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**The Subject of Madness: Insanity, Individuals and Society
in Late-Medieval English Literature**

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Abstract

The introduction deals with theoretical approaches to insanity and problems regarding the definition of madness in the Middle Ages, especially the difficulties in separating the concepts of madness and folly. It is argued that the widespread interpretation of madness as a spiritual metaphor has only a limited application to late-medieval literature and that there is a need to consider the secular as well as the religious import of madness.

After a brief examination of attitudes towards madness in a variety of discourses, the meaning of madness in the medieval romances is considered. It is argued that despite the theological significance of madness as a metaphor for sinfulness, insanity here may be seen as a sort of social alienation, or even as a rejection of civilized values. It is suggested that this reevaluation of madness is related to the increasingly positive perceptions of the Wild Man, whose characteristics the mad heroes of romance share.

Chapter Three discusses the dream vision of Book I of the *Vox Clamantis*; it shows how Gower repeats the commonplaces of medieval didactic writers, regarding the peasant insurrection of 1381 as an outbreak of demonic derangement. It is seen that Gower makes use of the 'organic analogy' of society to show this madness as an infection of the entire social body. The sufferings of the nobility at the hands of the rioting mobs are described sympathetically in terms of 'grief-madness'. Thus Gower presents two very different, class-based, attitudes towards insanity. The discussion of Chaucer's *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales in the following chapter continues the investigation of the link between madness and social class. Here it is seen how Chaucer undermines the traditional theological interpretation of madness as a punishment for sin by encouraging comparison and contrast of the many allegations of insanity in the texts.

A rather different approach is taken in Chapter Five, which examines the major works of the civil servant Thomas Hoccleve. Far from regarding madness as essentially spectacular, the apparently insane narrator of Hoccleve's major poems stresses that insanity is a hidden and undetectable affliction. This conclusion, it is argued, contradicts the standard view of psychiatric history regarding madness in the Middle Ages. The relationship between madness, expressions of interiority and medieval autobiography is considered.

The final chapter explores the association of madness, female unruliness and mystical rapture in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. It argues that the *Book* displays two contradictory attitudes towards madness. Kempe is eager to present madness as a moral abomination and she frequently invokes ecclesiastical authority to do so. Nevertheless, she herself is held mad by many of her contemporaries on account of her controversial devotional behaviour; this explains why madness is presented positively elsewhere in the *Book*, as a blessed condition of increased spiritual insight. In this sense the *Book* contains a craftily double-edged attempt by Kempe to vindicate her conduct.

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Stephen Harper, University of Glasgow, February 1997

Abbreviations

- EETS es Publications of the Early English Texts Society, extra series.
- EETS os Publications of the Early English Texts Society, original series.
- MED* *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by Hans Kurath
(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956-).
- PL* *Patrologiae cursus completus: Patrologia Latina*,
ed. by J.P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1844-64).

Preface

Thanks largely to the popularity of books such as Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, the topic of madness has in recent years become fashionable in philosophical, critical and historical scholarship. As the Introduction to this dissertation makes clear, representations of madness in medieval literature have already received attention from several quarters. The present work is a further contribution towards an understanding of the meanings of madness in some selected works of late-medieval English literature.

The extraordinary popularity of madness as a theme in late medieval literature is not easily explained, although some excellent attempts have been made to do so. Penelope Doob, for example, has argued that the subject of madness appealed to a didactic age which found in insanity an ideal metaphor for sinfulness. Despite its applicability to numerous works of medieval literature, this theory runs the risk of subordinating all medieval representations of madness to a single schema. Few attempts have been made to examine madness in the light of political ideologies and events or to show how individuals made use of the theme of madness in their works. This dissertation proposes that madness in the English literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is a manifestation of individual and sometimes collective opposition to the increasingly beleaguered social, economic and political systems and institutions of the time. This, it is argued, can only be shown by looking at literary representations of madness in relation to considerations of subjectivity, social class and gender.

Given the rapid growth of secondary literature about madness in the Middle Ages, it is now impossible to write about this subject without reference to recent critical ideas about the history of madness. This is the concern of the Introduction. As well as discussing various theoretical approaches to the study of madness, this chapter also outlines some of the difficulties critics have encountered in defining madness.

The literary works discussed later in this work exhibit a variety of conventional ideas about madness. Interpretations of these ideas are often difficult or contentious, and not all of them can be adequately dealt with as they arise. Chapter 1 therefore aims to give an overview of some of the most common causes, symptoms and treatments of madness in the medical, theological and legal texts of the late Middle Ages and to discuss their origins and interpretations.

The remaining chapters focus mainly on literary texts written in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These texts are all concerned with madness, either in its physical or its metaphorical sense. The selection of poetic and prose works is intended to illustrate the diversity of viewpoints about madness in the Middle Ages. In the interests of concision, however, I have excluded from consideration those texts which merely touch on the theme of madness or which illustrate points made better elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this dissertation casts some light on the significance of the language of madness in works not discussed here, such as *Pearl* or the mystery plays.

Given the significant generic and stylistic differences between the texts discussed here, it has seemed sensible to devote each chapter to a separate author. The exception is Chapter 2, which examines the convention of the mad hero in its native genre, medieval romance. The romances demonstrate the structural function and moral significance of madness in the Middle Ages. Here madness, as in many other works of late-medieval English literature, is presented as the product of tensions between the individual and society. As such madness is sometimes condemned, but at other times sanctioned by the writers of romance, depending on their social positions and individual perspectives.

The following two chapters are concerned with the relationship between madness and social class in the works of two contemporary authors. Chapter 3 shows how the language of insanity is used in Gower's *Vox Clamantis* to describe the rebels who stormed London in 1381. This use of the terminology of madness, which is common in clerical rhetoric, eventually gives way to a vision of a whole

society plunged into melancholic chaos. Chapter 4 focuses on Chaucer's *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales, which contain sophisticated satires of the kind of official rhetoric found in Gower.

Chapters 5 and 6, on Thomas Hoccleve and Margery Kempe respectively, examine texts in which madness is seen mainly from an individual perspective. As well as enduring frequent allegations of insanity, both Hoccleve and Kempe appear to have been afflicted with madness. While both authors are aware and make use of the orthodox connection between madness and sin, the very different circumstances of their lives, in particular the difference in their gender, cause them to use the theme of madness in unique ways. These chapters emphasise the importance of attending to individual experiences, as well as official interpretations of madness.

Introduction

Modern Perspectives on Madness in the Late Middle Ages

Despite the paucity of historical evidence regarding medieval concepts of insanity, there is now a formidable number of books and articles on the subject. These studies, professional and amateur, span a dizzying range of academic disciplines including the history of psychiatry, literary criticism and philosophy.¹ This makes the history of madness one of the least clearly defined yet most vibrant areas of academic research. We shall begin with a brief overview of previous work in this field.

