. (p165).

For Rosen, the power of the Total Institution:

> 'is to focus upon them as an extreme form of class encapsulating
> institutions which regulate a major segment of humanity throughout
> most of their lives and which are truly life encompassing. For the lives of
> the poor are enmeshed in a network of such institutions in which they
> constantly encounter the routine personal assaults Goffman so clearly
> describes for special settings' (p166).

Third, is the experience of the physical environment. This is relevant as either geographical or social isolation from the home world. In the first instance, there are infinite reasons why an individual or group might remove itself, or be removed to a different and unknown place for an expanded period of time (travel, disaster, work). Moving outside of one's 'comfort zone' is in itself sufficient to create some of the more general and, perhaps, benign and/or temporary experiences of a Total Institution, which still have the effect of being life-changing.

With these three contemporary conditions foremost in mind and considering the needs and expectations of modern contemporary society, it is at this point I am going to add to the list of 're-interpreted Total Institutions' outlined in the literature review above. I will now propose my own variation on Goffman's theory – the New Total Institution.

The New Total Institution

To reiterate: early on in this chapter, I stated that for me, a Total Institution 'without walls' or within a framework beyond that of the physical embodiment of a building is a distinct possibility, a natural extension of model and metaphor. As such, my own revised 'definition'[29] of the concept draws from three major sources: (1) Erving Goffman's original concept, (2) Michel Foucault's theories of power and surveillance, and (3) Barker's notion of concertive control.

---

[29] My 'authority' to make such a claim for a New Total Institution arises from an undergraduate training in sociology and social work, postgraduate study in social and community health and many years direct experience of the individuals and groups I will come to discuss. Linking the sociology of the Total Institution to contemporary literature is something, I believe, that has not been done since Goffman's numerous literary quotes and 'evidence' in *Asylums*, and I expect that this cross-disciplinary approach will add a new dimension to the debate.

I believe the concept of the New Total Institution, ingrained in the original and which can be applied equally to belief systems, social structures and physical environments, is equipped to offer an essential and valuable addition to the discussion of the Total Institution more than fifty years after Goffman was writing.

I make five distinct adjustments, which, in my opinion, do not compromise the original concept. Neither do they roam solely into the realm of metaphor. They do extend the boundaries of the Total Institution as model and metaphor to create the New Total Institution.

Comparison of the Total Institution and the New Total Institution

Goffman's Total Institution	The New Total Institution[30]
A place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals are detached from the outside world by physical and social barriers	A number of like-situated individuals residing and working in their home world but somehow detached from wider society by non-physical barriers. For example, those who have a 'social identity' in common (e.g. a belief system) or who are subject to constraints of legislation (e.g. Looked After Children Act, Mental Health Act).
The individual tends to sleep, play and work in the same place, with the same co-participants, under the same authorities, and with an over-all rational plan. (This leads to incompatibility with the basic work-pay structure of society)	The individual tends to sleep in different places, with different co-participants, but key aspects of their lives are grouped under the same authorities, and with an over-all rational plan. (This maintains compatibility with the basic work-pay structure of society).
The individual is subject to a direct form of authority and control: the handling of many human needs by the bureaucratic organisation of whole blocks of people. They lead a common, formal and guided life.	The individual is subject to an indirect form of authority and control: whilst (apparently) living 'free' and (apparently) making their own choices, they are subject to surveillance and/or concertive control in the aspect(s) of their life that groups them together. They lead a common, relatively formal and guided life.
The sense of self (and reorganisation of it) is primarily affected by the totalising experience. (The inmate has a 'moral career' beginning with the mortification process).	The sense of self (and reorganisation of it) is affected by presenting culture and re-socialisation (escape) as well as the totalising experience. (The individual still has a 'moral career' beginning with the mortification process).
Incompatibility with the family.	Compatibility with certain types of family.

---

[30] I have toyed with a number of 'names' for this concept but here, for simplicity and comparison purposes, I have maintained the New Total Institution. The obvious 'Virtual Institution' I rejected as the term virtual is now inextricably linked to computers and social media.

Chapter Four

Inside the New Total Institution

In order to demonstrate my concept of the New Total Institution[31], I shall now return to the world of English literature and draw on some fictional examples to demonstrate its purpose and relevance. First, I revisit a traditional – both in social terms and in terms of being discussed as totalising – institution arising from a belief system, that of the Christian Church. I will consider it in the light of David Lodge's novel *How Far Can You Go?* (1980). Secondly, I look to a social structure that remains within the state-enforced categories close to Goffman's research, but spans beyond a residential setting, that of the UK Local Authority, and specifically the notion of Looked After Children. To this end, I will refer to Jenni Fagan's aptly named *The Panopticon* (2012).[32] Thirdly, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) is set in a distinct physical environment that has a profound effect on 'visitors' to it. This text also informs both discussions into belief systems and social structure. (Furthermore, it sets the scene for subsequent discussion in Chapter 5, which will involve aspects of the family, domestic abuse and the experiences of refugees and other variously displaced persons).

I stress again, the New Total Institution is essentially an extension of Goffman's original definition. Goffman's Total Institution is a practical model; my New Total Institution is model *and* metaphor and these texts mirror that extension by incorporating both literal (Fagan) and more abstract (Lodge) examples of the concept – as befits state structure and belief system respectively – with Kingsolver's physical environment somewhere in the middle. A close reading of each is, then, required to understand in practice, how, where, why, when and to what extent, the characters really experience a (New) Total Institution.

---

[31] A further note on terminology from hereon in. Since my revised definition leans heavily on Goffman's original, it is essential that in some situations the terms are interchangeable and for this I use (New) Total Institution. When the difference between the definitions matters, I use Total Institution and New Total Institution as appropriate.

[32] As may be expected, there is no evidence that any of these authors considered Goffman's Total Institution in their writings. Fagan, however – also as may be expected – was apparently reading Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* as she wrote, and acknowledges his influence, and that of Bentham: http://totallydublin.ie/more/print/interview-author-jenni-fagan/ Accessed 29 November 2014.

Once that is determined, the legitimacy of the concept of the New Total Institution is nearer – or not – to being validated.[33]

The Belief System

The institution of the Western Church, has, outwardly, changed significantly over the last two centuries. In the mainstream (away from emergent fundamentalism of all denominations) religious vocations and religious attendance have declined, and the power of the Church in social decision-making is depleted. These days, the lives and times of children – women – like Annie and Zita, for instance, are a far cry from the old regime.

Still, I would argue that there remains a reduced but significant enclave in society, living a life very structured and potentially constrained by its beliefs. As such, this forms the basis of a New Total Institution for this group.

Devout religious affiliates – Christian, Muslim, Jewish – who live their lives in the home world[34] – do so under a strict code of morality and instruction, they follow a certain way of being and their own 'rules of right' (Barker 1999). They do not usually live together, but still are bureaucratically processed and are subject to periods of so-called batch-living in terms of coming together in church, mosque or temple to worship en masse. There is a hierarchical religious authority, generally pyramidal in structure. In theory members are free to come and go and to choose their level of adherence, but for many, the ties are much deeper, and the root of their faith is inescapable.

David Lodge's (1980) *How Far Can You Go?* is set in the 1950s and 1960s, following the coming-of-age (over twenty-odd years) of a group of London University students as they observe the unfolding of the permissive society. With little else in common, their past,

---

[33] I have already drawn attention to the fact that there are no specific quantitative parameters for measuring the percentage of 'common characteristics' required to constitute a Total Institution. Goffman's more qualitative stipulation, that the majority of them will be present in most of the institutions, most but not all of the time, remains the general guidance.

[34] I am referring to 'ordinary' people for whom their religion is integral to their sense of self and central to their way of life rather than those for whom it is a vocation and/or has led to them withdrawing from wider society to live within a religious house.

present and future lives are bound together by the institution of the traditional Roman Catholic Church. Whilst *How Far Can You Go?* refers literally to the hugely complex and fraught business of sex, it is also a consideration of how far each of them can actually go from their religion.

How Far Can You Go?

David Lodge's novel opens with a sparsely-attended, early-morning, weekday Mass in a cold and gloomy Church somewhere in the London suburbs. Addressing the reader directly, the privilege of the omniscient narrator, Lodge wonders why each of the nine student characters: Angela, Dennis, Michael, Miles, Violet, Ruth, Edward, Polly and Adrian are there at all? It's more than duty, he concludes, more than supererogatory (his word). Is it then self-interest and/or other more secular reasons? To a degree, yes: from ingrained good behaviour (Angela), to 'getting the girl' (Dennis, Edward), to guilt (Michael). Yet underlying all of this, the reason they are there demonstrating devotion or confessing sin, is because the Church expects it, the priest expects it, and they expect it of each other; surveillance and concertive control both.

In order to explain it, Lodge turns to the metaphysics of the Catholic Church in which the characters have grown-up. It's a game of Salvation, a spiritual Snakes and Ladders that starts when a Catholic is born (or converted), with the winner entering Heaven and the loser burning in Hell. Lodge's nine players are subject to continual spiritual accounting of everything good, bad and indifferent in their lives, and the rules of the game are complex, complicated and archaic. There is a lot more besides (p6-8) but:

> Do the young people gathered together in the church of Our Lady and St
> Jude on this dark St Valentine's Day believe all this? Well, yes and no…
> but in outline, yes, they believe it, or at least they are not sure it is safe
> not to believe it; and this deeply ingrained eschatological consciousness
> is probably the chief common factor behind their collective presence
> here at mass… it will help them in the immortal game of snakes and
> ladders (Lodge, 1980, p9).

Lodge brings in the common argument of religion as insurance – nothing new in that, nothing that directly fosters evidence of a (New) Total Institution – although, of course, the Catholic Church does offer the best, most comprehensive cover, with weekday mass a premium. But for the students:

> it is also more than that. For their Faith teaches them that god does not only control the afterlife; He also controls this one. Not a sparrow falls without His willing it. As far back as they can remember, the cradle Catholics among them have been encouraged to pray for good fortune in this life as well as in the next; fine weather for the School Sports Day, the recovery of a lost brooch, promotion for Daddy, success at the Eleven Plus (Lodge, 1980, p17).

The pyramidal structure of Lodge's Church is simple: God has ultimate control, his representatives (the few) on earth administer it throughout the congregations (the many) who are, in effect, under constant surveillance. There is not much respect for the hapless curate Austin Brierley but not one of the student characters does anything but apologise immediately with unquestioning obedience when he arrives to break up a (more amusing than risqué) party (p27-8).

Whether the characters face life-changing events or minutiae, the Church is in control. Lodge couches his examples in terms of sex: virginity, life-partners, marriage, babies. When Angela, tired of setting endless boundaries to ward off sinful groping, says to Dennis, 'Why not do it properly, then?' Dennis, who has spent years cajoling her, backs off immediately, purely out of fear. Later, when Polly and Michael are discussing Life, they sum up the situation:

> 'D'you really want to settle down so soon, Michael? Don't you want to have some fun, first?' Polly's expression made it fairly clear what kind of fun she had in mind.
> 'How can you if you're a Catholic, Polly? I mean, either you are or you aren't. I am. I often wish I wasn't – life would be more fun, agreed. But I am, and there it is.' (Lodge, 1980, p41).

For Michael, it is a fait accompli, a New Total Institution.

It might, however, be different for converts; they haven't been so long in the institution, not so long surrounded by the institutionalised. For Miriam and Tess, under Instruction, the doctrine is not to be taken lightly but not so life-or-death, heaven-or-hell serious either. This allows for an interesting insight into the issue of presenting culture; potential 'proof' that the pre-institutional experience is, indeed, of paramount importance?

Lodge, wearing his narrator's mantle and slipping out of the story for a few lines, shows the other side of that coin by referring to an earlier work, *The British Museum is Falling Down,* a story of a couple who are desperately and unsuccessfully trying to limit their family by way of the so-called Rhythm or Safe Method of contraception:

> it was intended to be a comic novel and most Catholic readers seemed to
> find it funny…agnostics and atheists amongst my acquaintance, however,
> found the novel rather sad (Lodge, 1980, p74).

Catholics, of course, know the culture, have learned the lingo. Outsiders haven't. Either that or it's a coping mechanism: to revisit *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* 'you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance' (p214).

