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Reinvention in the search for asylum in selected novels  
of Anna Kavan

**Bakalářská práce**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled “Reinvention in the search for asylum in the selected novels of Anna Kavan” is the result of my own work and that I used only the cited sources.

Prague, 25 November , 2013 .....

## **Abstract**

Anna Kavan was born Helen Ferguson and published half of the works in her real name. By 1940, Ferguson had re-invented herself changing her name to Anna Kavan (a character from one of her books) and produced one of the most significant works in a genre of slipstream. The themes and characters in her books mirror her life experience - a life filled with abuse, drug addiction, loss and rejection.

This thesis will discuss three main areas. Firstly, it will argue that she may have used her writing to try to influence the course of her life. Secondly, it will suggest that she sought acceptance and sympathy from society through her books even though she made statements to the contrary. The third aim of this thesis is to explore the use of slipstream as a narrative technique in the selected novels of Anna Kavan, namely *Ice*, *Asylum Piece*, *Scarcity of Love*.

**Key words:** Reinvention; asylum; detachment; addiction; subconscious; symbolism;

## **Abstrakt**

Anna Kavanová, rozená Helena Fergusonová, vydala víc jak polovinu knih pod svým původním jménem. Roku 1940 se Hana Fergusonová přejmenovala na Annu Kavanovou, postavu která vystupuje v jedné z jejích knih. Vydala jednu z nejvýznamnějších prací v žánru slipstream. Témata a postavy v jejích knihách zobrazují její životní zkušenosti - život plný utrpení, závislosti na drogách, ztrát a odmítnutí.

Tato bakalářská práce je rozdělena do tří částí. Nejprve se soustřeďuje na její tvorbu, během které se Kavanová snažila ovlivnit průběh svého života. Ve druhé se zabývá jejím neustálým hledáním sympatií od společnosti, tím jak se snažila navázat kontakt se společností přes své knihy, přestože se v nich často vyjadřovala rozporuplně. Třetím cílem této bakalářské práce je prozkoumat vypravěčskou techniku slipstreamu ve vybraných románech Anny Kavanové, konkrétně v knihách *Ice*, *Asylum Piece* a *Scarcity of Love*.

**Klíčová slova:** Sebevynalezení; útočiště; odloučení; závislost; podvědomí; symbolismus;

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## 1. Introduction

This work concentrates on the main writings of Anna Kavan, on exploring their structure and main topics. The books that are considered to be crucial in our attempt to understand Kavan's writings are *Asylum Piece* (1940), *A Scarcity of Love* (1956), and *Ice* (1967). All these works were written under the nom-de-plume of Anna Kavan. The reason for our attention to these particular books lies in the fact that they present Kavan as a person and a writer. By 1940 Helen Ferguson was transformed into a completely different person – her own fictional character – Anna Kavan. Every work that was composed before that period seems preliminary to the novels written after her incarceration in a mental hospital. The treatment changed Helen both physically and mentally. The woman that came back was determined to overcome her past by fictionalizing her previous life experiences. The selected books were a critical success in spite of the unusual experimental style that Kavan employed in them. The genre of slipstream had not yet appeared on the literary scene and Anna knew that she would be excluded from the mainstream by choosing a peculiar style of writing and specific unfamiliar subjects. Although the critical reviews on her works were positive, the newly arrived genre was not immediately acclaimed. Kavan struggled with her publishers who demanded more realistic work.

Post-war Britain witnessed the appearance of literature of the minority. Women, immigrants and ordinary people became a new force on the British literary scene. A new approach, social realism, invaded the artistic world. Kavan's work had nothing in common with the new literary tendencies. She continued to write highly surreal stories and put herself at the risk of being ignored or dismissed by the critics. However, Anna Kavan had some advantages among which were financial supports of her friends and good connections with London high society. She always attracted bohemian intellectuals who were eager to help her out. Among these were Rhys Davies, a Welsh novelist and a critic; Raymond Marriott, a theatre critic and Gerald Hamilton, a memoirist. Anna's letters to her friends have been preserved and now are available to the general public. Jeremy Reed and David Callard in their biographies on Kavan give some valuable insight into what was left of Anna's correspondence. David Callard in *The Case of Anna Kavan* wrote that even "Rhys Davies refused to write her biography, saying that even after thirty years of friendship he did not know enough" (Callard 11). The most recent biography by Jeremy Reed is more complete and includes not only samples of Anna's correspondence but also her art work and critical reviews in the *Horizon* magazine. There is also 'the Anna Kavan's Society' which was "founded in 2009 and aims to encourage wider readership and increase academic scholarship of Kavan's work" (Anna Kavan's society). A visitor to the

society is given access to Anna's personal papers, handwritten revisions and letters to friends. However, one should not expect to discover Anna easily. Her books are not always readily available on the bookshelves and compared to those of her contemporaries are relatively rare.

What is fascinating about Kavan is that she remained a mystery in reality but made attempts to reveal herself in fiction. She managed to convert her miserable life into a fictional story that draws the reader into a net of surreal and dreamlike surroundings. The over-riding moods of Anna's works are those of inevitability and despair, but there is always some hope, which comes from Anna herself. In almost every story there is a figure of a saviour or a friend – a man who makes promises. In *Ice* this role is played by the narrator; in *A Scarcity of Love* it is a young doctor and later in the story a person called Louis; in *Asylum Piece* it is a lover who comes in dreams. All these characters come from an indefinite place and play the role of a consoler. Nevertheless, their promises are vain and their ability to protect the "glass girl" is questionable. They usually turn out to be either victimizers or they simply betray the girl by informing her cruel husband. There is a personal meaning in Kavan's attempts to save "the glass girl". Anna had sought acceptance and understanding throughout her life. She experienced two unhappy marriages that made her emotionally vulnerable and unstable. Having experienced the worst, she was desperate in her pursuit. She was unable to trust anyone when her inner world was falling apart. Therefore, she introduces the character of the "glass girl", who like her is extremely fragile, almost transparent, victimized and bullied.

## 2. The creation of Anna Kavan

Anna Kavan came to existence in 1930 in the novel *Let Me Alone* by Helen Ferguson. This work is a “directly autobiographical re-creation of Helen Ferguson’s school days and marriage”(Reed 19). In this novel Helen Ferguson creates a mirror image of herself and in 1938 she officially adopts her own fictional character’s name. The reasons for this unconventional change of personality are rooted in Helen Ferguson’s past. An unhappy childhood and a disastrous early marriage damaged Helen irreparably. In fact, she started writing at the time when she was experiencing utter loneliness and detachment in her marriage. Donald Ferguson, whom Helen married at the age of eighteen, was abusive and prone to violence. Helen’s mother initiated the marriage, because saw it as a means to dispose of her dependant daughter. By that time Helen had changed numerous boarding schools and still had not received a proper university education. Being an introverted and shy teenager, she had become a burden to her mother who refused to pay for her higher education even though she had been offered a place at Oxford. The marriage was supposed to bring the daughter independence and freedom from the family. Straight from school Helen married an older man and left with him for Burma where he worked at that time. Donald Ferguson humiliated his young wife who regretted the decision to marry him all her life, even though they barely survived two years together.

It was in Burma where Helen started keeping diaries and writing fiction “presumably as a way of coping with her depressed state and excruciating vulnerability” (Reed 21). Her early works feature women protagonists with a longing to escape from an unbearable existence. The first novels have no resemblance to the experimental fiction and slipstream technique that later would dominate Kavan’s fiction. It would not be until she was hospitalized in 1940 when Helen changed her literary direction from conventional narrative techniques and plots. In *Let Me Alone* we witness the appearance of a new character, Anna Kavan, who is daring and courageous. She challenges her abusive husband and does not let him mistreat her. Anna personifies the woman that Helen wants to be. This character indicates a new beginning for Helen. From that novel onwards all Helen’s works would concentrate on the yearning to escape from the confines of abusive relationships. There is a self-evident meaning in Helen’s decision to take the name of her protagonist. Throughout her life she made attempts to escape from her fears and set a new beginning. Anna Kavan was supposed to replace Helen Ferguson for ever: “the brunette, elegantly and formally dressed Helen was dispatched in the Zurich clinic, to be replaced by emaciated, blonde, strikingly made-up

woman in her late thirties with a vaguely East European name and a determination to write the sort of books that Helen Ferguson would never have dared” (Reed 37). Nevertheless, the two polarities of Anna’s personality would continue to co-exist and she would struggle all her life to come to terms with her new identity. Kavan’s fiction manifests her striving to control her life and escape from the shadow of Helen Ferguson. In real life and in fiction Anna Kavan – “an individual human being, alive in the world, alone, without support, without obligations, capable of intelligent thought and responsible for her own destiny” (Reed 43) confronts Helen – a “timid, delicate, humble and lacking self-confidence” (*A Scarcity of love* 100). A constant conflict between the desire to be a self-sustaining independent personality and the inner perception of herself as a vulnerable and mistreated girl is a prevailing motif in Kavan’s fiction. There are numerous contradictions in her works due to this clash of personalities namely Kavan’s appeal for help and simultaneously her rejection of human relationships.

Kavan internal conflict resulted in her drug addiction and mental instability. She never came to terms with her personality and never escaped the feeling of loneliness: “ I live alone in my mind, and alone I am being crushed to suffocation, immured by the walls I have made. It’s unbearable. I can’t possibly live in this terrible, hideous, revolting creation of mine” (Reed 162). Although, her fiction was a temporary asylum from the real world, it did not reconcile Helen Ferguson and Anna Kavan. It may be suggested that after the change of the name, Ferguson and Kavan switched over their places. The daring and resilient Anna Kavan, who was a fictitious persona, became real and Helen Ferguson’s personality was to be reflected in the character of the glass-girl. While Kavan was shutting herself out from the world, Helen was searching for love and appreciation.

