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## PORTRAY OF URBAN LIFE IN MARIAN ENGEL'S LUNATIC VILLAS

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### Abstract:

*Canadian writers have produced a variety of genres. Influences on Canadian writers are broad, both geographically and historically. The present paper tries to investigate the role of urban life on the protagonist in Lunatic Villas by Marian Engel. Engel uses her novels as a medium to portray the sad conditions of women living in small town, Ontario.*

### KEY WORDS:

Lunatic Villas, Portray Of Life.

### INTRODUCTION

Lunatic Villas is about Marian Engel's commitment to depict women's reality in work of art. Engel's heroines try to find deeper meaning of life. Harriet Ross, a protagonist in the novel, encounters the fact of real life. Social life and tradition of her small town is a boundary for Harriet, For Harriet the simplicity of ordinary life is lost in the boundaries of the small town.

Harriet Ross, the protagonist of the Lunatic Villas, is the writer. She as a mother and income earner of her seven children confronts the concrete world in the city. She talks about the real life "the things about all of us that nobody wants to know...moles, pimps, debt collectors ,cancer, socially unacceptable lovers...repressive welfare workers, permissive welfare workers, network of missing nerves".(70)

Lunatic Villas uses the realistic portray of life, but hardly brings such a reality into full description. In other words, the reality is not important for the novelist to convey the sheer description of it. But as a matter of fact the urban life plays the important role of portraying the psychoanalytic mood of the heroine. Villa in this novel is the symbol of society. Engel through this novel shows her protagonist dissatisfaction with her life in the city. Lunatic Villas combines the world of dreams and social reality. In Harriet's harsh condition she experienced the world of imagination, the snowy winter night. For her this imaginary landscape is the symbol of freedom and liberation.

She is not satisfied with the city life. For her villa is the symbol of closing place, sometimes she prefers the world of imagination. When her disease is highly contagious, she has to keep in isolation. She dreams to be free like landscape, "she feels light as a cloud, and thinks of renaissance paintings of the Ascension: bodies spiraling up".(244)

Emily Gilbert in her article explains the role of city: "The city is similarly complex in Marian Engel's Lunatic Villas, but to Harriet Ross it is also a fearful place, which, as I will illustrate, is contrasted against the relative security of her neighborhood enclave - specifically, a gentrified, inner-city, white, middle-class neighborhood".

She does not like urban life. For her nature is a land of hope and grace. She finds herself full of joy in the endless road of life in her imagination. She compares the road of life with real road of her small town.

She says: "life is as long and flat as the prairies... and your knees become extensions of bicycle and you're a machine by the time you get across".(235)

As the title of book suggests and even to some extent strangely, lunacy finds a key significance in this novel. Lunacy as bringing a new life and attachment to life makes it more tolerable but also it suggests the possibility for change. As is known, it needs certain lunacy before one can break from the present state of life and enter a new one. A sheer rational person who considers everything rationally and who is cautious in every regard, cannot act into change and freedom.

Christi Verduyn explains: "Lunatic Villas implies empathy for a little lunacy in life .Much of this sentiment stems from the value placed on children, who are seen as complex individuals with complicated lives, a view Engel underscores by multiplying the number of children in her protagonist's life. The key, Harriet informs Rager, is always to consider them as individual". (L.V 164)

It can be discussed that Lunatic Villas is both about the reality of ordinary urban life but also is about the strange things that may happen in it that can give it an extraordinary understanding to life. In other words, it is also about surrealism where it can be said individual experiences life in a hallucinatory way. Lunatic Villas expresses Engel's commitment to social life and goes beyond the reality.

Harriet is not satisfy in her home. The major reason for leaving house is that she could not get along with her father who was 'a decent, honest, upright man' (LV 67) and he also was a church elder. So it is natural for her to have experienced a kind of suffocation from her early life and it is not very meaningless if she considers such a house as a lunatic house. Gerda Wekerle's assertion that '[i]t is impossible to understand woman's place in the city without some understanding of women's place in the home".

Even later in her married life, she experiences the same sort of lack of understanding between herself and her husband. The idea of lunacy comes from her family experiences where there is hardly any connection, affection and understanding among the family members or mainly between Harriet and her father and husband.

Therefore, her social experiences are not very pleasant either. The work in magazine can shaped her view about society and city as being places of pain, limitations, lies and sufferings where the apparently simple things like human understanding and connection is ignored. But it is not only the lies and ignorance of society which brings her to depression. Too much concern with money is also so deadening to her. 'More and more I am walking across the crusted snow of depression' (LV 52)

Having had such a life full of disappointments, she sees the world around her as not being very sane but actually quite lunatics. Their neighboring villas are lunatic too. But still with the very neighbors, she is able to cope with her depression and disappointments.

In this novel, seeing the home and the city as not quite a perfect places gives the protagonist a sense of loss of place. but as Harriet contends the loss of place is a required step to acquitting identity. Landscape being described in a lunatic way is the symbol of this loss and alienation but at the same time, it stands for a new look which makes the life more tolerable and requires the residents of such society to understand all the wrong in society, not to ignore it and to move towards the possible changes.

For Harriet, city is a fearful place where though you can find beauties, but still is not secure enough. Engel in describing city that way has had an aim, which was to bring in the social reality of living in that city, in that era. As Brady puts it, "Engel "defined as one of the novel's primary functions the recreation of a felt sense of place - in her case the Canadian landscape" (Brady 1987: 186).

To be content with urban life in the closed houses do not actually bring one peace and security but it makes a person even more anxious by closing you to the world of alternatives. Lunatic Villas make a landscape that has to be changed. In such a lunatic place, you are forced into believing that you are content with the present life and such a belief and assumption deprives you from the real content that you can achieve through search and determination for change.

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