For a while, Vatican II was going to make escape possible. In actual fact, it leaves them in a holding area, waiting for the doors of the institution to slide open and create a gap big enough to fit artificial contraception and thus wash away the stain of mortal sin and risk of excommunication. Ultimately, the doors stay firmly closed. Vatican II makes other changes, vast, dizzying, fundamental changes in the deeply-ingrained institution of the One True Church. Lodge catalogues them: the Latin mass is revised and translated to the vernacular and becomes a dialogue during which the celebrant and congregation now face each other. The Roman Catholic Church can't stop, underneath, imagining itself the One True Church but it does recognise, officially, that other upstart Christian denominations might have merit, might assist Christian unity, even if they don't bow to the Catholic superiority. But these changes are liturgical, not pastoral. They don't offer any freedom, escape, for the nine characters asking how far can they go? The answer remains: no further than you've ever gone.

Polly, professionally and anonymously reinvented as Ann Field, agony aunt in a women's magazine, faces questions from distraught Catholic women wondering how they will cope with multiple pregnancies, children and more children, gynaecological disorders, frigidity, desertion… the effects, they believe – or do not dare not to believe – of natural birth control.

> 'My God, the Church has an awful lot to answer for,' she would mutter to herself, trying to find some comforting word for these pathetic women that was not false or hypocritical. Yet, deep down, Polly still believed in God, and, willy nilly, He was the Catholic God (Lodge, 1980, p98).

Why do they persevere with a system that they feel is out of date, impractical, unnecessary, inefficient and, at times, damaging?

> 'It was fear, the fear of Hell,' said Michael. Well, yes, that was at the bottom of it, they all admitted (Lodge, 1980, p79/126).

It arises from the theology of mortal sin, from indoctrination and the threat of final damnation. And then:

> At some point in the nineteen-sixties, Hell disappeared. By Hell we mean, of course, the traditional Hell of Roman Catholics, a place where you would burn for all eternity if you were unlucky enough to die in a state of mortal sin.
>
> And:
>
> On the whole, the disappearance of Hell was a great relief, though it brought new problems (both Lodge, 1980, p113).

Heaven and Hell are the ultimate promise and threat at opposing ends of the privilege/reward – punishment spectrum. If the absolutes are gone, surely the characters are no longer confined by a (New) Total Institution? God still exists, but he is benevolent, the God of the people, not the dictator of the Total Institution of the Church. Even more so, then, now that Hell has been unearthed as an institutional sham, the construct of the clergy to keep the laity under control, they can escape?

Lodge addresses this in his fifth chapter, 'How They Broke Out, Away, Down, Up, Through, Etc.', and the thing is, they don't. Wherever they go, whatever they do, the Catholic Church and its fundamental teachings, in some guise, goes with them. Essentially, it's the totality that gradually dissipates. What the characters do, however, is revise their interpretations and release themselves from the tightest confines of the institutional Church. They stop being slaves to the regimentation, the administrative and bureaucratic requirements: Mass, Holy Days, Confession. They shrug off – often with difficulty – the teachings of Catholicism that most fuel their guilt (contraception being the obvious one) and in the subsequent chapter, where Lodge goes on to describe 'How They Dealt with Love and Death', their faith, or lack of, remains fundamental. As their lives move on, they do not free themselves totally of the institution; they don't necessarily want to do so but they do free themselves from the Total Institution. In so doing, they must slowly reorganise their senses of self, so that they come to terms with their presenting cultures, their encompassing experiences and initiate their own re-socialisation.

They succeed to a point. Their partial escapes do not really go in very different directions. Ruth, after a long spiritual and physical journey remains in her convent as it becomes a changing, more 'modernising' environment. Miles tries to find a way to reconcile his faith and his sexuality, and as for the young curate, grown into a questioning, and for his superiors, troublesome priest:

> So Austin Brierley's friends watched his vocation like a guttering candle,
> wondering when it would go out (Lodge, 1980, p168).

Finally, all of the characters (Violet is probably the exception: she, regularly in therapy, goes from being a Jehovah's Witness to trying out Sufism) join together in their new-found replacement union and the finale of the novel is the omniscient, documentary-type, view of the Paschal Festival of Catholics for an Open Church. The ending suggests it's a transient organisation, from which the members will re-organise themselves and move on once more, but even at this stage there is a caveat in their emancipation:

> VOICE OVER (Adrian): I think one has to be fairly tough-minded about
> this. Christianity <u>is</u> the best of the world religions… And, for all its
> historical sins, Catholicism is the best form of Christianity (Lodge, 1980
> p235).

And:

> VOICE OVER (Angela): Oh, I'll always be a Catholic, I couldn't imagine
> being anything else… I suppose it's only chance, yes, the way I was
> brought up. If I'd been born a Baptist or something I daresay I'd be a
> Baptist. I think you need religion to get you through life at all, and mine
> happens to be the Catholic one (Lodge, 1980, p236).

In the light of these comments, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Adrian,
Angela and their peers are, more or less, willing members of their New Total Institution,
whether it is a truly voluntary membership is blurred by the patent references to the power
of presenting culture. There is no question that their senses of self are bound –
inextricably? – within their belief system.

The Social Structure

Contemporary statutory systems for the care and protection of those deemed 'At Risk' (or
even A Risk) may or may not have a voluntary basis. Children and Young People are no
longer labelled as 'In Care' but as 'Looked After' and vulnerable adults and the elderly are
'Supported'.

Jenni Fagan's *The Panopticon* (2012) is both an example of a physically encompassing
environment and the totalising effects of this social structure. Anais, by the age of fifteen,
has experienced every form of voluntary and statutory Care that the Scottish Social Services
can provide: kinship care, foster care, respite care, children's units, supported living groups,
adoption. She is now headed to the Panopticon, a facility for chronic young offenders and
last chance saloon before the ultimate secure unit. No matter how often she runs, fights
and argues, she remains a subject of the formal Care system, and even more significant for
Anais, she knows that's only the outward institution of her control; underneath it all, she is
party to 'the experiment': observed constantly, manipulated frequently and analysed
thoroughly; Big Brother at its worst.

The Panopticon

The opening of Fagan's novel is reminiscent of both the more traditional institution-based stories, and isolation ideology of the Total Institution discussed above: Gothic horror and physical detachment. It is not the main focus; that belongs to Anais, and her commentary on her current situation. She describes the Midlothian village, the 'wee stone bridge', the 'huge stone wall, up to a gateway framed by two tall pillars' (Fagan, 2012, p4) then:

> The Panopticon looms in a big crescent at the end of a long driveway. It's
> four floors high, two turrets on either side and a peak in the middle –
> that'll be where the watch-tower is (Fagan, 2012 p5).

Anais is not locked up – yet – except at nights, when the resident nurse clicks shut all the bedroom doors 'for their own safety'. This is though, Anais' last chance; next stop is the John Kay's secure unit for young offenders, somewhere unspecified in the distant 'up north'. In today's social work terminology, Anais is a Looked After Child; most people still refer to it as being In Care. It's been the case since before she was born:

> 7652.4 – Section 48 was my first name. Seriously, they couldnae even
> give me a name until they'd filed me and discussed me and deciding
> what I came under for sectioning (Fagan, 2012, p121).

And now, fifty-one placements later, there is nobody more bureaucratically processed and subject to the rigid structures of the statutory child protection system than Anais. She refers to herself as a 'Lifer'. In the Panopticon, she lives with half a dozen other young residents, all subject to the same day to day routines, rules and restrictions (Goffman's 'batch-living') of the home itself, and equally to the regulations of the legal system that granted the Care Orders placing them there, and the social work systems that that enforce the Care Orders. No different to any of her previous homes, except, perhaps for the time she was adopted and the rules were still there but as a background structure, not imminent obstacles, or safety nets – depending on your perspective.

Integral to this organisational feature is the hierarchical line of authority. Anais is subject to the rules of the Panopticon and to the changing pool of care staff that administers them. Certainly, during the day, the ratio of staff to residents is higher than in a traditional institution, as befits the vulnerability of the young people as well as their potential (given their histories and past behaviours) to harm themselves and others. In the evening, the singular night nurse takes over.

At times, there appears to be a certain informality between staff and residents; for example, Angus, Anais' key worker, performs small acts that suggest he's on 'her side'. Beyond that, Anais is answerable, often directly, to her social worker, to the police and the courts, to the Children's Hearing System. It is a rigid system of control that gives Anais the right of access to her copious file records and case notes – via a formal written procedure – the right to complain – via a formal written procedure – and the right to receive vegetarian food – via a formal written procedure; not yet granted by the end of the book. Anais is permitted to come and go from the Panopticon – unless she is being punished – but has a curfew, a financial allowance, and later on is fitted with an electronic ankle tag, so that she is never out of range.

Anais knows how to work the system to her advantage; she understands the overt and covert reward/privilege system, how far she can go to avoid sanctions. She has learned how to survive; learned that knowledge is power – it may not guarantee safety but it stops a person being seen as weak, crushed.

> The police dinnae get it – we compare notes just as much as they do. We know if there's a psycho in a unit, or a right bastard pig who'll always batter you at the station. We know if somebody's been stabbed, or hanged themselves, or who's on the game, or which paedos in town will lock you in their flat and have you gang-banged until you turn fucking tricks. We send emails, start legends – create myths…notoriety is respect (Fagan, 2012, p8).

Fighting, showing who is physically the toughest, is a behaviour expected of a new inmate, and there are other, personal ways that Anais maintains a semblance of control over her

existence. Like Shukhov in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, food, albeit in a different way, is important:

> I put my cornflakes bowl through the hatch; that's all I ate today,
> tomorrow it will be normal food. The day after that – crisps only (Fagan,
> 2012, p102).

They cope by laughing. They laugh at what could otherwise kill them, and it is often anathema to those outside the institution. Anais and John laugh over the fact he set fire to a school for children with special needs. It was not funny – 'it's so wrong you couldnae make it up', says Anais (p62) – but it was the reason for the breakdown of John's latest foster placement, and compared to Anais's reason for being in the Panopticon was the lesser evil. Anais sums up her situation: 'prozzie mum gets stabbed – it disnae have the same funny vibe' (p62). Their fellow-resident, Isla, has her own story so traumatic it cannot be laughed at by anyone, and it does kill her, or rather she commits suicide because of it.

Anais's sense of self is hugely problematic. She is desperate for privacy and for self-identity, both of which have been stripped from her, again and again. On this admission to Care, to the Panopticon, Anais is subject to a mortification process she knows well. Since she is accused of assault too, she has to strip naked and hand over all her clothes and submit to forensic examination – fair enough maybe, but it is also meant to mortify:

> I hate this. Handovers. New places. Staff. Files. What I want is a hole
> under the ground to live in. Or a tree-house. Somewhere nobody can
> see me. My stuff's not arrived yet; well it isnae in this office anyway. I
> asked for something other than bin bags – to move my stuff in – once
> (Fagan, 2012, p15).

So far, Anais' request has not been fulfilled and at The Panopticon, three split bin bags filled with all her possessions, are now in her room. She's advised that her bedroom door stays open but she may partially pull it shut when getting dressed; best though to stand to the left of it and then she won't be seen – well, only by the watch tower and there is nobody there except the night-nurse when on duty. Anais rebels by sneaking through the fire exit, through the out-of-bounds fourth floor and onto the roof; the only place she feels alone.

If anyone on the 'outside' sees Anais, they see a child in Care, a young offender: the local residents are getting up a petition to get the Panopticon relocated; the school only tolerates her erratic attendance and substance-misuse because she can be an A-grade student; the chair of the Children's Panel tells Anais that she is a perpetual re-offender. It is a stigma that goes deep, and is exacerbated by practicalities:

> People are looking. It's the minibus that does it.   Our minibus is well embarrassing. It has *Midlothian Social Work Department* emblazoned across it.   It's that and the young-offenders aura.   A children-in-care aura. A we'llfuckyouandyerweepetsrightup kindae aura (Fagan, 2012, p193).

It is not just that she has her identity stripped from her, *they* say she has an identity problem. Anais disagrees:

> Identity problem. Funny that. Fifty odd moves, three different names, born in a nut house to a nobody that was never seen again. Identity problem? I dinnae have an identity problem – I dinnae have an identity, just reflex actions and a disappearing veil between this world and the next (Fagan, 2012, p99).