### 3. Slipstream direction

“Why shouldn’t I let my imagination run away with me? If I prefer the dream to the reality, what does it matter?” (Anna Kavan)

Anna Kavan was one of the pioneers of the slipstream genre. The novel *Ice* and a collection of stories *Asylum Piece* are representative works of the sci-fi descendant – slipstream literature. She was always ahead of her time, writing in such a manner that would not be acknowledged until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kavan was probably unaware of the novelty she introduced in her style of writing. However, it would not be a mistake to say that she chose to write radically subjective fiction that relied on the power of the reader’s imagination rather than realistic plots. She opens the door into the suppressed world of man’s subconscious and lets the reader in. “Slipstream shifts science into the realm of the unconscious mind, into metaphor, into emotion, into symbols” (Priest 5). What makes her stories slipstream are the surreal and illogical plots where time and place are not important. Born of postmodernism, slipstream also presents subjective reality. There is no meaning in slipstream fiction, it tears apart the preconceived attitudes and often blurs reality and dream. The term ‘slipstream’ was coined by Bruce Sterling in 1989. He defined it as “a parody of mainstream, and nobody calls mainstream "mainstream" except for us skiffy trolls” (Sterling). He also pointed out that slipstream would never be commercially successful, because “slipstream authors must work outside the cozy infrastructure of genre magazines, specialized genre criticism, and the authorial esprit-de-corps of a common genre cause” (Sterling). Indeed, writers who choose slipstream genre often remain marginal. Their fiction is highly introspective and often describes everyday objects from a very unusual perspective.

In his foreword to *Ice*, Christopher Priest compares slipstream to a distorting mirror. He writes: “slipstream is a view of familiar sights and objects from an unfamiliar perspective. Reality might not be quite as certain as we think” (Priest). Slipstream is a highly speculative genre and it presents reality through a prism of a personal creative vision. Kavan often took her clinical experiences as a basis for her plots and then fictionalized them. Her style reminds one of Franz Kafka whose surreal and gloomy stories deeply affect the reader. Kavan’s fiction can be described as Kafkaesque. A psychologically oppressive atmosphere, alienation, victimization and parent-child conflicts became necessary characteristics of Kafka and Kavan works. Both Kavan and Kafka escaped from the dominance of family, both were said to be psychologically unstable and both of them derived inspiration from their shattered inner world. It is highly unlikely that Kafka influenced Kavan though. Kafka’s books were written in German and by the time they

were translated into English, she had already published some of her books. However, Anna's choice of the name "Kavan" may have been triggered by the acquaintance with Kafka's fiction. "Kavan" is a Czech name and this fact provoked many of her critics to make all kinds of assumptions. Was Anna fascinated by Kafka or was she merely following her own ambitions? The answer is not that important, but Kavan would certainly write a review on his novels if she had had an opportunity. In the 1940s she was working for a magazine called *Horizon* as a secretary and editorial assistant. *Horizon* was financed by Peter Watson, a close friend of Anna, who gathered a circle of bohemian individuals around him. "Anna's connections to the *Horizon* team provided her with a critical platform not only for assessing the merits and defects of her contemporaries but for showcasing her own deeply formulated ideas about the subjective novel" (Reed 92). Not only did she find friendship and acceptance in her new milieu, but also *Horizon* developed Anna's critical and literary opinions. Her articles expressed a strong faith in the individual and an admiration for those who had the audacity to take risks with literary style. Later these features would become the core of Kavan fiction.

A great change in Anna's writing started in the 1940s. The literary works that were composed by Helen Ferguson were more an attempt at self-exploration. The transition work was *Asylum Piece* which was written by a completely different person. Helen Ferguson had ceased to exist by 1940. Anna Kavan was determined "to write the sort of books that Helen Ferguson would never have dared" (Reed 37). *Asylum Piece* signalled a new beginning for Kavan. The radical change in style did not trouble Anna. She knew that she was able to create something that would connect her to the outside world. At that time her aim was to establish a dialogue with the attentive reader and put an end to her constant self-destruction. It is possible that these were the reasons that caused Anna to experiment with structure and style. Kavan was aware that her works on the verge of science-fiction and allegorical novella would neither attract big audiences nor bring financial success. Anna deliberately excluded herself from mainstream literature and followed her own path. The metaphors and symbols in Kavan's fiction are enigmatic and evasive, they do not reflect the reality but convolute the understanding of it. Fortunately, she had the opportunity to be independent in her writing and in her real life. Happily for Anna, she never actually found herself in financial difficulties and was always well supported. Writing was never a primary source of income for Kavan. She would get on publishers' nerves and stand her ground, but she would not make alterations to please the general audience. She strongly believed that her true readers would understand the path she had chosen. Nevertheless, at times she had to adjust her works to suit her readers. Having been rejected by a number of publishers with *The Cold World* because the novel was too surreal, Anna had to compromise, but the agreed changes

did not in the least ruin her plans for the novel. She chose a path of a “radically interiorized fiction” (Reed 92) and would not deviate from it.

It is possible to say that Anna took the slipstream direction because of her habit of keeping diaries. Although she destroyed nearly all of them, the diaries worked as a solace when Anna was feeling desperately lonely. A feeling of being trapped and in despair throughout her first marriage forced Anna to let her emotions pour out. There was nobody share her thoughts with but the paper. Later she would learn how to divulge her thoughts to the reader and would give up trying to keep them hidden. Kavan destroyed her diaries; after all she had found a listener. Everyone is permitted to slightly open a door to Anna’s life. She was honest with her reader and wanted the world to hear her cry. Her style does help to establish a dialogue between the real world and the inner reality. The slipstream provides an indirect path to the subconscious. At times the reader would feel confused and lost but he or she should remain sympathetic and understanding towards a sensitive and vulnerable woman who could not see a better way to express herself.

#### 4. A Scarcity of Love

The title of the novel *A Scarcity of Love* speaks for itself. It is a fictional story about the lack of affection Anna experienced in her life. She manages to express the reason for her lifelong misery in the words of the title. Having read the book, one can easily imagine what Kavan's childhood was like. A scarcity of love, care and tenderness in her upbringing did not pass without leaving a mark in Anna's life. It is advisable to read this novel before her other works, as it provides a background to everything that happened to Kavan later. In addition, the book is full of character-archetypes such as the glass girl, the dominant mother, the cruel husband and the young man as a saviour. They all come from real life and present Kavan's subjective vision of the people in her life.

Anna published the book by herself in 1956. The reason for a publication of vanity was Kavan's obscurity in the literary world. The fading commercial success of her books made it challenging to find a publisher. The novel was intended to be a fictitious account and the relationship she had with her mother, Helen Bright. It can also be seen as "an act of vengeance, a fantastic reworking of her relationship with her mother" (D.A.Callard 107), who had died the previous year. Anna never forgave her mother for the loveless childhood she had experienced. Her attitude towards Helen Bright became even worse when she disinherited her. It is clear from the book that Helen Bright never wanted a child and tried to keep Anna out of her sight by every means available to her. Numerous boarding schools and Anna's early marriage helped Helen Bright achieve her aim. Anna was denied maternal care and love. There was no sense of "family" in her childhood, but, nevertheless, she was expected to raise her own family at the age of eighteen. There is no doubt Anna blamed her mother for everything that happened to her in her married life. The book served her as liberation from the dominant mother who in the novel suffered a stroke after having had an argument with a small girl. Although the reader cannot help but pity the girl who was denied parental love, one should not forget the main feature of Kavan's fiction – subjectivity. The reader is invited to hear a story from a girl who was resentful towards the whole world. The only hope is that this story helped the girl free herself from her dreadful memories and move forward with her life.

Kavan's diaries and two biographies provide sufficient evidence to suggest that the relationship between mother and daughter described in the novel reflects Anna's relationship with Helen. Kavan's mother is portrayed as the mysterious Countess Regina, convinced, "that people existed only to serve her" (*A Scarcity of Love* 8). She is presented through the eyes of a young doctor who is the narrator of the first part. He describes the pregnant Countess in the

following way: “she gave an odd impression of being dissociated from her condition, as if pregnancy were something unsuited to her – a trick played upon her” (*A Scarcity of Love* 7). The reader is given much more than just the narrator’s impressions. We are allowed to see what is happening behind closed doors. From the very beginning Kavan introduces a multiple third person narration, which is known as the “over the shoulder” technique. Each character presents reality from his or her own perspective and at times the reader is drawn into their lengthy introspective monologues. Kavan was very fond of impeding a story with a flow of thoughts which allow the reader a close observation of the characters’ personalities. Although, this book cannot be placed alongside *Asylum Piece* and *Ice* as it has a clear and structured plot, the story is not completely devoid of experimental stylistic devices. Kavan introduces multiple narrators who tell the story from different points in time and provide a vivid description of each other. In the first part of the book it is the young doctor who observes other characters, in the second part it is a woman Mona who adopted the Countess’ baby, later on it is The Countess Regina and eventually it is Gerda – the main character in the novel.