This Introduction is not a comprehensive review of scholarship: for reasons of space alone, a complete survey of all works touching on madness in the Middle Ages would not be feasible here. This discussion is therefore restricted to a small number of texts which seem most relevant to the present dissertation. Its aim is to outline what certain influential critics and historians have said about madness in medieval society and literature and to assess the validity of the various critical approaches they have employed. The chapter will also identify and attempt to address a number of difficulties faced by criticism in defining madness.

Twentieth-century discussions of madness in the Middle Ages have tended either to follow or to react against a one-sided Victorian version of psychiatric history. Nineteenth-century assessments of medieval attitudes towards madness were often disapproving or patronising. The medieval period, when it was not glorified as a vanished age of social harmony, was regarded as a benighted era of barbarism and superstition.² The psychiatric reformers of the eighteenth-century were therefore seen to have rescued the insane from medical neglect. In 1887 Tony Robert Fleury painted his famous 'Pinel Freeing the Insane', which admiringly depicts the occasion in 1793 when the French alienist oversaw the unchaining of the mad inmates of the Bicêtre hospital. For the Victorian

progressivists, as Michel Foucault sardonically notes, the image of Pinel's 'philanthropic liberation' of the insane symbolizes the beginning of 'that happy age when madness was finally recognized and treated according to a truth to which we had too long remained blind'.³ Pinel's English contemporary, the Quaker William Tuke, shared in this triumphant spirit of reform, opening a 'humane' lunatic asylum at York in 1796.

The aims and ideals of these early psychiatric reformers are encapsulated in *Chapters in the History of the Insane in the British Isles* (1882), written by Tuke's grandson Daniel Hack Tuke. The book is of great importance for the early history of madness. Tuke gathers information about popular medieval cures and remedies for insanity and discusses the establishment and early development in England of hospitals for the insane. He has often been criticized, however, for his liberal or progressive view of the superstitious attitudes of the Middle Ages; although, as Micale and Porter justly point out, Tuke's historical account is less progressivistic than many critics have wanted it to be, his meliorist assumptions were taken up by later historians.⁴

Indeed, the disdainful attitude of liberal psychiatry towards medieval explanations and treatments of madness reaches its pinnacle only in the twentieth century. 1941 saw the publication of *A History of Medical Psychology* by Gregory Zilboorg, a man 'deeply rooted in nineteenth-century culture' and steeped in the major psychiatric writings of that time.⁵ Predictably, Zilboorg's extraordinarily influential work shares some of the ideological assumptions of the nineteenth-century tradition of psychiatric history begun in England by Tuke and his contemporaries.⁶

It has been pointed out that Zilboorg chose the term 'medical psychology' rather than the more common 'psychiatry' because he bel

Middle Ages. The titles of these chapters -- 'The Great Decline' and 'The Restless Surrender to Demonology' -- amply indicate the strength of their author's meliorist assumptions and have helped turn Zilboorg into the Aunt Sally of revisionist psychiatric history.

Zilboorg sees the Middle Ages as an unenlightened era in which the insane were treated cruelly and the rational study of psychology was all but eclipsed by supernatural explanations of abnormal mental phenomena. 'Demonology', he complains, 'was to rule medical psychology for sixteen hundred years', so that 'the human side of psychology was overlooked'.⁸ It will be seen that Zilboorg's bleak account of post-Galenic attitudes towards insanity and his contention that demonology governed medical psychology throughout the Middle Ages do not stand up to scrutiny.⁹ Nevertheless, these perspectives provide a useful context for Zilboorg's major project. Having described the plight of the medieval madman in the darkest possible terms, Zilboorg charts the triumphant advance of medical science towards a more complete and enlightened understanding of mental illness. This is the classic statement of what is now known as Whig history, the essence of which has been crisply summarized by Peter Sedgwick. 'The basic perspective of this variety of psychiatric history', writes Sedgwick, 'is, roughly speaking, liberal, evolutionist and sympathetic to modern diagnostic categories as the criterion of reality against which earlier discoveries are to be tested and found wanting'.¹⁰

Other twentieth-century commentators on medieval attitudes towards madness have challenged the liberal narrative on empirical grounds. In a chapter on the 'Medieval Care of the Insane' (1920), J.J. Walsh warns, presumably with Tuke and his followers in mind, that 'only a careful study of the details of actual historical references to the medieval care of the insane will serve to contradict unfortunate traditions which have gathered around the subject entirely without justification in real history'.¹¹ Walsh argues that the treatment of insanity in the Middle Ages was sympathetic and often effective. He also emphasizes the rational, rather than the supernatural, character of these treatments.¹² Walsh concedes that

religious or superstitious attitudes were brought to bear on the insane; unlike Zilboorg, however, he interprets their influence as essentially benign.¹³ Unfortunately, the evidence from medieval literature often contradicts Walsh's optimism. Nevertheless, his account is a useful corrective to the one-sided psychiatric history promoted by Zilboorg and his followers.

Walsh's call for the careful study of historical references to madness has been heeded by a number of more recent historians. George Rosen's chapter on the late Middle Ages in his *Madness in Society* (1968) counterbalances the excesses of Zilboorg's book by considering various discourses about madness. Although a professional physician, Rosen looks at the popular and religious, as well as the medical discourse on madness in the Middle Ages.

Rosen's work helped to shape twentieth-century ideas about madness in the Middle Ages and lent methodological muscle to the fledgling discipline of psychiatric history. By far the most influential work of the 1960s, however, is Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la Folie à l'âge classique*, known to English readers as *Madness and Civilisation*. Acclaimed by Roy Porter as 'the most penetrating work ever written on the history of madness', this book diverges more radically than any other work from the liberal account of psychiatric history offered by Zilboorg.¹⁴ Foucault's central project is to recover what he calls the 'experience' of insanity during the Enlightenment. Indeed, it has recently been argued that the medieval concept of madness is not Foucault's main concern and that the medieval material merely constitutes 'intriguing marginalia'.¹⁵ But the structural importance of Foucault's discussion of madness in the Middle Ages should not be underestimated. Like Zilboorg's appreciation of medieval 'psychiatry', Foucault's medieval chapter serves as a springboard for his discussion of madness in the Early Modern period. Also like Zilboorg, Foucault gives the impression that the attitude towards madness in successive epochs was stable, the product of each period's monolithic 'world view' or *Geistesgeschichte*.¹⁶ Despite these structural

and methodological similarities between the works of Zilboorg and Foucault, Foucault's history of madness turns the liberal or Whig narrative on its head.

Foucault's ideas about medieval madness are by no means entirely original.¹⁷ Nevertheless, they remain so compelling and influential, especially among radical critics and philosophers, that they must be briefly rehearsed here. While it must be remembered that Foucault is primarily concerned with madness in the European and particularly the French Middle Ages, his discussion may not unreasonably be taken as a starting point for a consideration of the English situation.