She has a game she plays, 'the birthday game'. In it Anais reinvents herself, her family and her heritage: 'it's the only thing that belongs to me – the birthday game' (p302).   She favours Paris as her place of birth, and that's where she heads when she escapes the Panopticon, to try out her new persona as Frances Jones. Even then she is sceptical because people don't escape the system, they disappear*:* 'People in care are always disappearing. Nobody finds out where they go' (p124). Anais is under constant surveillance from Care staff, and potentially from the workings of the panopticon, but they are not the real threat. Those who have fundamental control over her, who can cause such disappearances, are, she believes, 'the experiment':

> I'm an experiment. I always have been. It's a given, a liberty, a fact. They watch me. Not just in school or social-work reviews, court or police cells – they watch everywhere…They watch me, I know it, and I can't find anywhere any more – where they can't see (Fagan, 2012, p1).

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* Chief Bromden said as much about the Combine, the force he believed really controlled the psychiatric hospital. Connie Ramos, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, thought she was part of a social experiment as she flitted between the reality of Rockover State and her reality of Meso. Were they crazy? Medicated, hallucinating? Employing coping mechanisms?

And what about Anais? She's no stranger to illicit substances, and she's learned to cope in any number of ways that make sense only within the confines of her home world. She appears very sane, apart from the times she feels she is shrinking, or that other people are shrinking in front of her – and that may be drug withdrawal or a personal coping mechanism. When she ponders the experiment, it is surely paranoid, yet she is not the only character to mention it – apparently to Anais' surprise. It sounds possible. (Meso, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, sounds possible at times, too, but it is placed more firmly in the realms of a book, and from an author, that may be labelled part science fiction.) Anais is very convincing:

> You can feel them, ay. In the quiet. In the room. Wherever you are –
> they're there. That's a given. Sometimes they're right there, sometimes
> a bit further away; when I want to hurt myself but I dinnae, I can always
> feel them then. They want me to hurt myself. They're sick like that.
> What they really want is me dead (Fagan, 2012, p23).

And just before she runs away, having helped incite a riot both to do that and to commemorate the death of Isla *('*this…this…this is how we say goodbye to our own!' p319), Anais sees them, high above her in the watch tower:

> The whole surveillance window shatters, and I see them – turning on
> their fucking tails – the experiment, for a fraction of a fucking second:
> exposed (Fagan, 2012, p319).

Anais says they grew her in a Petri dish and they are biding their time to reclaim her. It is never clear whether she believes what she is saying or whether she has constructed it to convince herself and fool the reader. Either way, the only thing more horrifying for Anais is:

What if there was no experiment? What if my life was so worthless that
it was of absolutely no importance to anyone? (Fagan, 2012, p233).

From a theoretical perspective, it's largely immaterial. If the experiment exists, then Anais is

incarcerated in a Total Institution of epic, dystopian proportions. If it doesn't, the

Panopticon and the statutory Care system still control her within an ideological framework

that meets the criteria of the concept.

So, is there any hope for Anais? No, none. But maybe, if the experiment isn't real, there is

for Frances Jones, newly arrived in Paris. She thinks so: 'I – begin today.' (Fagan, 2012,

p324).

The Physical Environment

Any like-situated group of people who are geographically and/or socially isolated from 'the

norm' may experience core elements of the New Total Institution. At one end of a spectrum

are the individuals and groups I have already labelled 'second class citizens' who are

affected by social structures, as outlined above – families who live on large and poverty-

stricken housing schemes, for example (the so-called 'sink' estates) where unemployment,

crime and violence is rife.

At the other end of the scale are those who are geographically isolated, and often socially

and/or culturally isolated because of it. Relief and aid workers sent to catastrophe-ridden

sectors of the world, or international missionaries are cases in point. Individuals

constrained by their physical environments, even voluntarily, will likely be constrained by a

state of mind; of necessity they must reorganise themselves to make sense of, and cope

with, a day to day life that is different to that of wider society.

In Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), the Price family comprising preacher and

father, Nathan; mother, Orleanna; four daughters, Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May, are

Evangelical Baptists, uprooted from their strictly controlled but physically comfortable

existence in the USA to a remote village in the Belgian Congo. It is 1959, the African

community is an enigma to them, the country is subject to huge political unrest, and they are the only non-native faces, other than the transient Eeben Axelroot who may be ally or enemy. Ruled at first-hand by Nathan and at one-remove by their Baptist beliefs, both informed by a distinct hellfire and damnation version of Christianity, they are there to fulfil their roles as missionaries.

The Poisonwood Bible

Told using alternate points of view, in which each of the female characters has a voice, the Price women reflect on their lives as 'captive witnesses' (Kingsolver gives these words to Orleanna) in a world they never really know or understand, even after thirty years. As Orleanna says, 'I had no life of my own' (p9).

Hemiplegic Adah, electively mute, and extraordinarily intelligent, describes the first impressions of their new surroundings thus:

> The bush plane that dropped down into the field to leave us here went right away again, and there will be no more coming-going until that same plane returns again… A short way on either side of our village the road falls into a frenzy of hard dirt ruts that look like ocean waves frozen solid in the middle of a tempest. Our Father says in the great beyond nearby there are probably swamps you could sink a battleship in, not to mention a mere automobile. We do see vestigial signs of automobiles in our village, but they resemble the signs of life you would dig up in a graveyard if you were inclined to that pastime (Kingsolver, 1998, p38).

Their isolation increases exponentially when it becomes clear that the Southern Baptist Mission League does not actively support their placement there, it provides a reluctant stipend but no other back-up. This in the face of pressure from Nathan Price, whose hard-line hell, fire and damnation philosophy informs his role of preacher and patriarch equally; domestic and parochial father who, under the rules of right, knows best.

Adah's healthy twin, Leah, sums up the wonderful incongruity of possessions permitted to travel with them. 'The Things We Carried' makes up the first section of the book, dictated as

much by Pan American airlines weight restrictions as their own ignorance of what might be required and Nathan's staunch 'consider the lilies of the field' stance:

> We came from Bethlehem, Georgia bearing Betty Crocker cake mixes into the jungle… She wouldn't go against him, of course. But once she understood there was no turning back, our mother went to laying out in the spare bedroom all the worldly things she thought we'd need in the Congo just to scrape by… In addition to the cake mixes, she piled up a dozen cans of Underwood deviled ham; Rachel's ivory plastic hand mirror with powdered-wig ladies on the back; a stainless steel thimble…' [the list continues] (Kingsolver, 1998, p15).

In trying to choose their favoured, yet most useful possessions, they are all at a loss; they cannot visualise where they are going, therefore they cannot decide what they will most need or even what they want; their personal identities, and their fall-back items of familiarity and therefore safety, are slipping before they even board that Pan-Am plane. When they find they have so many 'wrong' things, their confidence crumbles further.

The family's innate – conscious, subconscious or unconscious – superiority is lost in their need to cope in an alien, enclosed world. It takes little time for the female Price's to realise they left any vestiges of power and sense of being in control in that little aeroplane Ada describes, and at differing speeds they undergo individual mortification processes and find new ways to cope with their virtual imprisonment – there is no way out of the village for them – and perhaps to make sense of it. It transpires that even after thirty years the latter is by no means a given and furthermore, Nathan never relinquishes the God's-right-hand-man mentality that will kill him.

In reality, outwith his family, Nathan is never the authority figure he believes he rightfully is. There is a clear hierarchy in Kilanga. Tata Ndu, the village chief is the powerful one, the person in control – 'without the chief's blessing he [Nathan] could have no congregation' (Kingsolver, 1998, p111) – and second is Tata Nuvudundu, in effect, the witch-doctor. The authority of both men originates with the spirits, ancestors and guides that no member of the village should cross. The villagers may play at being Christian, but it's here their loyalty ultimately lies.

Back home in Georgia, the Prices' were a family unit under tight rein, here they are a unit living within, alongside, but never in step with (Nathan's dictat again) the indigenous village. Batch-living in Kilanga, where life is lived communally, mostly outside and privacy is immaterial, ensures that they learn to do the same things, at the same time, in the same routine as their neighbours. It's about survival in the face of extreme seasons, ferocious, weather, invasive wildlife, subsistence poverty; in all, it is about nature exercising control, something far beyond the comprehension of the Price family. They are leading an alternative, yet very recognisable, form of the 'common, formal and guided life' with Nathan at the bulls-eye. Tatas Ndu and Nuvudundu, are second-in-command, as it were, and village life and the natural world add their own controls. It may not be particularly bureaucratically administered but it is 'naturally' administered, which for them all in Kilanga and the whole province, amounts to the same thing.

The mortification process and stripping of identity is similarly peculiar to their environment. It is not necessarily meant to mortify, some of it is practical. For example, the family maintain their own names amongst themselves, but the residents of Kilanga, rename each of them according to what makes sense indigenously. Nathan though, will not allow himself to be mortified at any level, even if it happens to him again and again; he will not see it. On the other hand, Adah's mortification is strangely affirming – her disability is taken for granted; it is nowhere near as bad as the imperfections of many of the villagers.

The women study the internal culture and some progress is assured once the nuances of language become familiar and they accept that much of what they have learned in their home world has to be unlearned in Kilanga:

> Every fifth day was market day – not the seventh or thirtieth, nothing
> you could give a name like 'Saturday,' or 'The First of the Month,' but
> every thumb if you kept the days in your hand. It makes no sense at all,
> and then finally all the sense in the world, once you understand that
> keeping things in your hand is exactly how it's done in the Congo
> (Kingsolver, 1998, p100).

The 'lingo' is at the centre of the culture. Adah illustrates the difficulties when one word in a language has several meanings and someone from 'outside' the system tries to become part of it, indeed to control it, without understanding the pitfalls. One example she gives is that:

> ...in Kilanga the word nzolo is used in three different ways, at least. It
> means 'most dearly beloved.' Or it is a thick yellow grub highly prized for
> fish bait. Or it is a type of tiny potato that turns up in the market now
> and then... And so we sing at the top of our lungs in church: 'Tata Nzolo!'
> To whom are we calling? (Kingsolver, 1998, p197).

There are, too, significant repercussions for Nathan, who largely refusing to learn the language, fails to note that 'bangala' means both Jesus and poisonwood tree.

In terms of rules, rewards and privilege and punishment, Nathan's favoured punishment is The Verse. Nathan views this, the tedious transcribing of a long extract from the Bible, as a privilege. He also expounds about the unique opportunity they have in the Congo, their life ensures: 'great sacrifices, great rewards' (p44). Whether the others would agree that the sacrifice of their childhoods and Ruth May's life brought any of them sufficient reward is unlikely.

As their wilfulness peters out in the face of adversity, each of the characters adopts, transiently, one of Goffman's four modes of adjustment to a (New) Total Institution. Orleanna takes to her bed in a case of situational withdrawal and only gets up because her children need her. Nathan bends to nobody, ever, and Ruth May refuses her quinine tablets, which are alternative examples of rebellion or the intransigent line. Leah marries Anatole in an instance of 'conversion' and Eeben Axelroot, and Rachel, practice colonisation throughout. It is Adah, who has withdrawn into herself her whole life, who is the one who finds herself more accepted here, her disability is not at issue and she actually requires less adjustment. Their coping mechanisms are variable, but ultimately they survive, physically – except for Ruth May.

Kingsolver's description of Orleanna's character is reminiscent of Annie, back in St Bride's. Orleanna would probably have subscribed to the notion of a Total Institution and its

65

inescapability. For her, decades later, alone on her small-holding 'at home' in Georgia, she reflects how Africa as a whole invaded her soul:

> Once every few years, even now, I catch the sense of Africa. It makes me keen, sing, clap up thunder, lie down at the foot of the tree and let the worms take whatever of me they can still use… I find it impossible to bear… It has found me here on this island, in our little town, in a back alley… it found me on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi… Africa rose up to seize me as I walked on a pier past a huddle of turtle-headed old fishermen… Once I merely walked out of the library in Atlanta and there it was… The sensation rises up from inside me and I know you're still here, holding sway (Kingsolver, 1998, p99).