The characters eagerly share with the reader their intentions and fears. We learn what is happening in Regina’s head while she is giving birth to her child. She feels that pregnancy is a “shameful and disgusting process, utterly vile and revolting” (*A Scarcity of Love* 17) and as soon as Gerda is born she gives the child away. Kavan projects herself in the story as Gerda - an unwanted baby. She fictionalized her own birth but probably her fiction was very close to reality. The thoughts Regina had were not that unfamiliar to Anna. We know Anna had a son, Bryan, to whom she referred as “an unwelcome product of her shattered marriage” to Donald Ferguson (Reed 21). And a few years later Anna had an abortion because the idea of being a mother appalled her. In the same way Regina hates her pregnancy calling it “a loathsome obscenity” (*A Scarcity of Love* 17) and arranges that the baby should be given to somebody else. In real life Kavan never regretted her decision to send her son Bryan away, or to have an abortion. She seemed to feel no remorse. Nevertheless, the voice of the narrator (or Kavan herself?) cries out: “Would she be able to bear the sight of the world again? Would she ever again be able to bear her life, herself, after what had happened?” (*A Scarcity of Love* 27). These words refer to Regina as much as to Kavan. She may have buried her grief over the two dead children in reality, but disclosed her remorse in the fiction, even though it is the voice of the narrator whose mournful voice we hear. By endowing Regina with her own features Anna unwittingly follows her mother’s path and hence there is a feeling of despair and hopelessness throughout the story.

So far we know enough about Kavan to say that the memories from the past haunted her. She would not reveal her fears to the world but her voice is heard in her writing. One of Anna's protagonists contemplating human relationships wrote: "People have always been horrible to me. How can I help hating them all? Sometimes they disgust me so much that I feel I can't go on living among them" (D.A.Callard 47-48). The rejection of humanity functioned as a defense mechanism for Anna. She believed that trusting someone again would mean surrender. Men in her life always failed her expectations. Her first marriage had left deep scars and her subsequent relationships did not provide shelter or relief from her haunting memories. Nevertheless, there is always a saviour - character, not necessarily a narrator in Anna's fiction, eager to provide help. In *Ice* and in *A Scarcity of Love* it is a young man through whom the reader witnesses events happening in the book. In this story the doctor offers protection and care for Regina. He implores her to give up her haughtiness and to rely on him: "You can't fight the whole world the whole time...This is one of the times when you've got to trust someone- So you might as well trust me- I won't let you down" (*A Scarcity of Love* 20). The narrator's persistence eventually wins over her pride and the doctor marries Regina. Their relationship is very similar to that depicted in *Ice*. After the marriage Regina more closely resembled Anna Kavan rather than Helen Bright: "and she was grateful to him for treating her as though she were a Venetian-glass-girl, extremely frangible, delicate" (*A Scarcity of Love* 54).

The "glass-girl" already became very familiar to the reader as she appears in almost every Kavan's story. Although in this book Gerda, the daughter of Regina, plays this role, the Countess at times shares certain traits with Kavan such as obsession with body image and dispassion in intimate relationships. There are passages that illustrate this assertion: "The whole physical relationship revolted her, each repetition of the sexual act seemed a rape, and, when pregnancy thickened the fine lines of her figure, she began to hate the man for debasing her beautiful darling" (*A Scarcity of Love* 51) or that she was inculcating "the doctrine that sex was unmentionable, vulgar and entirely superfluous" (*A Scarcity of Love* 107). The image of the Countess is presented as "her face, under the shadow of heavily hanging hair, seemed to be changing before his eyes; growing smaller, whiter, more mysterious, with an indefinable sensual look, half smiling, like the faintest possible hint of something corrupt" (*A Scarcity of Love* 60). Had we not known that this was a portrait of Regina, we would have thought of the "glass girl" from *Ice*. The passage: "when she married, straight out of the schoolroom, the titled rich man her parents had chosen, she was bound to resent his interference with the lovely body that was her private treasure and joy" (*A Scarcity of Love*

51) could not refer to anyone else but Anna. Even Regina's habits were the same as Kavan: "every day, in front of long mirrors, she scrutinized her naked body minutely, dispassionately, systematically eliminating each defect" (*A Scarcity of Love* 52) or "she took it for granted that men should be attracted to her, but paid little attention to her admirers" (*A Scarcity of Love* 63). Kavan's diaries reveal the fact that Anna had a strong aversion to sex and was more in favour of a platonic relationship in her married life. She describes sex in her first marriage with Donald Ferguson as "a marital rape" or "an act of violence", and while being married to Stuart Edmonds she was "regularly rendering herself senseless with sleeping pills as a means of deferring his advances" (Reed 24).

The depiction of Countess Regina strongly corresponds with Anna Kavan's peculiarities, which is not coincidental. It is obvious that Anna "remained fixated upon her mother's image" (Reed 163), but what makes the story perplexing are these striking similarities between Anna and her mother. By creating the dominant character of Regina, Kavan unwittingly draws parallels between herself and her mother. The allegorical story not only portrays the parent-child relationship, but also shows the two polarities of Kavan's personality – a self-sufficient narcissistic woman and a victimized girl.

Multiple narrators in *A Scarcity of Love* give the reader a unique insight into the characters from various angles. However, our attention should be focused on the female narrators who are projections of Anna Kavan. The first chapter features the Countess Regina, a mother giving birth; in the second chapter Regina's child is given to Mona, a woman who previously lost her own baby; in the fourth chapter Gerda, Regina's grown-up daughter is the narrator. Although these three characters possess different features and at times confront each other, all of them in one way or another represent the complex personality of Kavan. From this perspective, the character of Mona, is particularly interesting as she can be seen as a mediating figure between the dominant Countess and the submissive Gerda. Mona is a foster mother who makes an agreement with Regina to take care of her newborn child. By taking the baby away, Mona receives a large payment from the Countess and frees the latter from the burdensome responsibility. Apart from the financial benefit, Mona had other reasons to adopt Gerda. At the beginning of the chapter the reader is given the background of events happening to Mona, namely, her stay in the hospital and the adoption. We learn that Mona was married to a man who left her when she was seven months pregnant. Prior to that they went on a journey that was supposed to put an end to their monotony and boredom. After a month had passed, Mona noticed a change in her husband: "feeling the dream slipping between her fingers, and unable to hold it back: watching him grow preoccupied, restless" (*A*

Scarcity of Love 32). The holiday resulted in their separation, leaving Mona in a state of shock and disillusionment. There is no description of Mona's husband in the chapter but his personality can be easily imagined in the way he treats Mona. He falls into the category of men with whom Anna Kavan had long-term relationships. Moreover, Mona's feelings for her husband are perceived as submission rather than love: "It had been difficult for her to fall in love. In some part of her she had felt it almost like a loss of integrity" (A Scarcity of love 32). For Anna Kavan, her marriage to Donald Ferguson was also an act of surrender, which left her skeptical and mistrustful of relationships. She projects her attitude towards men through female characters who are left disillusioned and regretful after their experience of being married. Mona's disillusionment "had been harsh and brutal, hacking through the delicate membranes she had so painfully grown to connect herself with him. Never again, she'd thought: never again" (A Scarcity of Love 32).

Feelings of wretchedness and despair pervade Mona's world when she is left in the hospital about to give birth to a child she does not want. As a result of Mona's illness and distress the baby is born, but is barely alive. The sight of her baby gives Mona a sense of shock and revulsion: " 'why couldn't you have died' – she had whispered furiously to the hideous little red wrinkled horror, when they left her alone with it for a minute. It was a nightmare of a little homunculus that they'd brought out of her" (A Scarcity of Love 34). Mona's words come true and the baby dies the same evening.

Both Regina and Mona perceive childbirth as loathsome and unnatural. There is no trace of mother-like attitude or any kind of affection towards children in the entire novel. The feelings that Regina and Mona shared demonstrate Kavan's refusal to become a mother. Anna quickly disposed of her son Bryan after her divorce with Donald Ferguson, a few years later she became pregnant with her lover's baby and chose to have an abortion. Her last child, a girl, was still born. Abandoned by her own mother in childhood, Anna was not given parental love and thus had no foundation to be a mother herself. In fact, deep inside Anna remained a little neglected girl who longed for care and attention. The thought of becoming a mother scared Anna, who knew that she would not be able to deal with this great responsibility: "what a miserable waste of happiness" (D.A.Callard 35) wrote Anna in her diary. However, the death of her own child in 1926 could not have passed without leaving a trace. Although Anna Kavan was unable to show maternal love, she was not devoid of emotions. She used drugs to cope with her feelings and it was not long before she would slash her wrists and make a note in her diary: "real life is a hateful and tiresome dream" (D.A.Callard 32). A suicide attempt after the death of a baby also takes place in *A Scarcity of Love*. Mona

swallows a flask of sleeping pills immediately after her release from the hospital. “But she didn’t make a good job of it in the end. And then the damned hospital again” (A Scarcity of Love 35) – an unsuccessful suicide attempt almost places Mona in confinement in a mental institution, which would have been a reflection of Anna Kavan’s fate when she was institutionalized after consuming a bottle of sleeping pills. Nevertheless, Kavan chose a different destiny for her character and Mona is rescued by the young doctor, who offers her an agreement. Mona adopts The Countess’ baby in exchange for money and thus is saved from the prospect of being treated in the asylum.

The adoption does not symbolize atonement for Mona as she feels no regret about her own baby. Kavan stresses the fact that her character accepts the bargain for purely selfish reasons. Mona is drawn to the young doctor, who is caring and attentive: “when he looked into her face, she always had the feeling that he understood her as nobody else ever had done, as if he saw through to her inmost thoughts and needs” (A Scarcity of Love 41). It is the young doctor who brings Mona to life, not the baby. Mona is now dependant on her saviour and attempts to return to normal life.