Foucault argues that in the Middle Ages and Renaissance madness and reason were in 'free trade': As he puts it in his earlier work, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 'madness was allowed free reign; it circulated throughout society, it formed part of the background and language of everyday life'.¹⁸ In practical terms, this means that lunatics were at liberty to share the streets with the sane and to interact with them. As Richard Howard's breezy English translation has it, medieval madmen led an 'easy wandering existence'.¹⁹ It was only during the Age of Reason, says Foucault, that the insane were deprived of their carefree life and began to be confined in institutions extensively and systematically. For Foucault, the founding of the Hôpital Général in Paris in 1656 marks the beginning of the 'Great Confinement', a period of some one hundred and fifty years during which the mad -- along with other scandalous embodiments of 'unreason' such as criminals and the poor -- were incarcerated on an unprecedented scale.²⁰

Foucault's powerful and simple argument has provoked endless defences and often bitter attacks, particularly from empiricist historians. A number of critics have noted that *Madness and Civilisation* is sometimes factually inaccurate.²¹ If the book were a strategy or a 'fiction', as Foucault latterly referred to many of his texts, this apparent carelessness would not matter. But if, as seems likely, the book is the work by Foucault which 'stands closest to a

genuine historical endeavour', then Foucault can be accused of negligence.²² A frequent criticism of *Madness and Civilisation* is that it is under-documented. Some of the treatments for insanity that Foucault sees as particular to the Age of Reason, such as the washing of the shaven head in vinegar, are in fact medieval commonplaces; it may therefore be suspected that medieval attitudes towards madness had more in common with those during the Early Modern age than Foucault leads us to believe.²³

Moreover, at least one of the practices that Foucault ascribes to the late Middle Ages is plainly fictitious, namely that of exiling the insane on the drifting *Narrenschiffe*. These 'ships of fools', claims Foucault, really existed outside the artistic convention made famous by Sebastian Brant and his contemporaries. As many exasperated commentators have pointed out, however, 'there is no evidence that any actual ships of fools put to sea with groups of the mentally ill in their indefinite custody'.²⁴ The critics may have missed the point of Foucault's claim, which is so flagrantly false -- and his assertion of it so unusually confident -- that it is presumably meant either as a joke or as an indication that the author is not in the business of writing an empirical history.²⁵ Perhaps, as Allan Megill suggests, Foucault should be read 'not literally, but ironically'.²⁶

However that may be, Foucault's picture of madness and madmen in the Middle Ages may not unfairly be seen as a 'romantic chronicling of decline from some previous age of greatness'.²⁷ In his later work, Foucault implicitly rejects his early suspicion that scientific positivism has led to the alienation of madness and his belief that the madman was once privy to truths now denied to him.²⁸ Nevertheless, these ideas have been taken very seriously and have been adapted and developed by scholars working in many areas. The medieval madman, they argue, was considered sacred and enjoyed a freedom which he lost only in the Great Confinement. Thus Yannick Ripa, shifting Foucault's schema forward by nearly two centuries, asserts that the confinement of women in the nineteenth

century signalled 'the end of the image passed down from antiquity of the madman as bearer of truths'.²⁹

Other critics have taken up Foucault's early claim that during the Great Confinement 'madness forged a relationship with moral and social guilt'.³⁰ Shoshana Felman, for example, writes that 'the medieval conception of madness as something cosmic, dramatic and tragic loses, in the Classical age, its quasi-religious mystery; madness is now desacralised, and through its exclusion takes on a political, social and ethical status'.³¹ This implies, as John Saward says, that 'the fool's place in medieval society was natural and normal; he was neither an outcast nor a monster'.³² After the Middle Ages, however, fools 'would not be treated so kindly. No longer would the fool be the guardian of truth; foolishness is now a disease or a crime'.³³ No doubt there is some truth in each of these remarks; but a number of qualifications and objections must be made to them.

First, the permissive and reverential attitude towards madness described above is not, in fact, typical of the Middle Ages; it is popular, if at all, only at the very end of the medieval period. It was not until the time of Brant and Erasmus that there occurred a shift or break in the experience of madness, after which insanity started to be seen as universal and dramatic or satirical. Foucault himself makes this quite plain. 'Up to the second half of the fifteenth century', he writes, 'or even a little beyond, the theme of death rules alone. [...] Then in the last years of the century this enormous uneasiness turns on itself; the mockery of madness replaces death and its solemnity'.³⁴ Foucault's followers, however, have either conflated or confused the medieval and Renaissance eras: what they call the 'medieval conception of madness' belongs in fact to a later period.³⁵

This chronological blurring may be attributed not to a lack of historical awareness, but to the difference between the English and French definitions of madness. Indeed, folly cannot simply be equated with madness or insanity. In the Middle Ages, as today, European languages differed in the extent to which they

differentiated madness and folly. In Middle English, the terms 'woodness' and the less common 'madness' were generally reserved for the medical conditions of mania or melancholia. 'Folly', while it could overlap in meaning with these terms, more often denoted any manifestation of irrational or sinful behaviour or the sort of satirical folly that became fashionable in the Renaissance. The French term *folie* encompassed all of these senses.³⁶

This historical difference between English and French definitions of madness is evident in twentieth-century critical works. In English, madness and folly are not synonymous. In the French language, however, they are indistinguishable; both fall under the umbrella concept of *folie*. A quotation from Jean-Marie Fritz's French-language book on the medieval discourse about madness neatly illustrates this point. For Fritz, the heroes of early romances such as Chrétien de Troye's Yvain and the buffoons of the sixteenth-century satirical plays known as the *sotties* are all fools (*fous*).³⁷ In English, however, a distinction between these two sets of figures can be made on medical grounds. The deranged heroes of the twelfth-century romances are clearly madmen, insofar as they suffer from mania or melancholia. The jesters and clowns of Renaissance drama, on the other hand, present no such medical symptoms; in English, such figures are fools, not madmen.

The distinction between the positivist or medical concept of madness and the more general notion of folly is common in European languages other than French. As David Cooper writes:

in some languages a distinction is made between madness seen in a medical perspective (*pazzia* in Italian) and a more general sense of madness (*follia*) that is often seen as something creative, inspirational and often satirical (as in the plays of Pirandello) or the other madness of the repressive social system, every form of bureaucracy, etc., for which I prefer the English word "craziness".

As the German *verrückt* is opposed to the true delusion of *wahnsinn*. Or like the Latin delusion (*de-ludere* is to play, or mock at fully, differing from delirium -- wandering off the beaten track of the plough). In French there is only *délire* for the two very different senses.³⁸

Since they do not distinguish between madness in its medical and satirical aspects, the French are more inclined than the English to stress the positive associations of madness in the Middle Ages. Indeed, the difference in meaning between English *madness* and French *folie* constitutes more than an interesting semantic distinction: it has been largely responsible for the seemingly endless critical controversy about how madness was regarded in the Middle Ages.