Of the Price family, only Ruth May and Nathan remain in Kilanga beyond the initial two years. Ruth May is already dead, and years later, Nathan is killed too. But none of the rest escape either. Rachel's unlikely saviour is Eeben Axelroot. Once 'free' – the oldest daughter, the one who had railed against the placement from the start, the one who craved her old life and her lost identity as the All-American teenager – Rachel claws her way into the 'right' social circles, chooses her husbands for their wealth and maturity, and finally finds herself, alone, mistress of The Equatorial, which she runs with the level of control her father may have approved (had he approved of working or educated women).

Leah, too, settles largely in Africa, part of the country's struggle, not ignorant of it, like Rachel. Like Annie and Zita in the West of Ireland, each of sisters remembers the past differently, and when they do go looking for the reality of it, they are told that Kilanga does not exist; there has never been a place of that name.

Incidentally, it is Ruth May who believes she alone has escaped. She explains from her grave:

> Nelson said to think of a good place to go, so when it comes time to die, I won't, I'll disappear and go to that place. He said think of that place every day and night so my spirit will know the way... I know what it is: it's a green mamba snake away up in the tree. You don't have to be afraid of them anymore because you are one… you can look down and see the whole world, Mama and everybody… Finally you are the highest one of all (Kingsolver, 1998, p346/7).

In Ruth May's life, knowing what to do in the face of death is the ultimate coping mechanism. For those she leaves behind, it simply adds to the ties that permanently constrain them and bind them to Africa.

<center>**Chapter Five**</center>

<center>**When There Is No Refuge**</center>

The Family and the New Total Institution

Goffman's stipulation, outlined in Chapter 1, and subsequently contested (with conditions) in my definition of the New Total Institution, is that 'the family' and the Total Institution are incompatible. To reiterate:

> Family life is sometimes contrasted with solitary living, but in fact the more pertinent contrast is with batch living, for those who eat and sleep at work, with a group of fellow workers, can hardly sustain a meaningful domestic existence (Goffman, 1961, p22).

He qualifies this by continuing:

> …housewives or farm families may have all their major spheres of life within the same fenced-in area, but these persons are not collectively regimented and do not march through the day's activities in the immediate company of a batch of similar others (Goffman, 1961, p18).

Few sociologists have taken issue with Goffman's claim, though there are, accepting momentarily a wide definition of 'family', a couple of interesting exceptions.

Sardenburg & Donnellon's (in Gordon & Williams, 1977) sorority combines an authority that is family-like (with the intention to make wives and mothers) alongside formally administered rules. They draw attention to the lack of tension between the home world and the 'institutional' world in their Midwestern sorority house. Seen in a positive light and much less cut-off from wider society than other residential settings, the sorority under examination is likened to a convent:

> recruitment and training of their members, use of props and symbols, performance of similar rituals, and primarily in their organizational structure…both types of institution were found to rely on communal

<center>68</center>

living and on a family structure, which are preserved by the constant performance of reinforcing rituals (Donnellan & Sardenburg, 1976, p120).

They go on to suggest that a meaningful domestic existence is 'not only compatible with, but is one of the aims of total institutions of a voluntary nature such as sororities and convents' (p120) and as such, the Total Institution (in the sorority) is *only* preserved by the existence of a family-like structure and fictitious family bonds. They believe that such conclusions may well be externally valid to other Greek letter organisations and voluntary 'institutions'. If this is so, the same might be said for communes and community-based living co-operatives generally.

Indeed, Folkenllik's (1993) study of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, or, *Virtue Rewarded,* infers that the Total Institution of domestic servitude has long been the framework on which the family has always survived. Pamela is effectively incarcerated in her master's household, the lifestyle and duties of domestic servitude in the eighteenth century isolated from her own family and secluded and controlled by the master and mistress above stairs and by the butler and housekeeper below. She is expected to be seen and not heard, yet to keep the 'family secrets' at all costs. Although she must 'sleep, play and work' with her fellow servants, her life is never thoroughly regimented nor does she have to share her experience with a large number of people all required to act in the same way at the same time. Still, the servants' quarters is an example of small scale batch-living. Whilst Pamela does manage to keep her name, she cannot not keep her personal property or her distance from other staff, she has no choice in her associations with MR B, Colbrand, or sleeping beside Mrs Jewkes. Pamela, on the surface, is permitted a certain individuality by being dressed in her mistress's clothes and being taught lessons beyond that of the average servant girl, but this is solely to please the reigning family and, as Pamela herself realises on imagining a return to her village, it is a form of role dispossession; being 'above her station' strips of her place in the home world.

Davies (1989), whilst not disagreeing, cautions that familial authority remains very different to bureaucratic institutional authority. Given my own stance, that the New Total Institution is not necessarily incompatible with the family, I would like to add my own caveat: that

firstly, it depends on what precisely is meant by the term 'family' and secondly, how that 'family' functions.

The 'Ordinary' (Functional) Family

Consider life from the point of view of various family members. At certain times in their lives, they may well believe they are stuck in the middle of something akin to a Total Institution. For a child or a teenager, the family unit is often literally inescapable. Children lead a guided life. They are not locked up – though they may feel so once they reach the age of having curfews and being grounded – but they do have daily routines, significantly too, a requirement to attend school. Access to life beyond the immediate household is monitored and rules and privilege are usually laid down by the singular authority of the parent/carer(s). Whilst they should not be mortified or have their identity stripped of them, it is not uncommon for a child to be seen as the 'outsider' of the X family or frustratingly labelled as so and so's younger/older sibling and thus given roles to live up to. In addition, teenagers are famous for their ability to withdraw from a situation or, hopefully temporarily, to colonise.

In literature, Jeanette Winterson's (1985) *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*, tells the story of a young girl living within the confines of a closed family-church world. Winterson fluently questions the institutional authority of the family and of the church, but in doing so, she goes on to demonstrate the truth of most (family) situations – and this is the difference, this is where an average family is not akin to a Total Institution – that whatever the beliefs or actions in a closed family world, they are usually temporary. Children grow up and leave home, choosing what aspects of their upbringing to retain; family ties remain naturally and to varying degrees.

Ordinary, functioning, family life as a unit and as part of a social entity is not about control or surveillance or regimented living. It is about safety and security and preparation for independent living as adults. If any member feels s/he is part of a Total Institution, it is transient.

The key word here, of course, is 'ordinary' and it is my contention that the discussion must go further regarding those families that are not ordinary, but 'closed'. That is those which are all-encompassing in their lifestyles or whom regularly dysfunction in some recognisably significant way.

The Closed Family

It becomes clear to an outsider, just how closed the family can be, how 'total', when one works professionally with families in professions such as social work and in health and education. This is a fact apparent to me from my background in social work and specifically the development of the family-led decision-making process of Family Group Conferencing (FGC), in Scotland and internationally. Families have their own cultures and belief-systems, their own language, their own routines, their own ways of ways of coping – inspirational and dubious – and dealing with conflict and crisis, their own punishments and rewards system. Families have secrets. In the majority of cases, all of this still renders them 'ordinary'; well-intentioned and positive. Sometimes it does not.

Being particularly inward-looking, encompassing, or closed does mean there are certain ways in which a family might share more ideologies of the Total Institution than a so-called ordinary family.

There are some interesting examples in literature. Throughout the majority of her twenty-plus books, Ivy Compton-Burnett's families are renowned for their closed natures and behaviours.[35] The themes and style found in most of her works are remarkably similar; quickly found in a brief perusal of *Brothers and Sisters* (1929) and *Parents and Children* (1941). Both demonstrate almost total and extended confinement in the isolated environment of a large family home. There is a claustrophobic, narrow social group of the

---

[35] The author's own family life is a case in point. Compton-Burnett was one of twelve children. She was largely educated at home and after university returned there to tutor her four younger sisters. Her stepmother is reputed to be the model for the line of matriarchs – domestic bullies – that feature in the novels. Compton-Burnett's own two youngest sisters killed themselves in a suicide pact, none of the siblings had their own children and all eight girls remained unmarried… Hers was possibly the prototype for the large and wealthy, highly dysfunctional families she created in her fiction of domestic situations in the Edwardian/late Victorian era.

family and very little enlarges the family's world. In *Brothers and Sisters,* we meet the Stace family and never go beyond their village. Thirty years previously, Sophia married her adopted brother, Christian. In the present story, they live, dominated by Sophia, with their adult children, and socialise only with other brothers and sisters. Because of this, two of the Stace children, Dinah and Andrew, inadvertently find themselves engaged to their own uncle and aunt respectively. There is an intensity in this which may not be incestuous sexually but is undoubtedly unhealthy since the various brother and sister pairings constantly alter and reform.

In *Parents and Children* (1941), Eleanor and Fulbert Sullivan, their nine children (three in the nursery, three of school age and three adult), Fulbert's parents, and three governesses and a myriad of maids live in a huge country house. Their only visitors are their 'friends', the Cranmer family, and the three Marlowes, neighbours on the edge of the estate, who turn out to be the illegitimate children of Fulbert's father. It's a cast of twenty-three; it's the family's entire world – more or less. There is very little plot, but what there is, towards the end, is life-changing; like *Brothers and Sisters*, the story revolves around startlingly accurate family relationships and dynamics.

Christina Stead's sprawling *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) is not dissimilar. The shocking 'cry-wolf' end to the storyline aside, it is nothing but the timeline of a family and the vagaries of family life. In his introduction to the 1965 edition, Randall Jarrell says it succinctly: we see in the novel, a family that is both unique and everybody's. Jarrell suggests there is no other book that represents, or rather tries to represent, family life in quite such conclusive detail (page pxxii).

On first reading, these are unusual families, but second and subsequent readings renders them less so; their absolute peculiarities are largely in terms of family size and in the authorial style sustained in the writing. Real families are complex and so much of what happens in the stories may at once horrify and make us wince at its closeness to home. In essence, then, I agree with Goffman: these are not Total Institutions. Further, they are not New Total Institutions. Nevertheless, for me, a closed family may not be written off either as the antithesis of the New Total Institution.

The Dysfunctional Family and Domestic Abuse

An unequivocal exception to the 'natural order' in a family situation, or a variant of it, is a type of dysfunctional family where one or more members maintains significant and unhealthy control over the remainder of the group. Child abuse is one example that goes some distance to fitting Goffman's ideology, and moves towards my vision of the New Total Institution, and a second is that of domestic abuse. Reverting briefly to Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), I will then look to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) for further discussion.

Re-reading the extracts from Kingsolver above (Chapter 4), clearly evidences Nathan Price's authority over his wife and his four daughters, and shows it exhibiting an unhealthy element of control. That this too often slides over into abuse, is inherent within the narratives of each of the women and is blatant throughout Orleanna's thoughts, even if she never confronts the term itself. It is almost impossible to pick a chapter where Nathan's control isn't overwhelming, where he is not laying down his law to one of more of his family or to the community of Kilanga. He is far more than arrogant and determinedly right and he goes way beyond his role as 'head of the family' in demonstrating a cruel and vindictive streak.

Rachel describes an incident in which Nathan, speaking in 'that same special voice, for bad dogs and morons' (p152), deliberately jerks Orleanna's hand, thereby breaking her favourite plate:

> He asked her with a mean little smile, 'Who were you showing off for here, with your tablecloth and your fancy plate?' He said the words in a sour way, as if they were well-known sins. Mother merely stood there before him while all the sparkle drained out of her face. 'And your pitiful cooking, Orleanna? The way to a young Negro's heart is through his stomach – is that what you were counting on?' Her light blue eyes had gone blank, like shallow pans of water. You could honestly not tell what she was thinking. I always watch his hands to see which way they're going to strike out. But Mother's shallow-water eyes stayed on his face, without really looking at it (Kingsolver, 1998, p152-3).

Africa, the Congo, Kilanga, may be the 'walls' of the New Total Institution that the young Prices identify, but ultimately they are institutionalised, not by the family unit itself, but by the patriarchal, autocratic, abusive institution of the family as decreed by Nathan Price.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) pulls together many similar themes that make up the discussion around the New Total Institution: domestic abuse, religious fundamentalism and the controlling features of a threatened and actual military coup. Papa, Eugene Achike, arises from the same mould as Nathan Price in *The Poisonwood Bible*, although Nathan is consistently a bully whereas Eugene, businessman, devout Catholic, omelora to his people, is the epitome of the 'street angel, home devil' label. Taking refuge in the age-old caveat, 'Everything I do for you, I do for your own good,' Papa said. 'You know that?' (p196), he is an abuser, but to simplify atrociously, he 'means well'.