The archetypal character of a saviour in Kavan’s works comes from a real person – Stuart Edmonds. They were introduced to each other in 1926 and Anna fell in love with the bohemian painter. This relationship brought Anna back to life and gave her a reason to live. She was obsessed with Edmonds and did not recognise his resemblance to her first husband. Unlike Donald Ferguson, Stuart Edmonds was impassioned with art and bohemian lifestyle, but occasionally would overindulge himself in a bottle of whisky, which usually resulted in his incapacity for a couple of days and bouts of violence. Once they were married, Anna came to despise him and his likeness to Donald. A man with whom Anna bound her hopes let her down through his alcoholism and arrogance. When Edmonds did not visit his wife during her stay at the clinic in 1940, Anna realized that he had abandoned her and their marriage was over. In the same way Mona, who comes to depend on her new friend, feels betrayed and cast away, when he leaves her and the baby at last. The reader hears Mona’s cry: “It all happened again and again no one cared; no one had moved to save her – why she had expected it? People never did care. She felt that the young doctor had used her for his own ends, betrayed her, as her lover had done – she’d been sold; sold again” (A Scarcity of Love 43). Kavan deliberately removes the saviour away from Mona and leaves her in a state of shock and horror. Her intention is to show the reader how desperate a woman can be when she is betrayed. Mona’s thoughts are almost identical to Kavan’s contemplation in her diary: “she felt she had finished with the human race, that she loathed and detested them all. Nobody

could even expect her to go on living” (A Scarcity of Love 34, 45). At this point in the story Kavan identifies herself with the character of Mona completely. The character is merged with the author and it is no longer clear if the story remains fiction.

There are numerous similarities between Kavan and her character, namely their longing for retreat. Kavan admires the mountains, “because they are the negation of life, indestructible, inhuman, untouchable, indifferent, as she wants to be” (D.A.Callard 47). Mona, in her turn, admires the beauty of the mountains from the train that takes her further away from people: “deliberately she identified herself with their inhumanity and utter loneliness – with the fearful cold otherness of the non-human world” (A Scarcity of Love 49). If Kavan retreated from the world with the help of heroin and sleeping pills, Mona runs away into a secluded place in the mountains, which she perceives as a hideaway from humanity: “there was nothing left for her to live for – far better to die, and have done with it: the mountain world seemed like a form of death” (Scarcity of Love 47). Mona’ story ends unexpectedly. It is no coincidence that Kavan chose a different fate for her character, as the story does not end with the death of Mona nor with her confinement in a mental institution, but with a marriage proposal. After many years the doctor returns to Mona and this time is willing to marry her: “knowing now that she still had a heart alive somewhere in her, not quite turned to ice, his task would be to bring back its full living warmth” (A Scarcity of Love 76). However, the ending is ambiguous and Kavan leaves the reader uninformed of what eventually happens between Mona and the doctor. The question whether Mona surrenders remains unanswered.

The character of Gerda who appears in the middle of the novel is crucial in that she symbolizes a different side of Kavan’s personality as opposed to the characters of Regina and Mona. The women appearing in the story prior to Gerda represent Kavan’s strong-willed and audacious personality. She challenges men’s authority and determine her own fate. Anna Kavan possesses all of these features and thus serves as a prototype for those protagonists. However, the character of the “glass-girl” or in this story, Gerda, manifests a different identity, and that is Helen Ferguson.

The fourth chapter begins with a description of Gerda’s teenage years. In the previous part we learn that Gerda spent her early childhood with Mona, her adoptive mother, but then was taken away by Countess Regina who had changed her mind about the baby. The Countess married a wealthy admirer and took her daughter to live with them in America. Although Anna Kavan was never given up for adoption, the story about Gerda’s childhood is not completely fictitious. Gerda’s adoption originates from Anna’s experience when at the

age of four she was abandoned by her mother and left with her nurse in London. Gerda's family trip to America, in its turn, corresponds with reality as a year later Anna's father returned to take his daughter with him. However, Anna was not brought back to the family but was sent to an American-boarding school, where she "suffered an excruciating sense of betrayal, alienation and acute loneliness" (Reed 16). Anna's negative experience at boarding school is reflected in Gerda's vision of her education: "Though she was no less intelligent than the average girl of her age, the circumstances of her life combined with her nervousness and her erratic education make her seem so. The continuous strain of keeping up with the others, in class, at games, in their communal life, left her no energy to enjoy her school days" (A Scarcity of Love 105).

The portrayal of Gerda and her life with the family is the closest description of Helen Ferguson's early years. There is no doubt that this character is an exact duplicate of the author herself. While Regina and Mona symbolize an independent and determined personality – Anna Kavan - Gerda is an introverted child, a fragile glass-girl, a mirror image of Helen Ferguson. Having experienced parental negligence and disregard, she divulges her resentful feelings towards her family through an allegorical story in which a despotic mother humiliates her own daughter. Feelings of solitude and mental suffering prevail in Gerda's story and she blames her family who "inflicted irreparable damage, a callous sustained withholding of all nutriment essential to the emotional life, which was thus starved and stunted at its very source" (A Scarcity of Love 99). Throughout the story the girl is bullied and mistreated by her own mother. Gerda dreads every evening spent with her family and "feels like a victim before her judges" (A Scarcity of Love 83) when speaking to her parents. It is mostly Regina who despite having taken her daughter back regards Gerda as an enemy and a threat to her own happiness. She treats her daughter as "an expensive nuisance, as though it were an act of generosity to clothe and educate her at all" (A Scarcity of Love 90). The poor child is perceived by her family as "a kind of family scapegoat, dedicated to the performance of all the tasks the others disliked and shunned" (A Scarcity of Love 82). Eventually, the constant bullying and mockery trigger an emotional breakdown and eczema in Gerda and she is taken to the hospital where she feels safer than at home.

Hospitalization is a repeated theme in Kavan's fiction. The novel *Asylum Piece* is almost entirely set in a mental institution and in *A Scarcity of Love* a nursing home plays an important part in the development of characters. They are often left in a state of anguish and bewilderment, abandoned by those in whom they put their trust. Mona describes her stay in the hospital as "hell" while Gerda feels that "the hideous institutional buildings were more

like home than any other place she had known. The daily renewed dread of being removed was the only flaw in her happiness” (A Scarcity of Love 97). Gerda perceives hospital as a refuge from the outer world and especially from her family. What connects Mona and Gerda is that they both find protection and friendship in the institution: Mona is rescued by a young doctor, while Gerda makes friends with a nurse Jean. The friendship allows Gerda to “enjoy her youth for the first time with a kind of wonder, laughing and chattering about everything in the world that did not concern her own family” (A Scarcity of Love 97). She puts her trust in Jean and a thought of somebody she can rely on makes a looming reunion with her family seem less dreadful. There is a reason for Gerda’s attempt to attain solace through friendship with Jean. Kavan herself experienced several long-term treatments in hospitals and one could assume that she was in need of a soul-mate during those times. She grants her character a chance to encounter a compassionate friend who would care for an abandoned child while others turned their back on her. Jean wanted to “protect her helpless fragility with her own sturdiness and independence” (A Scarcity of Love 98) and yet she “couldn’t afford to see Gerda’s despair, for, if she did, she’d be forced to see life as ugly, cruel, unjust; and human beings as cruel too” (A Scarcity of Love 99). There is a sudden change in Jean’s attitude towards Gerda when the latter confides in her. She tries to “avoid the contamination of Gerda’s unhappiness, which she had already felt spreading towards her” (A Scarcity of Love 99). At last Jean reneges on her promises and leaves Gerda for good. There is not much hope left for Gerda who returns back from the hospital to face a ruthless family environment. In Gerda’s cry of despair we hear Helen Ferguson: “Unless she saved herself, she was done for. She had a wild, childish notion of running away” (A Scarcity of Love 100).

Gerda’s personality shows no trace of determination or perseverance. She is presented as a vulnerable and powerless character, which has no resemblance to the daring Anna Kavan. Gerda symbolizes everything Kavan wanted to eliminate in herself, in other words, she was trying to suppress a side of Helen Ferguson. She was aware that she needed to eradicate a fragile “glass-girl” and replace her with an unshakeable woman responsible for her own destiny. Anna Kavan made a note in her diary: “non-attachment is admirable, it never lets you down; it’s the one thing worth aiming at, but it’s impracticable. It’s good for people like me. It’s too exalted for any human being who’s messed up with all the crazy emotions I get messed up with from time to time” (Reed 59). Kavan’s aim was to become a self-reliant individual and liberate herself from the side of the insecure Helen Ferguson who longed for support and care. That is why the story of Gerda in *A Scarcity of Love* ends with her suicide, which symbolizes the demise of the “glass-girl”. Gerda is overwhelmed by her “sense of

guilty unworthiness, leading her towards some unimagined catastrophe, as to foregone conclusion” (*A Scarcity of Love* 157) and “shrank from the idea of contact with human beings” (*A Scarcity of Love* 182). Anna Kavan believed that it was the only possible destiny for her character who regarded herself as a victim unworthy of being loved. The death of Gerda indicates the victory of Kavan over Helen Ferguson. In a battle of identities the weakest had to surrender and give way to a resilient and uncompliant personality. Anna was convinced that “society does not want a man to live with a live flower inside him but to harden like a mineral and live the life of a wheel. That flower at all costs it is determined to cut down stone dead” (Reed 83).

*A Scarcity of Love* was called a “personal mythology” and an “allegorical fairy-tale” (Reed 127) by critics which appear to be the best definitions of the novel. It was more than just Kavan’s reworking of her childhood memories; it was an attempt to determine herself between the two polarities of her personality and maintain control over them. Anna’s commentary on one of her works proves this assumption: “Lots of things that happen to me I really can’t bear at all. Then I write about them. I suppose it gives one the illusion of having some control over things, of being somebody, instead of merely an anonymous grain of sand in the desert called chance” (Reed 54). By analyzing her own childhood and contemplating over the reasons of her mental instability Kavan made a considerable step towards her liberation from the haunting past.