In distinguishing between madness or insanity and folly it should not be implied that madness in its medical and positivist aspect was always incompatible with 'witty' folly. On the contrary, some fictional characters combine the deranged behaviour of the madman with the satirical function of the fool. Such a figure is the madman or *dervé* in Adam de la Halle's thirteenth-century play *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*.³⁹ One of the *dervé*'s functions is to provide comic relief, humorously wrenching words from their intended meanings in the manner of a Shakespearian fool. But the *dervé* also suffers from delusions, believing first that he is a king, then that he is a toad, and finally that he is married to his father. As Edelgard DuBrock points out, this '*fou* is both a real madman and a fool who is supposed to amuse. In this latter function he is akin to the court jester as well as to the sots in carnival plays and the later *sotties*'.⁴⁰ It is the double nature of the *dervé*'s behaviour that leads Michel Foucault to talk of the singularity or coherence of the medieval madman -- what Foucault calls his '*densité personnelle*'.⁴¹ Nevertheless, DuBrock's comment shows that in the English language at least, it is possible and perhaps necessary to distinguish between madness understood in a medical context and foolish buffoonery.

There are further historical grounds for making a distinction between the madman and the fool. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance the fool, unlike the madman, was often a professional. The *Senchus Mor*, a fourteenth-century book of Irish customary law, distinguishes between folly, a professional affectation, and madness, which is understood as authentic mental disorder. 'A fool', says the book, 'is one who earns wages; a madman is one on whom the magic wisp has been thrown'.⁴² The reference to the 'magic wisp' is obscure; nevertheless, 'artificial' or affected folly is clearly distinguished from insanity here. In English law, too, 'natural', as well as artificial folly was held to be distinct from madness.

Among literary critics the failure to distinguish between madness and folly is particularly noticeable. In a recent essay on Beys's seventeenth-century play *The Illustrious Madmen*, Dominique Froidefond appeals to Foucault to substantiate her remarks about the history of madness. Although the ideas she discusses are discernible in Foucault's work, they are overstated by her. 'Until the seventeenth century', writes Froidefond of the madman, 'he alone had the freedom to do and say anything with impunity because he was under the special protection of God'. By the time of Foucault's Great Confinement, however, 'he has lost his former power and prestige'.⁴³ From now on 'the insane are not considered innocent since they are responsible for and guilty of their madness. It is the indelible stain of their fault'.⁴⁴ This view of medieval attitudes towards madness is quite mistaken. In general, the medieval madman was not a powerful or prestigious figure and was rarely seen as 'innocent'. In fact, one could argue with Penelope Doob that unlike the satirical fool, he was held to be 'responsible for and guilty of' his madness at least as much as his Early Modern counterpart, although no doubt for different reasons.⁴⁵

The assertion that madness was considered sacred in the Middle Ages, then, is somewhat misleading; and it seems to spring from a confusion of genuine madness and holy folly. Furthermore, Shoshana Felman's assertion that madness had no 'political, social and ethical status' before its supposed exclusion in the

Classical age appears to be unhistorical in the light of the literary and social evidence.

Foucault's disciples in the anti-psychiatric movement have also made much of the supposed freedoms of the medieval madman. The most prominent of these, David Cooper, succinctly summarizes Foucault's history of madness as follows:

In the Middle Ages in Europe madness was respected as a different way of being and knowing, perhaps a privileged way with a more direct access to heaven. It was only after the so-called European renaissance, with the flourishing of mercantilism and the earliest beginnings of capitalism, that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the process of exclusion of the mad began.⁴⁶

It is easy to see the appeal of Foucault's argument for radical historians and critics. For Cooper and many others, the advent of capitalism marked the beginning of the banishment of the insane. This view is consistent with the widespread romantic tendency to regard the modern madman as a misunderstood social marginal or even a dissenter.⁴⁷ But Cooper's bold claims have not gone unchallenged. The historian Roy Porter has shown that in England nothing like Foucault's 'Great Confinement' occurred until the early nineteenth century, and that when it did, the nature of confinement -- and the reasons for it -- were quite different from those described by Foucault.⁴⁸ Moreover, the insane were sometimes incarcerated in the later medieval period. As Sedgwick puts it, 'the beginnings of the new ban on insanity occur before the Age of Reason itself. We see it in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance'.⁴⁹ It is for this reason that medieval texts such as *The Book of Margery Kempe* can present the radical or critical aspects of insanity.

So much, then, for the simplistic view of the medieval period as a 'Golden Age of permissiveness towards insanity'.⁵⁰ This romantic picture of the Middle

Ages cannot be accepted any more than the dystopic vision of Zilboorg. One important way of discovering medieval attitudes towards madness, it is suggested here, is to examine the literary evidence; indeed, much of the most valuable research into the subject of madness in the Middle Ages has been done by literary scholars. Neither Zilboorg nor Foucault examines medieval literature in much detail for evidence of attitudes towards insanity. Had they done so, they might both have arrived at rather different accounts of the medieval relation to madness.

In the last thirty years there has appeared a number of works dealing specifically with madness in medieval literature, such as Judith Neaman's doctoral dissertation, *The Distracted Knight* (1968). Neaman follows her discussion of theological, legal and particularly medical perspectives on madness with an examination of literary texts -- all, as her title suggests, medieval European romances. With admirable efficiency, she sets out the various medical categories of madness, demonstrating, in the words of her later work, that 'medieval men knew what insanity was'.⁵¹ By emphasising the rigour of medieval medical categories of madness, Neaman takes a quite different line from Foucault, who regards the positivist accumulation of knowledge about madness as a post-medieval development. Neaman also argues, *contra* many of Foucault's followers, that 'in Christian medicine, as in Christian theology, true madness was never divine'.⁵² This is a provocative statement, whose implications are examined in Chapter 6; but it is closer to the truth than the more widespread view that madness was respected in the Middle Ages.

