

**THE
MYTHS
OF
MENTAL
ILLNESS**



THE MYTHS OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Interweaving the dramatic story of one man's breakdown and real-life interviews with psychiatrists, this is a powerful enquiry into the 20th-century human condition. It is also a testament to the indomitable human spirit, and to the healing potential in interpersonal relationships.

The film's central character, "Jerry A." could be any one of us. An idealist and a highly creative writer, he has for twenty years lived the life of a typical journalist: long hours, the constant pressure of deadlines, and too much booze. A two-year stint in a Chinese commune has left him with the last of his political illusions shattered, and his marriage in irrevocable shambles. Back in Canada, Jerry is deeply withdrawn, and obsessed with stories of loss. He holes up in his apartment to write the story of Wang, a Chinese commune worker who, in a matter of a few hours, had been stripped of his identity. When Jerry finally accepts an assignment for his newspaper, it is about Alex, a teenage runaway addicted to prescription drugs and alcohol. Obsessed by the need to find Alex, Jerry keeps missing him, with tragic consequences.

The Myths of Mental Illness follows Jerry's roller-coaster slide into chaos. His actions become increasingly bizarre, culminating in a series of vengeful stories about a mysterious bank employee. In the process, Jerry effectively commits social and professional suicide.

The film also traces Jerry's courageous struggle back into a world of meaning. A sympathetic and skilled psychotherapist helps him to see that,

through his intense journalistic involvement in the lives of the characters he describes, he has been unconsciously reenacting portions of his own childhood. With her help, Jerry also uncovers a deeply buried childhood trauma that explains the acuteness of his breakdown.

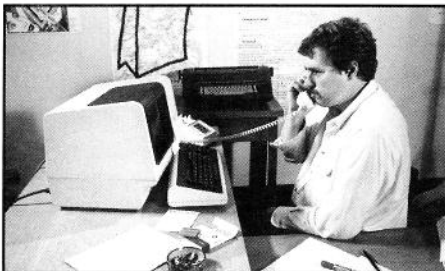
Structured dialectically, **The Myths of Mental Illness** intercuts concise narrative commentary, past and present scenes from Jerry's life, and in-depth interviews with prominent psychiatrists, to unveil a rich fabric of connections and meaning. The film is a contemporary drama along the lines of works by Tolstoy, Conrad and Malcolm Lowry. True to this tradition, it also raises key questions about humanity and our times.

The characterizations and events in this film are fictional. **The Myths of Mental Illness** uses non-actors to enact the dramatic portions of the film. All interviews with professionals are real.

About the professionals who are interviewed in this film:

Dr. Vivian Rakoff is Head of the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto, Ontario. In this film, he explains the traditional medical model of psychiatry, and compassionately argues for the need for chemical and electroconvulsive therapy for many patients.

Dr. Thomas Szasz, the author of fourteen books, a psychiatrist in private practice, and an instructor at the University of Albany, is firmly convinced that most human symptoms which are labelled "mental illness" are simply



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appropriate and healthy signals of the social and legal problems of our times. He became internationally known through an article in *The New York Times Magazine* of June 12, 1966, entitled "Mental Illness Is a Myth." Dr. Szasz believes that only physical abnormalities can be classified as diseases, and adamantly opposes chemical therapy and electroshock treatment.

Dr. Armand Elbaz, a generalist with a speciality in psychiatry, is a medical doctor at the National Film Board, and conducts the diagnostic interviews shown in the film.

Dr. Anne Entus is a psychologist in private practice and an instructor in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, one of many humanistic approaches now available in the helping professions.

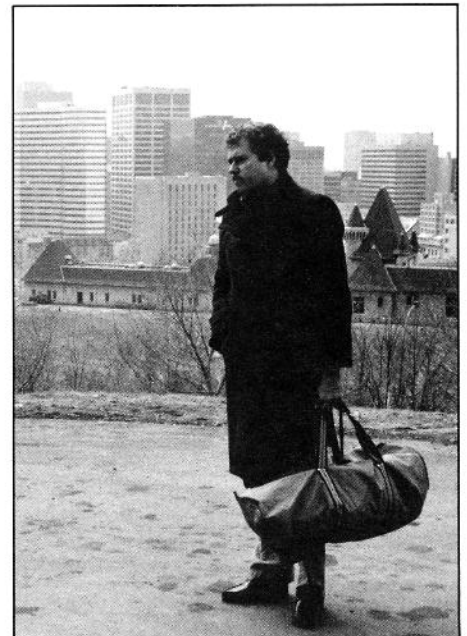
Suggested Audiences:

1. General audiences
2. Post-secondary education (Departments of psychology, psychiatry, medicine, sociology, media studies, journalism, philosophy, religion, management).
3. Secondary education, grades 11-13.

Discussion Themes:

How the modern environment (working conditions, technology, economic and political structures) impinges on the individual; sanity and insanity; psychiatry and psychology; the medical model, psychotherapy and healing; drug therapy; motivations behind strange behavior; levels of the

unconscious; the influence of parental beliefs and attitudes, and of childhood experiences, on our lives; theories of human development; different ways of handling crises; self-care; 20th-century addictions; media integrity and sensationalism; the relationship between creativity and self-destructive behavior; technology and the invasion of privacy; personal and social responsibility.



THE MYTHS OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Director, Editor **Pierre Lasry**
Screenplay, Narration **Pierre Lasry**
Denis Daigneault
Assistant Director **Ginette Breton**
Production Managers **Joy Johnson**
Kate Jansen
Camera **Martin Leclerc**
Michel Motard
Location Sound **Richard Besse**
Pierre Blais
Sound Editing **Paul Demers**
Re-recording **Hans Peter Strobl**
Narration Read by **Kelly Ricard**
Producer **Bill Brind**
Executive Producer **Andy Thomson**

Produced and distributed by the
National Film Board of Canada

Color
Screening time:
56 minutes 15 seconds

16 mm: 106C 0188 045
VHS: 113C 0188 045
Beta: 114C 0188 045
¾": 116C 0188 045



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