## 5. *Ice*

“I haven't felt anything for twenty years.” (Anna Kavan)

Anna Kavan died in December 1968, after many years of struggle to find her place in society and to adjust herself to the world around her. The reason of her death was stated as a “drug overdose”. A lot of assumptions were made whether she did it on purpose or it was just an accident. There are many aspects of her death that point to suicide but there is not sufficient proof to do more than speculate. Undoubtedly, there were some motifs for Anna to end her life, but no one took the responsibility to say this with confidence. In her article *A Stranger on Earth* Doris Lessing wrote that Anna never succeeded in finding an asylum for her soul in this world. None of her marriages were successful, none of her friends were close enough to be trustworthy, and she found out that dealing with publishers and editors could be quite wearing. Publishers' doubts about her work made Anna adapt to their demands and re-write some of her books. Anna could not get used to the fact that her books had to meet the demands of the reader. She was simply expressing herself and in the early 1960s she was working on the novel that would later be called the Best Science Fiction Novel of 1967. It would be highly praised and its author's name would be brought into the limelight. *Ice* would influence works of the literary slipstream, non-realistic fiction genre, which appeared only at the beginning of the 1980s. Not only did *Ice* anticipate the new genre to come, but it also stressed the importance of looking inwards to get inspiration. *Ice* was Kavan's magnum opus, which gave her temporary asylum from the world she rejected. She turned her attention and strength to writing while her life was gradually coming to an end.

“I start watching myself falling to bits” – Kavan wrote to Rhys Davies.

This novel drained the last of her energy, but it is considered her best work. All Kavan's previous novels and stories seem preliminaries before *Ice*. It was the book where Kavan “accumulated all of the strengths of her previous fictions and purged their weaknesses” (D.A.Callard 142). At that time she could not have known that *Ice* would bring her fame, recognition and would evoke the concept of the *nouveau roman*. The reviews were highly praising, words like “hypnotic”, “intriguing” or “dreamlike” were used to describe the book. It captured the readers' imagination and elicited the interest in the genre of science fiction and the metaphysical thriller. Although the novel is often associated with these two genres, it does not completely belong to them. Later this type of fiction would be called slipstream literature which goes beyond the bounds of science fiction. It presents the world through a distorting

mirror lacking logical explanation. There is no cause or reason in slipstream literature. It originates in a person's subconsciousness where everything flows uncontrolled. In fact, Anna was writing *Ice* as if looking in a mirror or rather the interior of her heart and soul. "A terrible cold world of *Ice* and death had replaced the living world we had always known" (*Ice* 158).

*Ice* brought Kavan prominence but it did not reconcile her with life. The novel is dark and foreboding. It gives the reader a sense of a looming catastrophe, which, in Anna's case, it was her death. The reader can only speculate what Kavan's inner life was like at the time of publishing *Ice*. The facts, however, speak for themselves. The 1960s was the time when youth culture started to become mainstream. Modernist or "mod culture" gained substantial popularity among the younger generation in London. New trends such as soul and sky music, club going and amphetamine use became prevalent in London society. The money and fashion followed the mod subculture. People were enjoying themselves in coffeehouses and shops in the daytime and clubbing in Soho with the music of the Rolling Stones and the Who at night. However, also with the Mod culture came new psychostimulant drugs and substances or so-called amphetamines. "It was clear to the public that drugs were no longer a habit subscribed to by decadent aristocrats, bohemians or the dilettante rich, but had become the street currency of a nonconformist youth in search of chemical heights. Youth had gone chemical" (Reed 117). Kavan remained distant from this Cultural Revolution sweeping London society. However, she was familiar with the drug culture more than anybody else. By the 1960s she had been addicted to drugs, heroin and LSD in particular, for more than 30 years and never tried to conceal her addiction.

Her first attempt in the early 1960s at writing a novel was called *The Cold World*. There are many reasons why Kavan chose this title and one of them is that it reflects the spirit of the world in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Cuban missile crisis showed people a possible doomsday scenario when the world was put on the brink of a nuclear catastrophe. For the first time it was possible to imagine a world in which there was no tomorrow. Another reason for choosing this title may be the fear of *Ice* and cold which comes from the experience of an abrupt drug withdrawal when an addict tries out "going cold turkey". "Cold turkey" is known for causing the unbearable feeling of cold and shiver. With this in mind, the title of the novel was more than an appropriate choice. However, Kavan's publisher Peter Owen rejected the manuscript and suggested renaming the novel. *The Cold World* was changed into *The Ice World*, and eventually became just *Ice*. It took Anna nearly four years to come up with the version that would satisfy Peter Owen. The early versions of the book were turned down with the explanation that: "one of the criticisms is that characters do not really

come to life.” and “it is important that nothing but the best should appear” (D.A.Callard 135). Kavan felt misunderstood and frustrated by Owen’s words. She tried to defend herself and wrote several letters to her publisher stating that the dreamlike atmosphere is essential and the characters have to stay enigmatic as they play only a secondary role: “I feel direct characterization would be out of place here.”(Reed 145). Struggling to please the publisher and, at the same time, not to fail her own ideas, Anna made several revisions and completed the first draft of the book by 1964. She was eager to carry on but the unexpected death of one of her dearest friends caused her to change her plans.

Anna was known for her antisocial behaviour and aloofness, however, until her death she kept a very small circle of friends, whom she trusted and from whom she sought advice. One of them was Doctor Bluth, a psychiatrist working in London. Anna and Bluth met at St.Stephen’s Hospital in 1934. Anna was a patient being treated for narcosis after another suicide attempt and Bluth happened to be the doctor in charge of her case. He would remain her psychiatrist and her advisor for the next twenty years. They would develop a strong bond that would keep them close, almost inseparable. Anna needed support and somebody to rely on; Bluth was bored with life and his patients and looked for strength to carry on working. It seems that fate had brought them together so that they could derive energy from each other. Both Kavan and Bluth referred to the days they spent together as a “dreamlike wonder”. They were not lovers, but they were attracted to each other, they both found a soul-mate in each other, somebody they could share their thoughts with, somebody who would offer compassion. Eventually, they felt no longer alone in this cold world. Bluth never condemned Anna for her suicide attempts and her regular states of depression. He simply accepted her personality as it was and never tried to change it. Moreover, he was fascinated by Anna’s creativity and her ability to draw inspiration from her experiences with drugs and mental institutions. “He looked to creativity as the means of liberation from psychologically extreme states” (Reed 107). There is no doubt that his beliefs and psychiatric practice influenced Anna’s works. She was attracted to his view of madness as a stimulus to create poetic works. Bluth theorized that Romantic poets used certain drugs to evoke a state of trance where they would connect with nature and turn to their repressed hidden desires. Bluth himself was a poet whose element was a literary circle where he could project his unrealised poetic experiments on others: “as a refugee doctor, Bluth had come to neglect his first love, poetry, and it was the poet in him that Anna reawakened” (Reed 84). Anna Kavan was an ardent follower of her friend and, thus, was willing to take part in Bluth’s experimental “treatments”. By that time opium had become an irreplaceable source of inspiration and a functioning state

of mind for Anna. Her “fix” was Dr. Bluth and opium. She could not live without either of them.

When Bluth died of a heart attack in 1964, Anna decided to follow him. She overdosed herself and went to sleep. They had an agreement that their deaths would coincide. She followed the rules of the friendship pact, she felt that the dearest friend had abandoned her, but she knew that the regular drug supply would no longer be so accessible, the legal prescription of heroin would stop. “His sudden death smashed a hole clean through Anna’s defenses like a boulder shattering thin ice” (Reed 140). She no longer wanted to live and even after being saved by her friends, Anna felt no gratitude towards her saviors. She simply wanted to die. Nothing kept her alive except one thing – her unfinished novel *Ice*. She gave all that remained of her strength to finish the book. In 1967 the novel was introduced to the literary world. In no time critics and journalists became restless to uncover the veil of mystery over the book and its author. Anna was invited to many interviews and literary talks. Peter Owen began to re-publish all her previous works. The world was impatient to learn more. However, Anna did not surrender. She remained, as she called herself “the world’s best kept secret”. Furthermore, her oppressive state of mind worsened and she became more estranged from society. The reason was a longstanding drug addiction and the unbearable existence without her soul-mate, besides, she had told her story to the world. She had said enough and given sense to the dark life she lived and the loneliness she felt. The foreboding ending of *Ice* mirrored the life experience of Anna. Exhausted, she died one year after the publication.

*Ice* does not give the reader anything except the feeling of perplexity and uncertainty. The novel has a plain story but no plot as such. It is a dream, but it joins with reality. To read *Ice* is to look deeply into the life of Anna Kavan. This book is the story she wanted to share with the world - the story of a looming inevitable catastrophe. Anna appears in the novel as the author and a character. Every line is about Kavan, the entire novel concentrates on her. The difficult task for the reader is to uncover the truth. The shadowy, plotless story makes it quite a challenge. The book can be compared to a dim vision, probably the best metaphor of Kavan’s life. It will slightly open the door to her mysterious world if one is prepared to plunge into the cold atmosphere of *Ice*.