Along with recent, thorough studies of madness and folly by Jean-Marie Fritz and Muriel Laharie in France, Neaman's later book, *Suggestion of the Devil* (1975), is one of the most important contributions to the understanding of medieval concepts of madness. The book covers the historical genesis of madness in medical, legal and social discourse. Neaman takes pains to emphasize the similarities between ancient and modern attitudes to madness. Such a long perspective is a welcome corrective to the unconvincing view, encouraged by the

followers of Foucault, that the medieval and the modern experiences of madness are essentially different, separated by an absolute 'epistemological break'. Nevertheless, Neaman remains sensitive to the differences, as well as the similarities, between medieval and modern attitudes.⁵³

Neaman's taxonomical rigour is typical of Anglo-American studies of madness in the Middle Ages. The best known and respected of these is Penelope Doob's scrupulous study *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: The Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*, a scaled-down version of Doob's doctoral dissertation.⁵⁴ Both Doob's approach and her conclusions differ radically, however, from Neaman's. Although she mentions clinical and religious forms of insanity, Doob focuses on the grave moral implications of madness which, she argues, was almost always seen as a consequence of spiritual turpitude. 'It is always the madness of sin that is most important', she writes, 'giving power and meaning to all cases of madness'.⁵⁵

Like Neaman's *The Distracted Knight*, Doob's book is concerned primarily with the theme of madness in literature. After a discussion of the causes, symptoms and cures for madness in the Middle Ages she applies her findings to the romance *Sir Orfeo*, Hoccleve's poems and the figure of Herod in the drama. Clearly, the present dissertation overlaps with Doob's in several ways; Doob's methods and conclusions, however, differ from mine.

Doob's central thesis -- that madness in medieval literature has almost always a negative moral significance -- is convincing to an extent. It is doubtful, however, that this is the only meaning madness had in the Middle Ages. Doob's sources, as she says in her doctoral dissertation, are various, including 'the Bible, and Apocrypha, commentaries, saints' lives, penitential manuals, sermons, exemplum books, romances, physiological and theological treatises'.⁵⁶ Her emphasis, however, is primarily on religious rather than secular attitudes towards madness. For Doob, the Church's view of madness as a divine punishment for sin is the way madness 'was seen' in the Middle Ages. This assumption, however,

allows the moral interpretation of madness too much purchase. Doob claims, for example, that even medical discussions of madness were subordinated to moral exegesis. It is true that Bartholomeus Anglicus -- Doob's chief medical authority -- begins his section on frenzy with a quotation from Deuteronomy.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, this quotation, however prominent, can hardly be said to govern Bartholomeus's thinking about madness. Indeed, Bartholomeus's biblical quotations are few and of no substantial importance; he is clearly not attempting to subordinate medical knowledge to a theological framework. Richard Neugebauer is closer to truth when he writes that Bartholomeus 'espoused a naturalistic theory about the origins of madness'.⁵⁸ Like most major medieval medical works, Bartholomeus's book is primarily rational and descriptive rather than moral and didactic; even the arch-progressivist Gregory Zilboorg concedes that Bartholomeus's ideas are 'classical, reasonable, and extremely advanced for his age'.⁵⁹

The practice of applying the theological conventions of madness to all medieval literature works both to homogenize texts and to oversimplify the picture of madness in the Middle Ages. In short, text and context are intelligible only in terms of one another. The danger of such an approach is that it draws the critic into a hermeneutical circle, so that flexible interpretation and the recognition of textual difference become impossible.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, it cannot be assumed that interpretations or uses of madness in medieval texts will always conform neatly to the writings of the Church Fathers. To make this assumption is to expose oneself to the criticisms which have often been levelled against so-called 'exegetical' critics in recent years.⁶¹ Although, as Albert Friedman points out, Doob 'explicitly forswears Robertsonianism', she nevertheless makes the fundamental exegetical assumption that medieval authors were so informed by the Christian essentialism of their age that their texts can carry only Christian meanings.⁶²

Important as such meanings are, other aspects of madness must be examined if we are to construct accurate and meaningful interpretations of literary

texts. Recent criticism has all but destroyed the once entrenched myth of the Middle Ages as a period of Christian essentialism. As Derek Pearsall warns,

not many things in medieval scholarship are easier than to multiply annotations from the *Patrologia Latina*, and the sanctification offered to every literary interpretation derived therefrom does away with the need, and then the desire, for flexibility and sophistication in a specifically literary response.⁶³

While acknowledging the views of the Church Fathers about madness, critics should not allow patristic writings to foreclose their interpretations of madness in works written a thousand years after Augustine. This is not so much a spurious justification for interpretative anachronism as a recognition of the diversity of meanings in medieval texts. Chaucer, to take one example, is concerned in the *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales not only with the traditional didactic value of madness, but also with the particular relation between insanity and social class around the time of the Peasants' Revolt.

Similarly, in the works of Thomas Hoccleve and Margery Kempe, specific medical, social and economic explanations of madness co-exist, and often overlap with conventional moral understandings of madness. Both writers may be Nebuchadnezzar's children, but they are also children of their age. It is difficult to understand the function of madness in the works of either without considering the social conditions which led them to write about madness. For these reasons, this dissertation is concerned not only with the moral significance of madness in medieval texts, but also with the relationship between madness and matters of gender, social class and subjectivity. Such concerns are not simply marginal issues or historical footnotes; they are the very stuff of history. An approach which takes account of them must be sensitive to the particularity of texts and be methodologically adaptable. Some chapters of this dissertation spend considerable

time discussing the formal features of texts; in others it has seemed necessary to concentrate more on the exploration of a text's historical milieu. As Sheila Delany says, 'culture is not monolithic: why should our methods be?'.⁶⁴

In one of her more theoretical reflections, Doob hints at a central problem of the interpretation of madness. 'The simple fact of madness', she says, 'is like the fact of a biblical narrative: it is nothing until it is fleshed out with interpretation'.⁶⁵ The simile here may encourage the charge of Christian essentialism, for it suggests that madness, like a biblical narrative, could be properly interpreted in the Middle Ages only in Christian terms. Doob's comment also poses an interpretative paradox: how can the 'fact' of madness be 'nothing'? On the one hand, the word 'fact' suggests a positivist methodology, according to which madness is objectively and transparently 'there', an undifferentiated phenomenon that precedes subjective interpretation; on the other hand, Doob's major point seems to be that madness must be constructed.

The ambiguity of Doob's formulation encourages consideration of the ontological status of madness, an issue that has bitterly divided psychiatric historians in the twentieth century. Michael MacDonald points out that until fairly recently most historians of psychiatry

have been philosophical realists: they generally believe that mental illnesses are actual diseases that can be identified in historical sources. They may grant that names of mental maladies changed over time, and so did the interpretations that succeeding eras placed on them, but they regard madness itself as a timeless and universal phenomenon.⁶⁶

But mental illnesses, as the radical psychiatric 'revisionists' tend to argue, may alternatively be seen as historically contingent 'labels that authorities and laymen use to stigmatize certain kinds of unacceptable behaviour'.⁶⁷ Since neither of these

ways of looking at madness is invalid, what is needed is some sort of *rapprochement* between the two opposed schools of thought.