Like Kingsolver's Nathan Price, Eugene is absolutely convinced of his religion, his ethics and stance. Eugene's family – wife Beatrice, fifteen year old Kambili and her older brother, Jaja – live in his shadow and tiptoe around him. They, initially at least, believe he is right and they are wrong. Here, Beatrice, who is pregnant, is feeling very unwell:

> 'Let me stay in the car and wait, Biko,' Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes. 'I feel vomit in my throat.' Papa turned to stare at her. I held my breath. It seemed like a long moment but it might have been only seconds. 'Are you sure you want to stay in the car?' Papa asked (Adichie, 2004, p29).

Later, Kambili describes the consequences:

> I was in my room after lunch… when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to pen it. If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true (Adichie, 2004, p32).

In fact, Eugene has beaten Beatrice with such brutality that she loses the unborn baby. With infinite care he transports her to the hospital and home again, where the whole family pray sixteen novenas for *Beatrice's* sins to be forgiven.

Kambili has always noticed that after each time she 'heard the sounds' she finds her mother polishing and polishing her collection of porcelain figurines, and at fifteen, she understands that it is her mother's only control, not of the situation but of her sense of self. It is particularly chilling then, after another violent incident directed at Jaja and an ornament is broken, Beatrice tells Kambili she will not replace it. This is what Kambili says:

> Maybe Mama had realized that she would not need the figurines
> anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the
> figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything (Adichie, 2004,
> p15).

To date, their family life and the secrets within have been contained; their Mama's collusion ensures it. But once Jaja stands up to their Papa, then life and events will spiral out of control.

Kambili's way of coping with the situation is to close her mind, and not to question anything. As she says when describing the curiosity of one of the nuns, a teacher in school, 'I often wondered why Sister Veronica needed to understand it, when it was simply the way things were done,' (p53) and later, when her brother 'tells' a family secret, she holds her breath and waits for the sky to fall: 'Had Jaja forgotten that we never told, that there was so much that we never told?' (p154).

She learns a very valuable lesson that will hold her in good stead – so that she does not help perpetuate the cycle of violence in her adult life – when she gets to know her Aunt Ifeoma, and falls in love with the goodness of a young priest who befriends her. Kambili observes the truth of religious, and human, goodness:

> He laughed and said he believed they could jump higher than they
> thought they could. And that they had just proved him right. It was what

Aunty Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realized then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified we couldn't (Adichie, 2004, p226).

The sense of self is tested at all levels, and re-organised, hopefully, for the better.

The Displaced Person and the New Total Institution

The sense of self is also tested, often to extremes, when individuals and groups are displaced from their natural home worlds. In Chapter 3, above, Williams' work (Gordon & Williams, 1977) demonstrated how migration might contain elements of totality, and in Chapter 4, I gave consideration to the influence of certain physical environments. Here I would like to take this one step further and examine the special situation of the person who is officially displaced.

Synonyms for a displaced person include: refugee, asylum seeker, exile, émigré, escapee, evacuee or stateless person. None of them means exactly the same thing, but the core issue is always one of dislocation, usually geographic, from one's own home or community and daily life therein.[36] Being a displaced person either involves detainment in a large residential setting like one of Goffman's traditional Total Institutions – concentration camp, refugee camp, immigration detention or removal centre – or in a more individually controlled state (of being and place) that shares certain common elements with the ideological 'without-walls' form of our New Total Institution.

---

[36] UNESCO describes the displacement of people as: 'the forced movement of people from their locality or environment and occupational activities. It is a form of social change caused by a number of factors, the most common being armed conflict. Natural disasters, famine, development and economic changes may also be a cause of displacement'. http://www.unesco.org Within that, people may be internally displaced when they meet this criteria but have not crossed an internally recognised state border, that is, they have not left their home country. More specifically, the recognised (though not legal) definition of the term refugee across the refugee sector, is a person who: 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country…' http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

At the zenith of the hierarchical pyramid of control is the government department of the relevant country and its particular immigration and asylum laws. For people legally displaced and 'known to the authorities', these rules are always stringent and rigidly enforced, for those who are resident illegally, there is the added trauma of somehow being in hiding and waiting to be found out. It is a regimented system that controls hundreds and thousands of disparate beings in exactly the same way; they are leading a common, formal and guided life whether it is in the company of similar-placed individuals or not. Being so displaced, rootless, enclosed in an alien, unfriendly or indifferent world is the basic, subliminal regret and which ultimately questions and changes the sense of self. And the ideologies of the New Total Institution surround them.

There is a wealth of literary texts to inform my belief.[37] Space dictates I shall concentrate on just three of them, where the emphasis is on individuals who are allegedly 'free' rather than those detained within institutional buildings.[38] Once again, I use *The Poisonwood Bible* for context and then turn to Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* (2008) [39] and Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* (2001).

In the peculiar situation of *The Poisonwood Bible*, the Prices call themselves missionaries. In actuality, if we consider a displaced person as a civilian who is involuntarily outside the boundaries of or her country then *this* is exactly what the women are – and Rachel spends her entire narrative reiterating this point.

Of all the girls, it is Rachel who feels her imprisonment is physical, actual. The family is living in another man's house – so much of it still belongs to Brother Fowles, the previous incumbent – unsupported by the American religious organisation under whose auspices they sit and, once the revolution comes, literally no way home. Later, they are trapped in other ways: physically, by an insect infestation; through the political upheaval and subsequent establishment of the Republic of Congo; and mostly because of the youngest

---

[37] See Appendix 1

[38] See Appendix 1: I have concentrated on the contemporary UK system, two very different, very similar, experiences. In recent history, biographical and novelistic examples of life under the Nazi regime (Anne Frank, Markus Zusak) and the Taliban (Khaled Hosseini) all demonstrate the totalising experiences of the individuals within.

[39] Published in the UK as *The Other Hand*.

child, Ruth May's, death. With their ultimate departure, one that Orleanna Price labels the 'exodus', they then become refugees in the true sense of the word.

Over the thirty year span of the novel, Kingsolver demonstrates how the family becomes fragmented and remains largely individually displaced. Rachel remains in Africa and runs a successful business; she has her own little empire which is the home she has manufactured to compensate for being alone and lonely. Leah also stays in Africa, and in her marriage and the birth of her children, she finds contentment, but geographically and politically they are never settled and never really accepted. Adah loses herself for a while when she realises that her physical disability is more psychological than not, and Orleanna is enclosed in her small-holding back in the Deep South, consumed by fighting her demons.

In a very different time and place, Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* is the contemporary story of seventeen year old Little Bee – the name she has given herself – who fled Nigeria when 'the men' came looking for oil. She spends two years in a different type of institution, a detention/removal centre in the UK, before an illegal release, with which the story begins. She attempts then to contact the only people she knows in the country. Her story is equally one of being a refugee, the events that lead to that happening, and the effects on the other people with whom she comes into contact. Her constant refrain, and the way the story begins for all the other women she has come to know in a similar situation is 'the-men-came-and-they…' As Little Bee says:

> So when I say I am a refugee, you must understand there is no refuge… I
> stowed away in a great steel boat, but the horror stowed away in me
> (Cleave, 2008, p46).

Whilst Little Bee is in the detention centre, her experience of a Total Institution is never in doubt: the control is such that she must 'plan her headache' and request painkillers in writing twenty-four hours ahead of receiving them, she is doled out one sanitary towel at a time. She reflects that:

> there were no seasons in there. It was cold, cold, cold, and I did not have
> anyone to smile at. Those cold years are frozen inside me. The African
> girl they locked up in the immigration centre, poor child, she never really

escaped. In my soul she is still locked up in there, forever… (Cleave, 2008, p7).

Even when she is released, Little Bee is not, and never will be, free – whether she remains hiding in England or is found out and deported to Nigeria. Either way, she is at the mercy of a higher, authoritarian, bureaucratic power – and by the events that led her to flee Nigeria. The latter is a clear example of the importance of presenting culture, although it is not Little Bee, but events in which she found herself through no blame of her own, that lead to her running. 'I will tell you what happened, the day my story changed…' (p210), she says and the reader learns Little Bee's story in detail.

Presenting culture, along with self-identity and the requirement for re-organisation of the self, resonates with all stories of refugees and displaced persons, more so than perhaps any other single group under discussion. For children born into a family, it simply does not exist; another nail in the coffin of the family as Total Institution, but for a displaced person, it is what came before the displacement that has already begun to shape the person who will emerge before they ever experience the Total Institution.

Another snapshot of presenting culture at its 'best' is found in Benjamin Zephaniah's, *Refugee Boy*. The story begins with two almost identical chapters, one the Ethiopian view, one the Eritrean and the interesting point is that both use exactly the same argument for telling the half Ethiopian, half Eritrean family to leave the country. Fourteen year old Alem and his father do leave Adis Ababa for London, where his father, in a calculated and caring act, abandons him and Alem, alone, is forced to seek asylum as a refugee.

Being a displaced person is all about being subject to the planning and control inferred by others, by a powerful hierarchy. On the political issue of immigration and asylum, the particular system employed by a country is one of bureaucratic organisation of whole blocks of people in an attempt to fulfil an organisational – governmental – rational plan. There is nowhere more evident of this than Alem's experience of a tortuous legal system in *Refugee Boy*. From the outset it is fully beyond his control under the auspices of Local Authority Care, first in a traditional, old-fashioned children's home housed in an old building up a long,

isolated drive, and then with foster parents. The information and instructions, the questions and the form-filling, the meetings, come one after the other until:

> things were moving so fast that Alem was finding it hard to keep up…he agreed to see the family and within minutes he was being taken from the children's home (Zephaniah, 2001, p82).

Alem has a court hearing, he has an Appeal; his application is in process, which for him is a limbo. His father returns and becomes part of the process when he is placed in a detention centre (or 'hotel') and given food vouchers. The Care Order on Alem is then removed so that he must leave his foster parents – and Alem still can barely keep up with events happening to him. When their joint father-son asylum application is refused, they are told they must leave the country, but his father is then killed, and suddenly Alem is 'free' to stay. The story ends with Alem's own words, and to paraphrase, this is not the end for him – though it is the end of the asylum process – it is just the start. Maybe now he will have time to breathe.

At the other end of the spectrum is Little Bee. Now technically an illegal immigrant (although it was a government official who altered records to gain Little Bee's release) her life is also shaped by the rules of the British government's immigration policies but for her it is hidden; she is hiding and so living under the constant threat of deportation, above which everyday life goes on – as in all of the refugee-based novels. It just does.

The mortification process for both Little Bee and Alem is inherent in the system. As Little Bee left the detention centre with her only possessions inside a clear plastic wallet, Alem is alone in London with a small suitcase and a photo of his family. He is 'bureaucratically administered' by the Refugee Council to seek political asylum according to the dictats of the Home Office. Alem's process of mortification and the attempts, as he sees it, to strip his identity are clear and detailed – and standard practice for everyone in his situation. The immediate process he undergoes, begins with Screening, in which: 'Alem was humiliated by the process… Alem asked if he was now a criminal' (Zephaniah, 2001, p83). He is photographed, finger-printed, interviewed, given a number.

In many ways, the issue of his name/number and the subsequent attack on identity, returns throughout the novel. When Alem's new friend Robert talks about his own origins in Chile, and the fact that his real name was changed, Alem is shocked. Then when the police ask Alem if they can call him 'Alan or Al?' (Zephaniah, 2001, p284), he refuses.

Back with Little Bee, she finds sanctuary of a sort with Sarah, an acquaintance with whom her life has become inextricably linked. Lawrence, Sarah's lover, employed, ironically, by the UK Home Office, is brutal about the situation for displaced persons:

> This is isn't your country. They'll come for you, I promise you they will.
> They come for all of you in the end (Zephaniah, 2001, p188).

The essence of a refugee is displacement and uncertainty, of never belonging and always being ready to run. This lack of security is a very real if oblique controlling force, because generally the refugees are going to run in a direction approved or controlled by the administration in charge; they dictate – literally or via lack of individual choice – the place to run. Little Bee engages very distinct coping mechanisms. She copes by knowing exactly how she will kill herself in any situation for when 'the men come' again to get her.