The book starts with the pursuit of a girl. She becomes an obsession for the one who tells the story. The nameless narrator seems irrational in his pursuit. He confesses that nothing else matters except the mysterious “she”. The reader is not told much about the girl, although one can easily guess who the girl is. “She was over-sensitive, highly-strung, afraid of people

and life; her personality had been damaged by a sadistic mother who kept her in a permanent state of frightened subjection” (*Ice* 8). From the first pages it becomes clear that Kavan put herself in the story. There are many allusions to her childhood and later life that prove that Anna devoted the book to herself. The theme of the pursuit runs through the whole story. Peter Owen, the publisher, pointed out to Kavan that the pursuit seemed pointless and illogical. He, as a publisher, was convinced that readers would get confused and disinterested by following the characters’ wanderings. In a reply to him Anna wrote: “The pursuit is the book. In saying that the pursuit is too endless and drifting, you seem to be objecting to the book as a whole” (Reed 145). Indeed, this piece of work is a complete story that could not be altered and broken into separate parts. *Ice* rises above Kavan’s previous books, where each part can stand on its own and where a line is drawn between reality and dream. In *Ice* reality, hallucinations and fantasies create a unique world where everything seems possible. According to Rhys Davies, a novelist and editor of Kavan’s fiction, *Ice* is a radical exception from all other Kavan’s novels where themes and sub-plots resemble one another. The point that Rhys Davies makes is certainly valid. Nevertheless, *Ice* is a novel written by Anna about herself and thus could not have been deprived of all the “Kavan features”. The favourite character of Kavan is an introspective person, usually a girl psychologically damaged by marriage and detached from the outer world. Men in Kavan’s fiction are quite dark figures – sadistic, arrogant and prone to alcoholism. Sexual relationship is never mentioned as a union of two loved souls but rather as marital rape. All these features appear in Kavan’s fiction, *Ice* being no exception. What makes the novel a unique piece of work is its genre and structure. A nameless narrator, a nameless place and a timeless plot contribute to an atmosphere of unreality, of almost an illusion. Anna wrote that she “wanted to free the reader so he would not be trapped in a piece of reportage”(Reed 153). She by no doubts succeeded in creating an almost three-dimensional effect in the novel that later would “elude the definition of science-fiction” (Reed 147).

The nameless narrator plays a significant role in the creation of a depersonalized world. The only thing we can be sure about is the narrator’s gender, otherwise neither his origin nor his intentions are explained. He himself does not know why he is following the girl and what he intends to do with her. His first words were about marriage and protection from the hardness of the world but later he mentioned the dreams where the girl was bruised and broken. To the reader’s great surprise, the narrator enjoyed the images his mind created. It is obvious that the girl plays a victim role, but who is the narrator if not a saviour? Kavan intended to draw the two together so that they would not only be attracted to each other but

would start to identify with one another: “It was no longer clear to me which of us was the victim. Perhaps we were victims of one another” (Ice 73). The narrator describes his feelings for the girl as a craving and obsession. She is more than “a fix” for him. He follows her everywhere and is eager to risk his life for just one moment with the girl. However, it would be a mistake not to mention the disturbing images in the narrator’s mind. They keep appearing in the story suddenly and often out of the context. Therefore, a reader cannot be sure if it was a flashback, a fantasy or a hallucination. As an example, the narrator recalls (or imagines?) one winter’s day when the girl was posing for her husband. “I wondered how she managed to keep so still; until I saw the cords attached to her wrists and ankles”(Ice 19). It seems the narrator was enjoying watching the girl being tortured, although he makes it clear that he “alone should have done the breaking with tender love” (Ice 54). There are quite a few images, or so-called hallucinations, where the girl is tormented. They contain a vivid description of a process where the girl with broken bones and slashed wrists was put in chains. We can only contemplate why Kavan wrote the book full of sadomasochistic images. Her novels “depict a self-created rather than an inherited world and are a representation of her individual perception of reality as it is filtered through imaginative sensors” (Reed 166).

Hallucinations in *Ice* were probably very close to the ones Kavan experienced herself. The world in *Ice* was coming to an end. The world of Kavan had already collapsed many times. The death of her dear friend, her heroin addiction and poor reception of her previous books contributed to the creation of a completely different reality. This reality is symbolically represented in *Ice*. “I thought of the ice moving across the world, casting its shadow of creeping death” (Ice 99) – there is a sense of a brooding catastrophe in every line about ice. Kavan’s merit lies in her ability to portray the encroaching ice as both mentally and physically agonizing. It destroys not only the land but also affects the mental state of characters. “Frozen by the deathly cold emanating from the *Ice*, dazzled by the blaze of crystalline ice-light, she felt herself becoming part of the polar vision, her structure becoming one with the structure of ice and snow”(Ice 21).

Ice pursues the girl wherever she goes. It appears in every vision and seems inevitable. However, at times it is not clear whether she is running away from the ice, the narrator or her husband. “I thought of her at the centre, not knowing she was encircled. I from one point, he from another, and then the ice...” (Ice 137). The narrator accuses the girl of corrupting him and is constantly questioning his decision to follow the victim. Wherever the girl is, there is ice and death. However, it does not stop the narrator in his pursuit: “she was like a part of me, I could not leave without her” (Ice 73). This attraction reminds the reader of the relationship

Kavan had with Dr. Bluth. She was drawn to him not only because he saved her from solitude but also for the regular heroin supply which made her dependant on him. The best description of their relationship would be “a dependency on each other”. If ice stands for heroin, than we can make an assumption that the drug played a crucial role both in the story and in real life. It was an imminent threat and it was an essential element in Anna’s life. It caused her pain and it revived her after being in deep depression.

The narrator in *Ice* “had been infatuated with her, had intended to marry her” (Ice 8). He plunged into the freezing cold world that might have caused his death. The aim was worth the risk. Every single chapter concentrates on him chasing the girl and thus chasing the ferocity of the ice. “When I considered that imperative need I felt for her, as for a missing part of myself, it appeared less like love than an inexplicable aberration” (Ice 24). By putting his life at risk, the narrator proved himself eager to share the fate of the girl. In the same way, Kavan and Dr. Bluth made a suicide pact that was meant to be proof of much deeper and stronger feelings for each other. The girl, despite all the pain she endured, was waiting to be saved. There is not much hope that she was saved though. The narrator did not appear to be a reliable character and the reader is left uninformed as to what might happen.

The book is peculiar in the sense that it lacks any development of the characters. The plot is quite patchy due to the sudden flashbacks and hallucinations. At times the reader can hardly tell the difference between reality and vision. In the meantime, the characters remain frozen in the attempts to satisfy their urges. Besides these two characters, there is another figure in the book. The girl is married to “a painter, not serious, a dilettante; one of those people who always have plenty of money without appearing to do any work” (Ice 9). With this description in mind, we can make another assumption that the character had a prototype in Anna’s life. The man had a propensity for alcohol and a tendency to be arrogant and violent. He derived great satisfaction from bullying the girl and making her suffer. There are two persons that spring to mind and the first of them is Donald Ferguson who married Anna when she was eighteen years old. There is enough evidence to suggest that this was not Anna’s conscious choice. Her mother, Helen Bright, was quite a dominant person and “taking advantage of Anna’s immaturity attempted to decide her future by introducing her to Donald Ferguson, who was rumoured to be one of her own ex-lovers” (Reed 17). This marriage was a turning point in Anna’s life. She had to face cruelty and submission in marriage and hence she came to reject family relations and sex. After the break-up with the sadistic Ferguson, the unfortunate Anna fell in love with a bohemian painter Edmonds who had the same

characteristics as Ferguson. She got married for the second time only to find herself in a similar situation when Edmonds would not get up unless she gave him brandy in the morning.

However unpleasant her life might have been, Kavan is honest in telling the reader her story. She reveals all her past in the fiction she wrote. As already mentioned, her novels and stories give a wider outlook on her concealed life. The best way to get to know Kavan is to bring together all her literary works, which fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. In this sense, *Ice* is a crucial novel. Anna disengages herself from the past and tells us a sincere story about “a glass girl with almost transparent skin” (*Ice* 12). Defenseless and broken, the girl appears to be a mere possession of her husband and her mother who both, by “systematic bullying, had distorted the structure of her personality, made a victim of her” (*Ice* 50). There is a reason why Kavan presented “the glass girl” as an ill-treated and intimidated character. From an early age Anna was deprived of parental love and care. In her marriage she regularly experienced humiliation and marital rape which inflicted an irreparable damage on Anna.

There is a paragraph in *Ice* that shows a horrendous picture of the girl lying on the bed with a twisted neck. The reader is allowed to see everything happening behind close doors. Anna, in her turn, is looking from above on the victim and the victimizer. She plays the role of the narrator, the girl and the omnipresent storyteller. She already knows the outcome but pretends not to. There is hope that the narrator is close to saving the “glass girl” but every time he gets hold of her, the fate (or Kavan herself?) takes the chance away. “Later she did not move, gave no indication of life, lying exposed on the ruined bed as on a slab in a mortuary” (*Ice* 37) – this is how Kavan sees the institution of marriage. Broken and shattered, the glass girl surrenders to her fate and to the power of the ice.

There is almost nothing optimistic about the novel except for one chapter where the narrator and the girl take refuge in a small undamaged town. “The girl loved all the gaiety, was absolutely transformed by it, her life miraculously renewed” (Kavan 117). This part stands out among the others. It describes the girl from a completely different perspective. She admits that self-indulgence and extravagance were not alien to her. The girl rushes to the shops, visits hairdressers and buys tons of cosmetics. “She seemed a different person. No longer shy, she made friends with people I did not know. She became independent and gay” (Kavan 11). This sudden change is explained by Kavan as delirium. The real world is still cold and merciless. People do not want to be reminded of a looming catastrophe and the girl also pretends that the impending disaster does not exist. The narrator’s attempts to make her aware of the situation are in vain. He feels completely isolated in the collective frenzy and leaves the town.