Universalist and positivist approaches to the history of madness are common. In her ambitiously wide-ranging book *Madness and Literature*, for example, Lillian Feder treats irrationality not so much as a social construction, but -- as she writes in a passage on Thomas Hoccleve -- as an ahistorical or 'perennial determinant of human nature'.⁶⁸ For Feder, whose chief theoretical debt is to the ahistorical psychoanalytical ideas of Freud and Jung, madness has essentially the same form and function in the poems of Allen Ginsberg as it does in ancient Greek drama. But while there may be many similarities among the representations of madness of very different cultures, the specific historical and social factors that shape concepts and experiences of madness in any particular context must not be ignored.

The tendency to globalize the concept of madness has affinities with the desocialising methods of positivist psychiatric history. Basil Clarke discusses the history of madness from a medical perspective, apparently confident that this can be easily kept apart from history. 'The socio-cultural context and the evaluations which decide the form of the conscious historical record', writes Clarke, 'are an archaeological stratum overlying the biological'.⁶⁹ Elsewhere he writes that

the separateness of the rationalistic (including the medical) and spiritist approach [...] can facilitate getting beyond the many accounts of church miracles or apparent medical crudities, for example, which tend to prevent enlightenment about what had really happened.⁷⁰

Clarke is right about one thing here: in the Middle Ages supernatural and rational explanations of madness were separable. Nevertheless, there is a certain naivety in his confidence that the historian of psychiatry can arrive at 'enlightenment about

what had really happened' simply by weeding out cultural specificities from the historical record. In fact, such an approach would leave nothing to examine; the historian of madness must acknowledge that his subject exists at the crossover between biology and culture.⁷¹

Retrospective clinical diagnosis in historical cases is sometimes possible and even unavoidable. Indeed, although our cultural formations have transformed at a far greater rate than our biology, a thoroughgoing relativism with regard to the human mind is as worthless as any universalist psychiatry. As Nancy Partner says,

the objection that we are making an unwarranted assumption in thinking that the human mind was essentially the same over centuries of changing culture is a counsel of utter despair. If the deep structure of human experience could change so rapidly and profoundly, altered by the comings and goings of institutions and beliefs, then there could be no discipline of history at all, and our endowment of memory [...] would be a cruel deception. As it is, every historian brings some notion of psychology to the understanding of persons encountered through evidence.⁷²

This means assuming the existence over time of at least some psychological and physiological constants. It is quite reasonable, therefore, to diagnose Margery Kempe as suffering from a severe postpartum psychosis. Moreover, as is argued later, Kempe's experience of madness interestingly parallels that of many women in later times.

Present-day diagnoses are of limited value, however, to the interpreter of six hundred year-old texts. The categories and terminology of modern psychology cannot explain medieval madness better than those of the Middle Ages; there is no substitute for close attention to the historical milieu of madness. A glance at the

sterile attempts of psychiatrist-critics to 'diagnose' illnesses in literary figures according to modern psychological categories reveals the dangers of anachronism.⁷³ 'Scientific finality in the description of mental illness', says Duncan Salkeld, 'is not a goal worth striving for and a pragmatic approach in such matters would seem more viable'.⁷⁴ This means recognising the limited purchase of twentieth-century concepts such as 'schizophrenia', 'personality disorder' or even 'mental illness' in the historical study of madness.

The majority of historians of psychiatry would now doubtless agree with Michael MacDonald that

retrospective diagnosis, while not necessarily invalid, yields disappointing results. A more fruitful approach to the history of insanity is to try to account for the shifting stereotypes of mental disorder by placing them in their historical and cultural context rather than trying to "read through" them, as it were.⁷⁵

After all, as MacDonald points out, historians do not study insanity itself (whatever that may be), but other people's observations of the insane. The rejection of a thorough-going psychiatric positivism does not imply that mental illnesses do not really exist. It is simply that we must be more flexible in our thinking about insanity. Historians should think of madness 'like heart-failure or buboes, as a physical fact; but interpret it, like witchcraft or possession, principally as a socially-constructed fact'.⁷⁶ Margery Kempe's psychosis is presented as a 'physical fact'; but it is also an equally real social construction.

This emphasis on the constructedness of madness, of course, does not imply that madness is not real to its sufferer, or that first-person experiences of madness are irrecoverable. Yannick Ripa writes that

We should always remember that there are two ways of looking at madness: it can be observed from the outside or experienced from the inside. The difference between experience and observation is always passed over in silence and the hidden story of madness is never told.⁷⁷

Ripa's distinction between first and third person observations of madness, however schematic, is legitimate. The validity of first person accounts of madness in the Middle Ages, however, has been undermined in recent years for two not unrelated reasons. First is the prejudice that madness cannot be perceived by its sufferer; second is the antihumanist premise that medieval people had no concept of subjectivity or interiority. Both of these assumptions, it will be seen, are untenable. In fact, it will be argued that madness in the late Middle Ages was often experienced and articulated as a problem of the subject in relation to his or her community. This study of madness will examine not only how the mad were seen, but also, insofar as it is possible and relevant, how they saw themselves and their sickness.

The preceding discussion has, it is hoped, indicated some of the major problems raised by the most important secondary texts on madness in medieval literature. Chief among these, perhaps, is the lack of critical consensus about the definition of madness. This might be overcome if commentators agreed to distinguish, albeit weakly, the concepts of madness and folly. To fail to do so is simply to ignore an important medical, legal and literary distinction of the Middle Ages. The focus of this dissertation is madness -- acquired melancholia or mania -- rather than folly or idiocy.

Another general problem is that assumptions about what madness is, how it was interpreted in the Middle Ages, and how best to discover its meaning have too often been governed by reductive or totalizing theories. Madness was not regarded with unmitigated horror, as liberal historians have tended to insist; nor was it

generally seen as a mark of innocence and sanctity, as the disciples of Foucault have implied. In fact, the texts considered in this dissertation display a range of often contradictory attitudes towards madness.

As far as method is concerned, criticism often fails to appreciate the specificity of literary texts. The full significance of madness in literature cannot be elicited simply by applying the pronouncements of the Church Fathers to a variety of texts. Certainly, in order to understand the various meanings of madness in medieval texts it is necessary to take into account both theological and medical ideas about madness, ideas which remained remarkably stable throughout the Middle Ages and achieved the status of conventions. But the specific material conditions that could lead to madness and the various social, psychological and political motivations underlying allegations of insanity must also be considered. While this dissertation does not espouse any particular theoretical approach, its recognition of authorial intention as well as its insistence on the necessity of historical awareness in the interpretation of texts aligns it with so-called New Historical principles and methods.

It has also been argued here that while we should not reject the idea of 'universal' diseases, we can only properly understand madness by examining it in its historical context. Finally, we must allow that we can find out things about madness through first person, as well as third person observations: no-one has a monopoly on knowledge about madness. It will be seen that many medieval representations of insanity are concerned with the tension between public perception and private experience.