> In the immigration detention centre, they told us we must be disciplined
> to overcome our fears. This is the discipline I learned: whenever I go into
> a new place, I work out how I would kill myself there. In case the men
> come suddenly, I make sure I am ready (Cleave, 2008, p47).

To cope is not to escape though. Little Bee is under no illusions about this, but she has an epiphany when out in the middle of central London. For the first time, she sees there may be a way of 'escape' in the racial mix around her:

> All that time in the detention center I was trapped by walls and all those
> days living at Sarah's house in a street full of white faces, I was trapped
> because I knew I could never go unnoticed. But now I understood that at
> least I could disappear into the human race (Cleave, 2008, p219).

But she concludes that to disappear into this multi-racial world would be hiding, not escaping, because 'troubles travelled with you'. Once, in another life, she changed her name to Little Bee, at this point, she feels she will 'take a name that suits this city instead' (Cleave, 2008, p220). She has just made this decision when the men do come for her, and she is subject to the deportation process.

The characters here are isolated from wider society, they are party to a system that is bureaucratic, controlling and highly regimented. It has its own 'rewards' and privileges (to stay in their country of asylum; literally, to stay alive) and punishments, in which deportation or death – sometimes the first implies the second – is the ultimate. The refugees who are interned certainly live, play and work together; those dispersed or re-socialised into the community live a similar common, formal guided life. Is this sufficient for us to conclude that displaced persons, in general, live within the ideological framework of the (New) Total Institution? They live within clear elements of it; they live within Foucault's theory of surveillance and under certain concertive control.

It need not be a life sentence. There is nothing average about the experience of being a refugee – or of domestic or child abuse – but never more than here is it evident that the New Total Institution characteristics of presenting culture and re-socialisation are as significant as the totalising experience. The sense of self will have been tested, probably re-organised and what emerges is affected by the personality that entered the 'institution' and the personality which escaped – and what happened to it in-between.

Chapter Six

The Novel and the New Total Institution

I have hated the words and I have loved them, and I hope I have them

right. (Zusak, 2005, p532).

Novelists create a world of their own in writing their stories. Readers create a world of their own in reading them. These worlds may coincide, they may not; to use Goffman's terminology, writer and reader come to a novel with a presenting culture and a sense of self, and these will direct and affect their experiences within and beyond, the pages. Like a (New) Total Institution, a novel has its own distinct language and culture, informed by authorial and editing decisions and writing style.

In the final section of this essay, I would like to mention these aspects of writer and reader experiences in terms of the novel and the (New) Total Institution. I will then consider the journey through which I created my own fictional world, which has become the novel *Chasing Elena*.

Writing Style

I have already touched upon the writing style of Ivy Compton-Burnett and Christina Stead. Their distinct insularity creates the sense of a closed or enclosed family world that is, literally, quite impenetrable for the reader.

Stead sprawls in her description and narration. To paraphrase protagonist's, Sam Pollit's, friend, Saul: when Sam talks, he creates a world. Stead, too, uses the kind of language of family innuendo, half-sayings and implications, not least the way people who are familiar with one another talk over each other and finish – or do not need to – other people's sentences. Early on it is mostly Sam's language, which has a rudimentary basis in young

children's natural distortion of language, to demonstrate that a family is to a certain extent a closed society which can be alien to the observer. Stead constantly offers a translation for the reader; the family do not need it because they both understand and mix it into their own regular speech.

Compton-Burnett relies heavily on dialogue, and dialogue that is often without any tag. There is little introduction, completion of speech, explanation, or readily apparent speaker; it is akin to a play script without the bulk of the stage directions. Trying to ascertain which of the characters is actually speaking, let alone acting, moving or gesturing, demands total concentration from the reader. Punctuation is perfunctory and significant information or events are casually mentioned in a fragment of a sentence. Unlike the majority of novels that aim to sweep us up and carry us away, this style generates a tightly-maintained authorial control.

Both authors keep the reader outside looking in, never part of the Pollit world or the Sullivan world or the Stace world – because the reader is not a member of these big, complex family households.

It is particularly interesting because writers, wanting (and needing) readers, are frequently striving for ways to entice them: the all-important first line, the gripping first paragraph, the hook at the end of the first page. All are deliberately crafted to engage the reader to enter the fictional world, to believe in it and to journey through it to conclusion. And authors of science fiction, fantasy or magical realism genres surely have an extra challenge, given that the new world is often a physical entity rather than an extension of, a new way of looking at our own existing lives. In any case, it is an overt if implicit process and one of inclusion. Consider David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* which employs the second person point of view to involve the reader by direct address or Kingsolver's use of multiple viewpoints to guarantee a wider vision of the story. Indeed, it is a fascinating aside to consider the novel(s) that *The Poisonwood Bible* might have been had Kingsolver chosen only one narrator. Compton-Burnett and Stead's styles are successful (or not) via a different tactic. By creating a closed world, they generate curiosity – human nature experiences an exclusive, unknown environment and the reader wants to be let in.

I spoke of Goffman's own methodological and writing style in Chapter 3. In addition, Becker's (2007) study of *Asylums* touches on the social scientist's problem of language, specifically what to call the things they study and the technical and moral consequences*.* Since 'they are never the first people to have arrived there…' (p24) the language chosen will have certain connotations. Goffman, says Becker, deliberately chose neutral, non-judgemental descriptors. He 'used his linguistic inventiveness to name things in ways that evaded conventional moral judgments and thereby to make scientific work possible' (p33)*.* In doing so, I agree with Becker when he suggests Goffman also attempted to engage the widest readership, and encourage those readers to consider an existing phenomenon – mental hospitals – in a new light, of language beyond that of the professionals licenced to confine. A novelist's intention is similar.

Reader Experiences

I have stated my belief that every reader comes to the novel with a presenting culture, every novelist is master/mistress of his or her own encompassing world. However, even at the farthest extremes of the metaphor, I will also state that the novel itself is not a (New) Total Institution, and neither is the writing or reading of it. All readers undergo a process of voluntary immersion wherein they need to familiarise themselves with the new fictional world and choose whether to accept it. A novelist does not attempt to institutionalise a reader, but to engage and hold firmly his or her attention for the duration of the reading experience. (How many times is 'I just couldn't get into it' a precursor to tossing the book to one side and seeking out an alternative? Alternatively, 'to get lost in a book' where the imaginary world eclipses the home world, is the highest praise). There is no control, no compunction – unless self-imposed – to begin or to finish the book. There is no moral career for the reader. There is no mortification process.

But there is an internal culture and most certainly a lingo. As already mentioned, fans of genre novels such as fantasy, science fiction and magical realism, must, most obviously of all readers, embrace an all-encompassing world, learn the language, rules and peculiarities of

it.[40] Likewise, experimental fiction, by definition, deviates from normal expectations and its readers are required to adapt to a different use of language or format or style of production. If the reader is not happy with the experience, his or her power lies in the freedom to part ways with it. This choice of engagement is generally where reader influence stops; once written and published it is unlikely that a novel will be fundamentally altered however readers respond. Of course, public response may affect what happens inside future books, but it may not. The novelist retains the ultimate control of his or her novel world.

The best novels question and, perhaps, affect, the sense of self, so that the reader leaves the book with something of it, short or long term, consciously or unconsciously, hopefully positively, internalised. The growth of interest in bibliotherapy[41] offers an active case in point. Within this mix of presenting culture and potential for re-organisation of the self, I would go as far to suggest that some readers are drawn toward certain genres of novel because of an – albeit unknowing – fascination for aspects of the Total Institution. The illustration I have in mind is a particular strand of English 'schoolgirl' fiction from the first half of the twentieth century – the girls' boarding school story.

The Girls' Boarding School Story

In Chapter 2, the boarding school was discussed in terms of Antonia White's, *Frost In May*. White's novel was chosen, first because it is quite a rarity of reasonably modern school stories in that it is written for adults (Tobias Wolff's *School Days* is another) and secondly because of its setting in a convent, potentially fulfilling Goffman's criteria on two levels. Purely in terms of literature though, I would like to present it as a case study in its own right.

Novels with a boarding school as theme or setting are not new.[42] Boarding school stories, on the other hand, are a more recent phenomenon.[43] As novels, their worldview is limited:

---

[40] Examples include the works of writers such as Marge Piercy and Ivy Compton-Burnett discussed in this text. In the light of the Total Institution I am also thinking of Alison Lurie's (1967) Imaginary Friends. More widely, is the huge range of fantasy and science fiction works from JR Tolkien to RR Martin, right through to the 'other-worldliness' of a selection of Muriel Spark's novels.

[41] Bibliotherapy (often in tandem with writing therapy) uses an individual's relationship to reading and/or the content of stories and poetry and other written words as therapy in treating depression, anxiety, PTSD etc.

[42] Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or Little Female Academy* (1749) is usually cited as the first of the genre. Charlotte Bronte featured them strongly in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*

to the school environments, to the pupils and staff, and to characters and events in the immediate vicinity of both. The schools are all self-contained environments, usually in large grounds, with carefully controlled local connections. The girls live, play, and study together within a strong sense of community and collective responsibility. Head teachers and mistresses are strong women, supportive, principled and often inspiring. Whilst they strive towards care rather than control, they are distant from the girls in a hierarchical, usually echelon, system supported by a house and prefect system; everyone knows her place.

The collective intention of these institutions is to produce fine, upstanding and educated young women with a strong sense of loyalty to the school that has bred these traits into them: there is no higher accolade than being 'a real Chalet School girl' and 'once a Chalet School girl, always a Chalet School girl'.[44] If rules are broken, the girls expect, accept and respect the punishment meted out, but total rebellion is rare. The main method of coping, in fact the only method, in Goffman's terms, is conversion.

From a contemporary perspective, these stories are littered with clichés and stereotypes but they are inevitably framed in a certain moral belief system, and not least because of that, deeply ingrained in the Total Institution tradition. Equally, their success is dependent upon 'kindly' surveillance and concertive control. The authors, Brent-Dyer particularly, may well have created total worlds to fulfil their own dreams and ideals of society. And why not? It is Brent-Dyer's own world, her characters, her situation and she can and may do what she wishes with them.

(1847-8) starts with Miss Pinkerton's Academy. L.T Meade's *A World of Girls* (1886), coinciding with the serialisation of *Nicholas Nickleby* and a good thirty years after *Tom Brown's School Days,* was perhaps the forerunner of girls' school stories that were fully school stories and for the younger reader, although Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did At School* (1873) is a contender, if not for the fact boarding school was an episode chronicled in Katy's life, not the centre of the trilogy.

[43] The so-called Big Four writers of school stories are: Angela Brazil, Elinor M Brent-Dyer, Elsie Oxenham and Dorita Fairlie Bruce; all have been prolific, producing hundreds of school stories between them in careers that lasted their lifetimes. Enid Blyton, on a smaller scale (that is, counting her school stories alone), and perhaps for slightly younger readers, might be added to the list in terms of the content and style of the books she wrote.

[44] Phrases used again and again throughout Elinor M Brent-Dyer's Chalet School series.

It pays off. In doing this, such authors have garnered a loyal following. Contemporary child readers – for whom the works appear to have timeless appeal, despite the peppering of archaic references, lifestyles and attitudes – join those who have grown to adulthood, still reading, re-reading, or remembering their favourite fictional school with a clarity that often appears beyond fondness. This is borne out by the variety of adult fan clubs and copy-cat spin-offs that currently exist.[45]

I would suggest that the ultimate endurance of these stories is down to the fascination these mature readers have for the entity and mythologies of the boarding schools themselves. That is, they fall in love with the institutions and the aspects of totality which make them unique, and the further away from their own school days, childhoods and first readings of the texts, the more the rose-tinted nostalgia aids and abets. As a young woman, and well into her middle years, Annie – St Bride's far behind her in temporal terms – 'secretly, shamefully devoured' (her words) boarding school stories; they simply showed her what she could and should have had, if St Bride's had been a very different place.