There were times in Anna's life when she forgot her fears and made attempts to enjoy life. Lipsticks and clothes became her obsessions. "Rhys Davis describes her capricious expeditions to big stores to buy a new dress and a gold chain as a desire to immerse herself briefly in mundane reality" (Ice 157). The girl in *Ice* is given the same interests and characteristics. Her character works as a mirror image of Anna. All Kavan's archetypical images are embodied in the glass girl – extreme thinness, frailty and emotional instability. Yet the reader can also recognise Anna in the narrator's suspicion of mad gaiety. The other part of Kavan's personality keeps telling her that the happiness was just pretence. The real Anna was the one who stockpiles heroin in her flat and is a regular visitor to psychiatric clinics, somehow balancing between the two polarities - an extravagant independent woman and a compliant victim. Anna often collapsed with a nervous breakdown unable to choose between the two. Although most of the time she was an over-sensitive, vulnerable woman who "was learning to live behind the inscrutable, perfectly made-up and impenetrable face she presented to the world"(Reed 74), Anna managed to create an enigma of herself. Only her close friends knew about her overdosing, breakdowns and suicide attempts. She tried to keep her fears to herself in the real world, whereas her fiction became an open door to her soul. The creation of a glass girl could have become a way to liberate herself from her past. Not only did she want to make a mirror image of herself, but also to merge it with her character: "There is little separation between Anna's characteristics as a person in later life and those of the white-haired, androgynously thin female protagonist of *Ice*. In the end she had become her own fiction, rather than its objective creator" (Reed 186).

Re-inventing oneself through fiction was not such a rare practice among the 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, but Anna outdid most of them. Having officially taken her fictional protagonist's name, Kavan showed her originality and non-compliance with the mainstream literature. In the same way there were a few writers who came into the limelight by talking about their drug addictions. The topic was controversial but not completely taboo. Kavan, in her own unique way, managed to write "a whitescape heroin novel that never names the drug" (Reed 186). The reader can feel its presence in every chapter. The ice world, the extreme thinness of the girl, the unbearable cold and the vividly described hallucinations – all these symbols represent the main obsession in Anna's life.

The novel provoked much speculation from the critics. It is not written in sophisticated language but contains many hidden allusions and symbols. It was meant to be Anna's swan song and it became her final attempt to explain the mystery of her life to the world. She committed suicide a week before the publisher accepted the novel. Her death

mirrored the ending of *Ice*: “Although I knew there was no escape from the ice, from the ever-diminishing remnant of time that encapsuled us. I made the most of the minutes” (*Ice* 158). Although Kavan knew that there was nowhere to run from her fears, she lived her life to the full and never stopped writing. “Heroin had saved my life and kept me from madness” – said Anna. Perhaps she was mistaken. “It was writing that allowed her to assert some degree of control over external events and fiction that interposed some sort of screen between her and the reality she so feared” (Reed 79).

## 7. Asylum Piece

“Asylum Piece is more technically daring than anything written before by an English woman with the exception of Virginia Woolf.”

(Duncan Fallowell, British novelist and critic)

*Asylum Piece* is one of the most experimental avant-garde pieces of 20<sup>th</sup> century British literature. Published in 1940 in London and a few months later in the US, it drew the immediate attention of literary critics as well as those, who did not feel indifferent towards experimental fiction. It was a critical success and its author was labelled as “Kafka’s English sister”. The publication of *Asylum Piece* is not only significant because it brought its writer fame and recognition, but mostly because it launched a career and life of Anna Kavan. Being no longer a fictional character, Kavan was brought to life in 1938 and replaced the identity of Helen Ferguson forever. *Asylum Piece* marked the ending of the lives of Helen Woods, Helen Ferguson and Helen Edmonds. However, it is still called a “transitional” piece as the personality of Kavan was still being established. It would take Anna a few years to re-invent herself completely, to cut off all the ties to the past and start her writing career again.

The origin of *Asylum Piece* can be traced back to 1938 when Helen Ferguson underwent treatment in a Swiss mental institute. It was the second time Helen was hospitalised after having suffered a serious nervous breakdown. Two failed marriages, heroin addiction, endless numbers of detoxifications and psychological detachment from the outer world – anything could have triggered her mental instability. *Asylum Piece* is a desperate cry for help: “Can’t somebody save me? Where am I to find a little warmth in all this?” (*Asylum Piece* 28). Having been rejected by the world and, what is more important, by herself, Kavan wrote her confession-memoirs to save what was left of her sanity and to start her life all over again. Although Kavan experienced everything that took place in her stories, they are still fiction. This is one of the reasons why *Asylum Piece* was highly praised by critics. Hardly anyone at that time wrote about his or her madness in such a sane turn of phrase.

*Asylum Piece* is a collection of short stories, which at times resembles the form of a diary and, at others that of memoirs. It consists of thirteen interlinked parts. It starts with the protagonist’s memories of her childhood, her later life full of paranoiac thoughts and ends in the mental hospital where feelings of solitude and fear reach their peak and cause her to have a nervous breakdown. The stories are written in the first person narration, which contributes

to the autobiographical nature of the book. Although descriptions of characters and places give the reader few facts, the protagonist's madness seems to be entirely genuine. Initials are mostly used instead of names: "at this school I got to know a girl called H" (*Asylum Piece* 9); "even with D I have always been on my guard" (*Asylum Piece* 55); "R is one of my oldest friends" (*Asylum Piece* 85). The story also contains nicknames such as "Patron", "Professor", and "Official Advisor". There is no reference to the place or time of the story; they are not relevant for Kavan. Madness does not recognise time, it blurs boundaries between the real world and the worlds created in a person's subconsciousness. Anna re-invented herself because she wanted to escape from the person she used to be. There was no nationality or need to make anything more precise. What happens to Kavan and to her characters can happen to anybody regardless of the time or place.

One cannot be sure if Anna was using any psychoactive substances or drugs while writing *Asylum Piece*, the only thing known is that she was recently released from the Swiss mental hospital with a strong will to start her life all over again. Having changed her name and appearance, she moved into her friend's flat in the South of London and started working on her memoirs. However, there is little doubt that Kavan changed her life style as opium, heroin and other drugs remained very popular among the bohemian circle where Anna found her company. In this milieu, she created a unique piece of literature far from mainstream literature, which brought her recognition not only in Britain but all over Europe.

Although *Asylum Piece* is highly autobiographical, it is very difficult to relate the stories to a particular time period in Kavan's life. The stories cover the timeline from her age of fourteen to Anna's confinement in the Swiss clinic in her forties.

From the first chapter Kavan lets the reader into her inner world and her thoughts, which are mostly self-analytical. The world is viewed through a prism of Anna's experience and judgment. The plot drives the reader's imagination, which is fired by assumptions created in the storyline. For instance, in the first chapter Kavan reminisces about her school years and a girl that she used to know. It is not clear whether the girl actually existed or it is a mirror image of Kavan herself. The reality is blurred and the reader is left confused. The author is unsure herself whether the girl was real or just a game of imagination. However, there is an interesting fact that we learn about the girl: "H rolled up one of her sleeves and silently pointed to a blemish on her upper arm. It was a birthmark, faint as if traced in faded ink: "Have you ever seen that anywhere else?" she asked me; and it crossed my mind that she hoped that I too bore a similar mark" (*Asylum Piece* 13). Earlier we learned that the girl had had a consistent bad luck and every attempt she had made ended up in vain. Was this

birthmark a sign or was it just her fate – the question is never answered. The only thing we can speculate about is the feeling of exclusion that appears from this story. The blemish on the hand, the bad luck that never leaves the girl is something that Anna could have possessed. The reader can only make assumptions and trust the author while struggling to find some sense in random thoughts and memories.

The memories are mostly dark and oppressive as Anna experienced complete loneliness and absolute desolation in the Swiss mental institution. The over-riding mood of the novel is a sense of a persecution mania. In the narrator's imagination she was being watched and followed in the streets: "It was though, in some mysterious way, I had become the central point around which the night scene revolved. The windows lighted or unlighted, were like eyes more or less piercing, but all focused upon me. The houses, the traffic, everything in sight, seemed to be watching to see what I would do" (*Asylum Piece* 80). The narrator was convinced that "some secret court must have tried and condemned me, unheard, to this heavy sentence" (*Asylum Piece* 71). These paranoid thoughts can be explained as Kavan's attempts to give sense to the reality. She was convinced that people took part in a conspiracy against her. Having lost control over her life, Anna withdrew herself from the real world and escaped into her own fictionalized reality. By putting her thoughts on paper, she managed to move on in her life and start a successful writing career: "Having been locked away, no matter how comfortably, Anna turned her life round by converting institutionalization and clinical regime into a writing in which small gestures of compassion and defiance compensate for the neglect or indifference the patients experienced on the part of the staff and those who have had them confined" (Reed 49). The characters of *Asylum Piece* experience desolation and mental suffering in their confinement. Having no one to comfort and care for them, they feel rejected and forsaken by their families. Although each of the characters has his or her own unique story, all of them share the same desperate state of mind and an acute feeling of loneliness. Kavan assigned her own perceptions to every character and thus created a collective consciousness which all of the characters equally share.

The first character that appears in the collection of stories is Hans, who has presumably checked himself in to the mental hospital because he believes that he has a severe mental disorder. Hans is an unusual character in the sense that he enjoys the hospital routine and thoughts of going back to the real world fill him with dread: "My brother must have written to say that he can't afford to keep me here much longer. Soon I shall be sent away from the clinic – and then what will become of me?" (*Asylum Piece* 133). Hans feels much safer being locked up and separated from reality. He thinks about the business he left behind, but has no intention of

leaving the hospital. The news of his small business enterprise, the factory which is “on its last legs” (Asylum Piece 136), is discouraging and Hans is torn between his business responsibilities and a peaceful environment of the institution where everything is quiet and predictable. He envies a girl in the hospital who “can stay here as long as she likes while I shall be turned out in a day or two to face the world” (Asylum Piece 139). The reason for introducing Hans in the story can be found in Kavan’s intention to show a different side to the mental institution reality. The hospital provided its patients with shelter, daily routine and tranquility. Although Anna’s reminiscences of the time she spent in clinics are profoundly disturbing, it can be argued that her numerous hospital admissions have a connection with her desire to find an asylum, a safe hiding place. Moreover, Anna’s drug addiction only contributed to the detachment from reality when she was subjected to insulin coma-therapy and underwent regular narcosis treatments. Anna’s chronic depression can be compared to her heroin addiction, which she tried to quit but eventually realized that it was a means of evoking creativity. The drug helped Anna to “monitor her inner world and channel it into the highly charged visual imagery of her fiction” (Reed 122). Similarly, Kavan’s experience in the mental institution inspired her to write “a radically interiorized fiction” (Reed 92) and awakened her interest in “the creative aspects of madness” (Reed 108).