This Introduction has argued for an opening out of the discussion of madness in the Middle Ages and for a flexible and historically aware consideration of literature which resists any kind of reduction. This is not to say, of course, that medieval texts shared no common ways of understanding insanity. Since it is impossible to decide what differentiates texts without first considering what unites

them, we shall begin our study of literary texts with an examination of some conventional ideas about madness in a variety of discourses.

Notes to Introduction

- 1 As Mark Micale and Roy Porter write in a recent survey of writings on historical psychiatry, 'perhaps no area of the humanities today attracts detailed and impassioned commentary from so wide a range of writers'. *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, ed. by Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.4.
- 2 For discussions of this view see Lionel Gossman, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment: The World and Work of La Curne de Sainte-Palaye* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1968) and David Carlson, 'Historicism and the *in medium sordes* of Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*', *Exemplaria* 3.1 (1991), 95-108.
- 3 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965), p.241.
- 4 *Chapters in the History of the Insane in the British Isles* (London: Kegan Paul, 1882). On page 12 Tuke refers to the 'quaint prescriptions' for madness in the past. We should not, however, oversimplify Tuke's viewpoint: he ends his book, Micale and Porter point out, with a 'paean to psychiatric progress written by Dr. Stokes, superintendent of the Mount Hope Retreat in Baltimore. But Tuke declines to endorse Stokes' vision. The history of psychiatry did not plot a path of progress'. Micale and Porter, p.10.
- 5 Gregory Zilboorg, *A History of Medical Psychology* (New York: Norton, 1941); George Mora, 'Early American Historians of Psychiatry: 1910-1960', in *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, ed. by Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 53-80 (p.61).

- 6 Zilboorg was strongly influenced by continental psychiatric histories of the previous century, such as that of Dupouy, who 'discussed medieval psychiatry almost entirely in terms of "démonomanie" and "spiritisme" and sorcery'. Basil Clarke, *Mental Disorder in Earlier Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), p.1. Zilboorg's own influence in the field is inestimable. His book, along with Alexander and Selesnick's *History of Psychiatry*, 'provided the standard version of psychiatric history for two generations of medical students in the United States'. *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, p.15. Zilboorg's argument remains extremely popular: Simon Kemp quotes a number of widely-used psychiatric textbooks from the 1980s which echo Zilboorg's view of medieval attitudes towards madness. Kemp, 'Modern Myth and Medieval Madness: Views of Mental Illness in the European Middle Ages and Renaissance', *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 14.1 (1985), 1-8 (pp.1-2).
- 7 Mora, p.61.
- 8 Zilboorg, pp.98 and 128. Such pronouncements are hardly consonant with Zilboorg's avowed aim of 'pluralistic partiality' (p.18).
- 9 For an early and devastating attack on Zilboorg's method see J.S.P. Tatlock, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*', *Speculum*, 18.3 (1943), 265-287 (p.281 note 1). Tatlock complains that Zilboorg 'ignores all the medieval Latin authorities'. Richard Neugebauer, apparently forgetting that Zilboorg's book is confined to the treatment of medical texts, alleges that Zilboorg 'underemployed certain standard historical materials, for example, chronicles and literary and legal documents'. 'Treatment of the Mentally Ill in Medieval and Early Modern England: A Reappraisal', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 14 (1978), 158-169 (p.158).
- 10 Peter Sedgwick, *Psycho Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), p.129. Thomas Szasz emphasizes the political implications of this approach,

- memorably calling Zilboorg a 'psychiatric imperialist', 'eager to conquer all of the Middle Ages for medical psychology'. *The Manufacture of Madness* (London, Routledge, 1971), p.70.
- 11 J.J. Walsh, *Medieval Medicine* (London: A. & C. Black, 1920), p.184.
- 12 Walsh, p.192.
- 13 'Religious feelings', says Walsh (p.203), 'kept [the insane] from being abused or taken advantage of in any way'.
- 14 Roy Porter, 'Foucault's Great Confinement', *History of the Human Sciences*, 3.1 (1990), 47-54 (p.47). The French text -- *Histoire de la Folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) -- is much longer and fuller than the abridged English translation, but is still relatively difficult to obtain in Britain. For ease of reference, therefore, I refer to the English translation (see note 3) wherever possible. Foucault's argument in this work is found in embryonic form in Chapter 5 of his early *Mental Illness and Psychology*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). A remarkably similar consideration of madness in the Middle Ages and Renaissance may be found in George Rosen's *Madness in Society* (London: Routledge, 1968), Chapters 4 and 5.
- 15 Gary Gutting, 'Michel Foucault's *Phänomenologie des Krankengeistes*', in *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, ed. by Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.331-347 (p.333).
- 16 For a discussion of the term *Geistesgeschichte* see Lee W. Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), Chapters 1 and 2. In fact, the history of madness in the Middle Ages more complicated than either Foucault or Zilboorg allows. David Aers complains about the tendency of 'Foucaultian new historicism' to homogenize the Middle Ages. See *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.8.

- 17 For example, Enid Welsford's remark that 'the fool in cap and bells can only flourish among people who have sacraments, who value symbols as well as tools' seems to anticipate Foucault's argument. *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (London: Faber, 1935), p.193.
- 18 Foucault, *Mental Illness*, p.67. This comment is perhaps supported by the popularity of madness as a theme in medieval literature.
- 19 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.8. The French text reads: 'les fous avaient alors une existence facilement errante'. Foucault, *Histoire de la folie*, p.19. Colin Gordon has argued that the phrase should be rendered: 'the existence of the mad at that time could easily be a wandering one'. 'Histoire de la Folie: An unknown book by Michel Foucault', *History of the Human Sciences*, 3.1 (1990), 3-26 (p.17). According to Gordon, therefore, Foucault does not say that the madman's wandering life was necessarily easy. Gordon's suggested translation, however, is plainly ungrammatical. In any case, it has been pointed out that even if Howard's phrase is a mistranslation of the original, 'the dominant thrust of Foucault's analysis is to emphasise the presence of madness within medieval society, in daily life as in art and literature. [...] It is the openness of medieval society to folly and unreason, not its harshness and cruelty, that is at the centre of Foucault's account, notwithstanding the glancing references to whipping and to *Narrtürmer*'. Andrew Scull, 'Michel Foucault's History of Madness', *History of the Human Sciences*, 3.1 (1990), 57-67 (p.62).
- 20 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, pp.187-190.
- 21 See for example one of Foucault's fiercest critics, H.C. Erik Midelfort, 'Madness and Civilisation in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault', in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honour of J.H. Hexter*, ed. by Barbara C. Malament (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) and Sedgwick; pp.125-148.
- 22 Sedgwick, p.131.