These boarding school stories are most often children's stories, with children and young people as primary characters, and, despite the large numbers of adult readers, it is their eyes through which the reader sees the institutional life – though rarely is it labelled in that way – and the story involved. Choosing this, or any, point of view is in itself an authorial decision that impacts on both writer and reader experience. A novelist must penetrate the world and language of the characters and must stay true to it. The reader needs to penetrate it too, and believe in it. An adult writing for children or employing a child narrator in adult fiction (as is common to several of the literary texts discussed in previous chapters) is a relevant case in point.[46]

Goffman said that the Total Institution was a 'forcing house for changing persons' (Goffman, 1961, p22). He, himself, drew upon literature to illustrate his concept. I have mirrored and then expanded his technique to consider the New Total Institution deliberately in terms of

---

[45] For example: Friends of the Chalet at www.chaletschool.org.uk and the Elsie Oxenham Appreciation Society at https://sites.google.com/site/ejosociety/ .

[46] The voice of the child as narrator in fiction and creative non-fiction, and the attached technique of dramatic irony, is pertinent especially to many novels focussing on 'refugee stories'. See Chapter 5 and Appendix 1.

the novel. The novel is not a forcing house, rather it may be an 'enabling house'. The act of reading – and of writing – itself is often described as a journey of self-discovery, in Goffman's terms, perhaps, a way of reflecting upon or reorganising one's sense of self. This is summed up by McShane (2010):

> Fiction brings us across worlds, moves us across stages and states of being, allows us to see ourselves in mirrors and across to others through windows. Participants articulate the importance of fiction in troubling their given notions of the world, providing gateways to wider worlds and role models for new identities, and helping them to make meaning of their lives and lifeworlds… negotiating those worlds brings them to self-knowledge, self-reflection, and their authentic selves (McShane 2010, p235).

Neither reading nor writing is akin to a (New) Total Institution, but like a (New) Total Institution, the act of reading and writing undoubtedly has the capacity to change the sense of self, to change us as people.

****

A few years ago, St Bride's far behind them, I introduced Annie and Zita[47] to the concepts of Goffman's Total Institution and my New Total Institution. True to type, they differed in their responses.

Annie, despite a life post St Bride's, which has faced family breakdown, domestic abuse and mental health issues, has begun, on the brink of her seventh decade to make sense of her life and, perhaps for the first time, to find contentment, to find 'herself'. For her, St Bride's Home and School, where she spent her childhood locked in a building with a large group of others, with insufficient social interaction and with allegedly abusive levels of control, is what has shaped her personality and her life. This physically-enclosed experience alone is, for her, the only definition of a Total Institution.

---

[47] My 'professional' relationship with the women ended many years ago but I've remained in sporadic contact ever since.

Zita believes the experience of St Bride's has had a significant effect on her, but that by far the most upsetting facet is the lack of shared memory, which has separated her and her twin sister. She wholly subscribes to the idea of presenting culture and inescapability; wondering what life would have been like had she and Annie not been the rurally-isolated daughters of an alcoholic and an habitual would-be suicide. As an adult, despite a happy family and a fulfilling career, she still feels constrained by an extended family, community and Church, all now largely defunct, which never adequately explained why the girls were abandoned in the first place. For Zita, the New Total Institution is apt.

Both women were agreeable to their – suitably anonymised – stories portraying the human element of a hybrid, part-sociological, part-literary, academic essay. Both were amused at being the catalysts for a contemporary novel.[48]

Chasing Elena

The novel accompanying this essay, entitled *Chasing Elena*, began with a three-tiered framework comprising topics in which I've long been interested, and which clearly coalesced into this complete thesis:

1) Cyprus – the history of this idyllic, troubled, strategically-placed island has long fascinated me from the simple expedient of extended holidays with Greek-Cypriot friends who, preoccupied with its history, have also introduced me to the beautiful rural topography. My early literary insights arose from the travel writers, Colin Thubron[49] and Lawrence Durrell,[50] and from an anthropological and ethnographic

---

[48] This was an immense relief. I had long wanted, somehow, to give the women a voice, but both, in a rare symbiosis, have always fiercely protected their privacy. The small peer-led, self-help group to which they nominally belonged shared this ethos – quite unlike many of the emerging support groups of the time – and at times felt akin to a secret society – a New Total Institution? I was privileged to be part of it, first in an advisory capacity and then as a friend. I am equally privileged to be given their blessing to write their story here.
[49] Thubron, Colin. (1975) Journey Into Cyprus
[50] Durrell, Lawrence. (1957) Bitter Lemons of Cyprus

point of view I owe much to personal communications with the late Professor Peter Loizos.[51]

2) Institutionalisation – I studied organisational theory and institutions, and was intrigued by Erving Goffman's research, long before meeting Annie and Zita. When I did meet them I was working for the Irish Social Services, in a Children and Families team. Our offices were moving to a refurbished ex-mental institution where the soon to be ex-residents of the locked ward had nowhere else to go; every day one woman 'escaped' to lay outside the Child Care Manager's office because that's where her bed of forty years had always been. Simultaneously, a small but convinced band of my colleagues refused to move because of the perceived insanity, distress and TB in 'the walls'. It mattered not that the said walls had been knocked down and reconfigured to bear little resemblance to the original floor plan, though to be fair, little could be done about the monstrous, grey-stone façade.

3) Family – what constitutes it in modern terms and how it functions. This was also the increasing focus of my career in social work and subsequent research and training interests.

Eventually, the appeal of Cyprus and my professional interest in institutionalisation and the family (and whatever these concepts really mean), took on a more creative bent. Having recently published a full-length travel narrative,[52] I wanted to try writing a novel; here I had my themes. I located my novel in a fictionalised convent in the Troodos Mountains (where, incidentally, I wrote quite a lot of the first draft). Several chapters in, I realised two things. First, my interest lay equally in the facts that come before and after, as well as inside, the Total Institution. On the premise that 'no man is an island'[53] there is, for me, always a presenting culture and always a profound after-effect to affect the sense of self. The second realisation, with Annie and Zita haunting me, was that I wanted to explore the experience of those neither literally incarcerated, nor settled in the average nuclear family environment,

---

[51] Professor Peter Loizos taught anthropology at the LSE and was a documentary-film maker. His most well-known trilogy of work documented the culture and conflict of his father's Cypriot village of Argaki.

[52] Hamilton, Anne. (2010) *A Blonde Bengali Wife*. Glasgow: LL Publications

[53] John Donne (1624) *Meditation XVII*

yet somehow deeply constrained within their lives in the home world. I wanted to go beyond Goffman. Simultaneously, the New Total Institution came into being and I had the basis of not only my redrafted novel but also a critical text.

In *Chasing Elena*, April arrives in Cyprus, on a number of pretexts, including the opportunity to look for indigenous orchids, and for her childhood friend, Elena, who vanished thirty years ago. Everything and almost everyone, is new to April. Her life (and in Goffman's terms her presenting culture) is complex, and it is her tendency to hide the issues – from herself, her fellow characters and thus, from the reader.

Elena's parallel story is set in 1974; she is a ten year old refugee who is moved to England and back to Cyprus at the whim of her (absent) mother's political leanings in a time of war. As she and her sisters are taken, apparently randomly, around the island in search of safety, Elena is unaware of the true situation and the reader only receives glimpses of it.

The more April relaxes, the more her story unfolds. She begins to wonder how far she is seeking Elena and how much more so, a family and a sense of identity for herself. That she is *Chasing Elena* is ultimately a red herring.

April is as constrained by her past as is Elena by her present. On Cyprus, April is drawn to strong characters, themselves constrained – past, present or future, with negative and positive connotations – some by physical institutions, some by history or family/community expectation. There is ambiguity the end of the story, but it seems that April might be a step closer to creating her own home world.

Chasing Elena is not a story about a Total Institution, and only peripherally about a New Total Institution. It is a work of fiction originally informed by the ideologies connected to the concepts of the (New) Total Institutions. It is a novel about family and identity, the sense of self and the connected lives of three women. For me, the author, I can trace the thematic process with ease but I would expect that a reader, unless this essay is read concurrently, would have no idea. That is how I believe it should be, and how I want it to be.

CHASING ELENA

The novel section of this thesis (pages 93 – 326) has been removed. It is under embargo for the standard 3 year period.

References

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. (2004) *Purple Hibiscus*. London: Harper Perennial Edition 2005.

Allmer, Thomas. (2012) *Towards a Critical Theory of Surveillance in Informational Capitalism.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Atwood, Margaret. (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale.* London: Virago Edition 1990.

Barker, James R. (1993) 'Tightening the iron cage: concertive control in self-managing teams'. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 38, pp. 408-437.

Barker, James R. (1999) *The Discipline of Teamwork. Participation and Concertive Control.* Canada: Dalhousie University.

Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity.

Becker, Howard S. (2007) 'The Politics of Presentation: Goffman and Total Institutions'. *RBSE* 6 (16), pp. 24-34.

Brent-Dyer, E.M. (1967 [1925-1970]) *Chalet School Series*. London: Armada.

Carter, Angela. (1984) *Nights at the Circus*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Cleave, Chris. (2008) *Little Bee*. Toronto: Anchor Canada Edition (2009). Also published as *The Other Hand* (2009) London: Sceptre.

Compton-Burnett, Ivy. (1929) *Brothers and Sisters*. London: Allison & Busby Ltd. Edition 1984.

Compton-Burnett, Ivy. (1941) *Parents and Children.* London: Bloomsbury Academic Edition 2012.

Coser, Lewis. (1974) *Greedy institutions: Patterns of undivided commitment.* New York: Free Press.

Davies, Christie. (1989) 'Goffman's concept of the total institution: criticisms and revisions'. *Human Studies Journal*, 12 (1-2), pp. 77-95.

Donne, John. (1923) *Donne's Devotions*. Cambridge: University Press.

Durrell, Lawrence. (1957) *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus.* London: Faber & Faber.

Fagan, Jenni. (2012) *The Panopticon*. London: Windmill Books.

Fine, G.A & Manning, P. (2003) *Erving Goffman, in The Blackwell Companion to Major Contemporary Social Theorists* (ed George Ritzer). Available at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470999912.ch3 Accessed 23 October 2014.

Folkenllik, Robert. (1993) 'Pamela: Domestic Servitude, Marriage and the Novel'. *Eighteenth Century Fiction,* 5(3), Article 3.

Foucault, M. (1975) *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books USA Edition 1979.

Godden, Rumer. (1969) *In This House of Brede.* London: Pan Books.

Goffman, Erving. (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates.* New York: Anchor Books.

Goffman, Erving. (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Pocket Books; 1st Touchstone Edition (1986).

Goffman, Erving. (1956, revised 1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* London: Penguin Edition (1990).

Goodman, Benny. (2013) 'Erving Goffman and the Total Institution'. *Nurse Education Today*, 3 (8), pp.81-82.

Gordon, Robert & Williams, Brett. (1977) *Exploring Total Institutions*. Champaign IL: Stipes.

Hacking, Ian. (2004) 'Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: between discourse in the abstract and face to face interaction'. *Economy and Society,* 33 (3), pp.277-302.

Hamilton, A. (2007) *Ask the Family: National Standards to support family-led decision making and Family Group Conferences (FGC) in Scotland.* Edinburgh: CHILDREN 1ST.

Hughes, Everett Cherrington. (1957) Memorandum on Total Institutions. *Sociologica 2/2010, pp. 0-0, doi: 10.2383/32719* Accessed 18 August 2013.

Hulme, Kathryn. (1957) *The Nun's Story.* London: Muller.

Huxley, Aldous. (1932) *Brave New World.* London: Vintage Classics Edition 2007.

Ignatieff, Michael. (1983) 'Total Institutions and Working Classes: A Review Essay'. *History Workshop Journal* 15 pp 167-173.

Kesey, Ken. (1962) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.* London: Penguin Modern Classics.

Kingsolver, Barbara. (1998) *The Poisonwood Bible.* London: Faber & Faber.

Kocan, Peter. (2004) *The Treatment and The Cure.* New York: Europa Editions.

Loizos, Peter. (1981) *The Heart Grown Bitter.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lodge, David. (1980) *How Far Can You Go?* London: Penguin.

Lodge, David. (1965) *The British Museum Is Falling Down*. London: Penguin.

MacSuibhne, Seamus. (2011) 'Erving Goffman's *Asylums* 50 years on'. *British Journal of Psychiatry,* 198 pp.1-2.

McShane, Laura M. (2010) *Being Through Books: A phenomenolgical study of constructing a sense of self through fiction.* University of Maryland.

Orwell, George. (1948) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Penguin Edition 1981.