A desperate longing for escape from the clinic is presented through the characters of Zelig and Marcel. Zelig is “a plump, heavy-looking girl in the early twenties with a pale and unhealthy complexion” (Asylum Piece 146), while Marcel is a “talkative, amusing, gay” (Asylum Piece 171) young man. Marcel “thinks nostalgically of his old life, of the gaiety of the city, of his work, and of his friends” (Asylum Piece 177) and one morning makes an attempt to escape on a boat. Zelig waits for her family to visit her, but when she finds out that her parents came to the clinic without seeing her, she jumps out of a window with the intention of breaking out. Marcel is driven by the thought of freedom from confinement, but nevertheless, he hesitates and finally abandons his plan. Like Hans in the first chapter, Marcel is afraid of the uncertain reality and he feels that “it is safer not to think, safer to remain vague, to realize nothing” (Asylum Piece 180). Zelig, on the other hand, is stopped by the hospital wire fence while running away from her claustrophobic environment. There is an over-riding mood of human despair in the ending of the stories: Zelig “lies collapsed on the pine needles under the indifferent trees” (Asylum Piece 151), and Marcel “slowly, wearily, with a deep sigh, his eyes empty and downcast, takes hold of the oars and begins the laborious passage back” (Asylum Piece 180). The endings symbolize the characters’ futile attempts to escape from their mad state of mind.

In addition to these three protagonists, there is another main character – Freda, who is “small boned and slight, immature looking, that at a first glance one would take her for a child of

about fifteen. It is hard to believe that she is actually a married woman” (*Asylum Piece* 184). Freda’s husband Mr. Rushwood “is very much older than his wife – perhaps more than twice her age. His face is serious, repressive, almost stern, under his grey hair” (*Asylum Piece* 186). By the description of the young wife and her husband we can assume Kavan puts herself in the story as Freda. However, she distances herself from the character as the story is told through a Miss Swanson’s perspective, a middle-aged English lady, who is also a patient at the clinic. Miss Swanson’s character represents the author’s consciousness, while Freda represents the immature Helen Ferguson. Miss Swanson observes Freda’s life in the hospital and provides her with support and care. The lady seems to be aware of Freda’s troubled relationship with her authoritarian husband and her concern for the young girl leads to her conversation with Freda’s husband. Miss Swanson insists on Mr. Rushwood taking the highly-strung and sensitive Freda away from the hospital, where she feels desperately unhappy. The husband ignores her words and leaves Freda with no hope of being released. The ending of Freda’s story is similar to that of Hans, Zelig and Marcel. All the characters are left with no hope of an escape from their confinement and reconnecting with the world.

The narrative technique used in the last part of the asylum stories has a specific meaning. The perspective of Miss Swanson introduces a new mode of narration, which distances Kavan from the character of Freda who represents Helen Ferguson. This technique will be later used by Kavan in the novels *Ice* and *A Scarcity of Love*. She would introduce independent narrators to tell the story from a third-person perspective. This technique allows her to draw a line between the two consciousnesses of Helen Ferguson and Anna Kavan. It is essential to understand that Kavan considered Helen Ferguson to be a different person and struggled all her life to disengage herself from her past: “I’m really terrified in a childish nightmare way of getting stuck out here, unable to move, and petrified forever in a repetition of my childhood isolation” (D.A. Callard 94). By having radically changed her identity in reality and “inventing an extreme individuality as an act of defiant liberation” (Reed 45) in fiction Anna Kavan separated herself from Helen Ferguson. Therefore, the main feature of Kavan’s fiction is self-analysis which is carried out through a third person perspective. Anna Kavan observes and analyses the consciousness of Helen Ferguson as if she was a completely different personality. In *Asylum Piece*, there is a clear distinction between Anna and Helen. The first part is the author’s diary where the narrator is Anna Kavan, while in the asylum part we witness the appearance of Freda, in other words, the consciousness of Helen Ferguson. *Asylum Piece* was the first work of Anna Kavan, where she made “the autobiographical element of her life the focal point, and the fictionalized reportage of her confinement is also her way of owning up to madness in both herself and others” (Reed 49).

Kavan's source of material for *Asylum Piece* was her own state of mind, and by scrutinizing her shattered personality and re-writing the history of her madness she managed to sustain her mental sufferings.

Anna Kavan believed that "a writer must speak, as it were, the language of the subconscious before he can produce his best work" (Reed 92). By saying this she meant that the impulses for writing should come from within and should be based on "the fundamentals of personality" (Reed 93). With this in mind, *Asylum Piece* can be seen as an allegory of Anna Kavan's state of mind after her suicide attempt in 1938. *Asylum Piece* ends with the author's contemplations of life, it is compared to the "impersonal garden, all neatness and vacancy, there is no arbour where friends could linger, but only concrete paths along which people walk hurriedly, inattentive to the singing of the birds" (*Asylum Piece* 212). It seems a very apt metaphor of the mysterious Anna Kavan, who was hiding behind the façade of an imperturbable and unaffectionate woman, while deep inside she was looking to be understood.

## 8. Conclusion

Anna Kavan did not gain substantial critical recognition during her life. Some of her works, mainly *Asylum Piece*, made her known in the literary world, but after short periods of fame Kavan's name was mostly forgotten and neglected. It is only after the publication of *Ice* in 1967 when her literary rehabilitation began. Anna Kavan died the following year and never witnessed the success of *Ice*. Although she made a significant contribution to slipstream and symbolism as literary genres, she does not appear in the Oxford Companion to English Literature. The novels *Asylum Piece* and *Ice* are the most celebrated works of Kavan's symbolism, which originates from the subconscious and challenges conventional literary norms. In both *Asylum Piece* and *Ice* the symbols are psychological in nature and do not reveal themselves plainly to the reader. Due to the highly experimental genre, tangled plots and the absence of resolution in the plot, publishers were skeptical about these works' ability to sell. Nevertheless, despite the lack of commercial success, Anna Kavan persevered. By re-working and analyzing her life experience she distanced herself from a threatening world, where she did not belong. In *A Scarcity of Love* she fictionalizes her childhood and a troublesome relationship with her mother. In *Asylum Piece* she analyses the development of her madness and her confinement in a mental institution. In *Ice* Kavan speaks metaphorically about her heroin addiction.

Considering the fact that writing was Anna's way of re-inventing herself and controlling reality, *Asylum Piece* marks the demise of Helen Ferguson and witnesses the beginning of a new life and new identity. In the works starting with *Asylum Piece*, Kavan distances herself from her past through a third person narrative mode – a technique that unites all three. In *A Scarcity of Love* and *Ice* Kavan makes “the glass girl” the main protagonist and analyses her alter ego through a prism of other characters. The separation between the author and the “glass girl” in these novels she no longer sees herself as a young and inexperienced Helen Ferguson, but the resilient Anna Kavan. Her reinvention which starts with *Asylum Piece* and continues in *A Scarcity of Love* and *Ice* was an arduous journey for Anna. Her writing at times contradicts reality, which can be seen as a struggle between the two personalities.

In *A Scarcity of Love* Anna Kavan takes revenge on her mother and blames her for having ruined her life. Nevertheless, Kavan herself sends her son away and refers to him as an “unwelcome product”. Kavan describes her mother as a narcissistic woman obsessed with her appearance – “she who possessed forty different varieties of lipstick and wardrobes full of

expensive clothes, who spent hours looking at herself in mirrors” (D.A.Callard 157). While in reality Anna Kavan was an advocate of human individuality and non-attachment in relationships, in her writing her main characters always look for love and care. In *Ice* the narrator pursues “the glass-girl” and finally saves her from an impending disaster. In *A Scarcity of Love*, the protagonists find shelter in relationships with others. In both novels the characters make attempts to communicate with the world and be more confiding. Although Anna Kavan espoused a feministic approach to men, in her novels there is always a male figure offering support to the heroine. In *Ice* and *A Scarcity of Love* the male narrators play this role. Anna’s contradictions are a proof of her complex personality and her desperate desire to influence the course of her life.

These three works were cathartic because they helped Anna to make sense of her life by re-writing her past. Her experience in a mental hospital was the inspiration for *Asylum Piece* and her relationship with her mother resulted in *A Scarcity of Love*. In *Ice* hides Kavan’s lifelong addiction to heroin. These books are essential in revealing the mystery of Anna Kavan who “wanted to remain the world’s best kept secrets”. Kavan’s fiction is her dialogue with the world. In *Asylum Piece* she tells the reader the true story of her madness; in *A Scarcity of Love* she admits her desire to trust and to communicate; in *Ice* she waits for the narrator to save her from devastating addiction. By confiding in her reader, Kavan was building a relationship with the world.

Although fiction gave Anna a temporary asylum from the uncertainty of reality, she was unable to endure her loneliness. In life she was never understood and had to deal with constant rejection from publishers. Kavan’s genius was recognised only after her death and most of her works were published posthumously. Today Kavan’s books are published by Peter Owen Modern Classics and can stand alongside Franz Kafka’s works. Anna Kavan, who has been called “Kafka’s Sister” by some literary critics, would certainly appreciate the place her works now occupy.

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