Piercy, Marge. (1977) *Woman on the Edge of Time.* London: The Women's Press.

Quirk, A, Lelliot, P & Seale, C. (2006) 'The permeable institution: An ethnographic study of three acute psychiatric wards in London'. *Social Science and Medicine*, 63 (8), pp. 2105-2117.

Richardson, Samuel. (1740) *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded.* Oxford: Oxford World's Classics Edition 2008.

Rubens, Bernice. (1997) *The Waiting Game*. London: Abacus.

Wallace, Samuel. (1971) *Total Institutions.* New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Scott, Susie. (2011) *Total Institutions and Reinvented Identities.* [Online] Available at: http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doifinder/10.1057/9780230348608.0001. Accessed: 14 October 2013.

Shuler, Sherianne. (2006) 'Working at home as total institution: maintaining and undermining the public/private dichotomy'. *The Electronic Journal of Communications,* 16 (3&4).

Smith, Greg. (ed.) (2002) *Goffman and Social Organization: Studies of a Sociological Legacy*. London: Routledge.

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. (1962) *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* Translated by Ralph Parker. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd. Edition 1963.

Stead, Christina. (1940) *The Man Who Loved Children.* New York: Picador Edition 1968.

Szasz, Thomas Stephen. (1991) *Ideology and Insanity: Essays on the Psychiatric Dehumanization of Man*. Syracuse University Press.

Thubron, Colin. (1975) Journey Into Cyprus. London: Heinemann Ltd.

Thurston, Hazel. (1967) *The Travellers' Guide to Cyprus.* London: Jonathan Cape Ltd.

Tracy, S. J. (2000) 'Becoming a character for commerce: Emotion labor, self-subordination, and discursive construction of identity in a total institution'. *Management Communication Quarterly,* 14 pp. 90-128.

Trevino, A Javier. (2003) *Goffman's Legacy* (Legacies of Social Thought Series). Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Vienne, Philippe. (2010) 'The enigma of the total institution: Rethinking the Hughes-Goffman intellectual relationship'. *Sociologica 2*. Available at http://www.academia.edu. Accessed 12 May 2013.

Vienne, Philippe. Introduction to C Everett Hughes' Memorandum on Total Institutions. *Sociologica 2/2010.* Doi 10.2383/32718. Accessed 10 May 2013.

White, Antonia. (1933) *Frost In May*. London: Virago Press.

Winterson, Janette. (1985) *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit.* London: Pandora Press.

Zephaniah, Benjamin. (2001) *Refugee Boy*. London: Bloomsbury.

Zusak, Markus. (2005) *The Book Thief.* London: Black Swan Edition 2007.

Appendix 1

The following, non-definitive, list comprises examples of the (New) Total Institution which were particularly significant in my thinking, earlier drafts and formation of this essay but are not explicitly outlined in the final text. All other relevant texts are listed in the bibliography.

1) Total Institutions

1.1)   Further key titles set within examples of Goffman's original concept of the Total Institution:

Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* (1958) is an autobiographical novel about the three years the author spent in a juvenile borstal. It is notable in this context for the way in which it captures the dialogue of the inmates – a study in Goffman's concept of 'lingo'.

Janet Frame's *An Angel at My Table* (1987) is the second volume in her autobiography, telling how the author left her close family for teacher training college, an experience that finally led her to attempted suicide and committal to a mental institution. She was discharged eight years later after the publication of her prize-winning short story collection. (Adapted into a film in 1990).

Kathryn Hulme's *The Nun's Story* (1957) is a novel based partly on the experiences of the author's friend, Marie Louise Habets, a Belgian nurse and ex-nun. It excels at demonstrating the total sublimation the convent and religious life required. (Adapted into a film in 1959).

Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) is a memoir recording the author's experiences, aged eighteen, of a psychiatric hospital in the 1960s. It strongly demonstrates the coping mechanisms adopted by the inmates. (Adapted into a film in 1999).

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) is a semi-autobiographical novel following the protagonist, Esther Greenwood's, spiral into depression, institutionalisation and the treatment therein.

Primo Levi's *If This Is A Man* (1987) is a memoir, the author's account of his own detention in Auschwitz. He describes the extremes of the mortification process as the 'demolition of a man'.

1.2)   Magdalene Laundries

The last Magdalene Laundry closed in 1996. There remains a paucity of fictional literature, even since 1999 when the first three Irish women went public with their personal accounts of the abuse they suffered in the institutions.

Marita Conlon-McKenna's *The Magdalen* (1999) is a popular fiction novel that follows the life of one young country woman who becomes pregnant and spends several months in a laundry in Dublin.

The following films/documentaries, of creative non-fiction, are of interest:

Sex in a Cold Climate (1997) is a documentary that interviews four women, three of whom lived in a Magdalene Laundry in Co. Limerick, and one resident in the attached orphanage.

The Magdalene Sisters (2002) is a film set in a fictional Dublin Laundry. Beginning in 1964, it tells the story of four young women during their incarceration.

The Forgotten Maggies (2009) is the only Irish-produced documentary about the Laundries. It focuses on the human rights aspect of the women involved and considers the effects on their lives following release.

Also worthy of mention here is *Philomena* (2013), a film based on Martin Sixsmith's book, *The Forgotten Child of Philomena Lee* (2010). Although not a Magdalene, Philomena Lee was resident in an unmarried mothers' institution and worked in the convent laundry. Whilst the book is the story of the child, Anthony Lee (aka Michael Hess), who was adopted

from the institution as a toddler, the film is primarily the story of his mother, Philomena Lee, and her search to find him.

1.3)   Kibbutzim

Kibbutzim have been labelled as both Total Institution and Greedy Institution – and as neither. These non-fiction titles are seminal texts on the subject:

Bruno Bettelheim's *The Children of the Dream* (1969) employs an ethnographic style to describe life on kibbutz Rabat Yohanan, with particular reference to the rising of children in non-traditional settings.

Melford E. Spiro's *Kibbutz, Venture in Utopia* (1956) is an anthropological study of the more radical collective settlements. Two years later Spiro went on to write *Children of the Kibbutz.*

Yonina Talmon's *Family and Community in the Kibbutz* (1972) offers a sociological insight into family life, ageing and social differentiation in kibbutzim.

2) New Total Institution

2.1) Extended Family/Social/Religious Networks

Alison Lurie's *Imaginary Friends* (1967) follows sociologists Roger Zimmern and Tom McCann who are carrying out a survey about the effects of internal opposition on small group dynamics. Their unknowing experimental group is the Truth Seekers who are in touch with an alternative world.

2.2) Domestic Abuse

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) has at its heart the notions of control from slavery down. Alice Walker tells how Celie has grown up in a culture of patriarchal control that has unquestioning violence at its roots.

Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996) tells the story of Paula Spencer, wife/widow of Charlo, the man who has alternately abused her and charmed her over the span of their twenty year relationship.

2.3) Displaced Persons

Patrick White's *The Hanging Garden* (2012, unfinished) is the story of Eirene Sklavos and Gil Horsfall who are Second World War refugees in Australia.

Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005) is the story of Liesel, a young refugee in a German town. She is living under the bureaucratic confines of the Nazi regime that effectively works as a New Total Institution.

John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) shows how Bruno has been displaced from Berlin to Poland where his father is commandant of Auschwitz. Bruno has a birds-eye view of the concentration camp without comprehending what he sees.

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) inadvertently examines the power of presenting-culture, in describing what Amir, the narrator, does to his servant, Hassan, and how this ultimately sends Amir 'home' to the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947) needs little introduction but is included here for its study of a young woman's displacement and search for her sense of self, in hiding, under a totalising regime.

Bibliography

Adams, Ernest. (2004) 'Postmodernism and the Three Types of Immersion'. Available at http://www.gamasutra.com Accessed 14 November 2011.

Atwood, Margaret. (2005) *Writing with Intent*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers Inc.

Baker, Silvia. (1950) *Journey to Yesterday.* London: Peter Davies.

Barnes, Julian. (1984) *Flaubert's Parrot.* London: Jonathan Cape Ltd.

Barone, T. (2000). *Aesthetics, politics, and educational inquiry: Essays and examples.* New York: Peter Lang.

Becker, Geer, Riesman & Weiss (eds.) (1968) *Institutions and the Person. Festschrift in Honour of Everett C Hughes*. Chicago: Aldine Transaction.

Behan, Brendan. (1958) *Borstal Boy*. London: Hutchinson.

Bettelheim, Bruno. (1969) *Children of the Dream*. New York: Macmillan.

Boyne, John. (2006) *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. London: Definitions Film Tie-In Edition 2008.

Burns, T. (1992) *Erving Goffman.* London: Routledge.

Conlon-McKenna, Marita. (1999) *The Magdalen.* London: Bantam Books.

Doyle, Roddy. (1996) *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Finnane, Mark. (1985) 'Asylums, Families and the State'. *History Workshop Journal,* 20, pp. 134-8.

Forster, EM. (1927) *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Penguin Classics Edition 2005.

Foucault, M. (1964) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* London: Vintage Edition 1998.

Frame, Janet. (1987) *An Angel at My Table*. New York: Braziller.

Frank, Anne. (1947) *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Eleanor Roosevelt (Introduction) and B.M. Mooyaart (translation). New York: Bantam Edition 1993.

Fulcher, J & Scott, J. (2007) *Sociology.* 3rd Edition. Oxford: OUP.

Graves, Robert. (1967) *Goodbye To All That*: London: Penguin Edition 1985.

Hamilton, Anne. (2010) *A Blonde Bengali Wife.* Glasgow: LL Publications.

Hosseini, Khaled. (2003) *The Kite Runner*. London: Bloomsbury Edition 2011.

Hughes, Everett C. (1971) *The Sociological Eye. Selected Papers.* With a new introduction by David Riesman and Howard S. Becker. New Jersey: Transaction Edition 1984.

Ignatieff, Michael. (1981) 'State, Civil Society and Total Institutions: A Critique of Recent Social Histories of Punishment', *Crime and Justice*, 3, pp153-192.

James, Henry. (1897) *What Maisie Knew*. Penguin Classics Edition 1986.

Kaysen, Susanna. (1993) *Girl, Interrupted*. London: Vintage Edition 1994.

King, Stephen. (2000) *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. London: Pocket Books Edition 2002.

Laing, Ronald. (1960) *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness.* London: Penguin Classics Reprint Edition (2010).

Levi, Primo. (1987) *If This Is a Man.* London: Abacus.

Lewis, Mrs. (1894) *A Lady's Impression of Cyprus in 1893.* London: Remington. (Out of Print).

Lodge, David. (1992) *The Art of Fiction.* London: Vintage Edition 2011.

Lurie, Alison. (1967) *Imaginary Friends.* London: Abacus Edition 1988.

MacHugh, Seamus. (1999) Cyprus: An Island Apart. Limassol, Cyprus: Rimal Publications.

van Manen, M. (2002) *Writing in the dark: Phenomenological studies in interpretive inquiry*. London, Ontario: The University of Western Ontario.

Papadakis, Yiannis. (2005) *Echoes From The Dead Zone: Across the Cyprus Divide.* London: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd.

Philomena. Stephen Frears. Pathé. (2013) Film.

Plath, Sylvia. (1963) *The Bell Jar*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics Edition 2006.

Prose, Francine. (2006) *Reading Like a Writer.* A Guide for people who love books and for those who want to write them. London: Union Books Edition 2012.

Sex in a Cold Climate. Steve Humphries. Testimony Films, Channel 4. (1998) Documentary.

Sixsmith, Martin. (2010) *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee.* London: Pan Macmillan.

Spiro, Melford E. (1956) *Kibbutz, Venture in Utopia*. Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press.

Spiro, Melford E. (1958) Children of the Kibbutz. Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press.

The Forgotten Maggies. Steve O'Riordan. Independent. (2009) Documentary.

The Magdalene Sisters. Peter Mullan. Magna Pacific. (2002) Film.

Vernay, Jean-Francois. (2012) 'Big father is watching you – a post-colonial reading of Peter Kocan's total institution novellas'. *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*, 26 (1), pp. 59-63.

Walker, Alice. (1982) *The Color Purple*. London: The Women's Press.

White, Patrick. (2012) *The Hanging Garden.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Wood, James. (2009) *How Fiction Works.* London: Vintage.