- 23 Compare Sedgwick, p.9.
- 24 W. Maher and B. Maher, 'The ship of fools: *stultifera navis* or *ignis fatuus?*', *American Psychologist*, 37 (1982), 756-761 (p.760). See also Midelfort, p.254; Scull, *Social Order/Mental Disorder: Anglo-American Psychiatry in Historical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.18; Lawrie Reznek, *The Philosophical Defence of Psychiatry* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.126.
- 25 Gary Gutting has recently argued that Foucault should be seen as an idealist rather than an empiricist historian. Gutting, *passim*.
- 26 Alan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p.345.
- 27 Midelfort, p.248.
- 28 Hubert Dreyfus notes that Foucault's rejection of hermeneutics in his later works entailed a rejection of 'his own historical brand of the hermeneutics of suspicion, the claim that madness has been silenced and must be allowed to speak its truth'. Introduction to Foucault, *Mental Illness*, p.xxxiii.
- 29 Yannick Ripa, *Women and Madness: The Incarceration of Women in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. by Catherine du Peloux Menagé (Paris, Polity Press, 1990), p.12.
- 30 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.69. In a severe riposte to an attack by Lawrence Stone, however, Foucault explicitly denies claiming that madness is regarded as 'shameful' after 1650. See Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited* (London: Routledge, 1987), p.283.
- 31 Shoshana Felman, 'Madness and Philosophy, or Literature's Reason', *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975), 206-228 (p.211).
- 32 John Saward, *Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ's sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.99. In fact, Foucault says that madmen were indeed monsters; that is, 'things to

- be shown', until the nineteenth century. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.70.
- 33 Seward, p.95. Compare Clare O'Farrell, *Foucault: Historian or Philosopher?* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp.72-74.
- 34 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.15. Compare Jean-Marie Fritz, *Le discours du fou au Moyen Age* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), p.377.
- 35 The definitions of the terms 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' are, of course, far from unproblematic. Like Foucault, I shall use the term 'Renaissance' to denote the period beginning, in Northern Europe at least, in 1500. I am aware that North American scholars commonly regard the medieval period as extending into the sixteenth century.
- 36 The first sense of 'woodness' in the *OED* (vol.20, p.513) is 'mental derangement, insanity, mania, frenzy, lunacy, craziness'. Sense 1 of 'folly' is 'the quality or state of being foolish or deficient in understanding; want of good sense, weakness or derangement of mind; also, unwise conduct' (vol.4, p.4). *Oxford English Dictionary*, prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 2nd edn, 20 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989):
- 37 'Au XIIe siècle, alors que la conscience de l'individuel est encore embryonnaire, le fou est un individu, un solitaire; au XVIe siècle, où triomphe l'individu, les fous sont légions' (p.106).
- 38 David Cooper, *The Language of Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.153 note 1.
- 39 Adam de la Halle, *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*, ed. and trans. by Jean Dufournet (Ghent: Editions Scientifiques, 1977). In the Picard dialect *feuillée* is homophonous with *folie*. For more on madness in this play see Jean Dufournet, *Adam de la Halle, a la recherche de lui-meme* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1974), pp.297-345.

- 40 Edelgard DuBrock, 'The "Marvellous" Madman of the *Jeu de la Feuillée*', *Neophilologus*, 58 (1974), 180-186 (p.181).
- 41 Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie*, p.133.
- 42 *Senchus Mor*, ed. and trans. by J. O'Donovan, T. O'Mahony, W. Neilson Hancock, 6 vols (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1931) III, p.269.
- 43 Dominique Froidefond, 'The confined spectacle of madness in Beys's *The Illustrious Madmen*', *Themes in Drama*, 15 (1993), p.47.
- 44 Froidefond, p.48.
- 45 Penelope B.R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: The Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), passim. Compare Midelfort, p.255.
- 46 Cooper, p.155.
- 47 Susan Sontag writes that 'in the twentieth century, the repellent, harrowing disease that is made the index of a superior sensitivity, the vehicle of "spiritual" feelings and "critical" discontent, is insanity'. *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p.35. Sontag also refers (p.36) to the 'romanticizing of madness' in the twentieth century.
- 48 Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness from the Reformation to the Regency* (London: Athlone Press, 1987a), pp.5-9. See also Porter, 'Foucault's Great Confinement', passim.
- 49 Sedgwick, p.132.
- 50 Sedgwick, p.138. Compare Muriel Laharie, *La Folie au Moyen Age: XIe-XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1992), p.292.
- 51 Judith S. Neaman, *Suggestion of the Devil: the Origins of Madness* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1975), p.145.
- 52 Judith S. Neaman, *The Distracted Knight: A Study of Insanity in the Arthurian Romances* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1968), p.43.

- 53 Neaman's treatment of madness in literature, however, is slight and sometimes disappointing. Her discussion of Hoccleve, for example, contains factual errors which suggest her unfamiliarity with the poet's work.
- 54 The dissertation is 'Ego Nabugodonosor: A Study of the Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1969). For the book reference see note 45.
- 55 *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.53.
- 56 'Ego Nabugodonosor', p.8.
- 57 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, p.348.
- 58 Neugebauer, 'Treatment of the Mentally Ill', p.158.
- 59 Zilboorg, p.138.
- 60 It might be argued that Doob espouses the sort of 'hermeneutical method' which, according to Terry Eagleton, 'seeks to fit each text into a complete whole, in a process commonly known as the 'hermeneutical circle': individual features are intelligible in terms of the entire context, and the entire features become intelligible through the individual features. Hermeneutics does not generally consider the possibility that literary works may be diffuse, incomplete and internally contradictory, though there are many reasons to suppose that they are'. *Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.74.
- 61 For a discussion of this movement in literary criticism and its 'ruthless totalizing' see Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, Chapter 1.
- 62 Albert B. Friedman, Review of Doob's *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, *Speculum*, 52 (1977), 135-136 (p.136). On this point see Peter L. Allen, 'A Frame for the Text? History, Literary Theory, Subjectivity, and the Study of Medieval Literature', *Exemplaria*, 3.1 (1991), 1-25 (p.15).
- 63 Derek Pearsall, 'Chaucer's Poetry and its Modern Commentators: The Necessity of History', in *Medieval Literature*, ed. by David Aers

- (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), 123-147 (p.139). Lee Patterson makes the same point more sarcastically. 'Put bluntly', writes Patterson, 'the *Weltanschauung* of medieval culture is neatly if illegibly printed in the marching columns of Migne's *Patrologia*'. *Negotiating the Past*, p.35.
- 64 Sheila Delany, *Medieval literary politics: shapes of ideology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.x.
- 65 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.49.
- 66 MacDonald, 'Madness, Suicide and the Computer', in *Problems and Methods in the History of Medicine*, ed. by Roy Porter and Andrew Wear (London: Croon Helm, 1987), pp.208-209.
- 67 MacDonald, 'Madness, Suicide', p.207.
- 68 Lillian Feder, *Madness and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.109.
- 69 Clarke, p.203. For a similar use of the word 'overlay' see p.35.
- 70 Clarke, p.24.
- 71 The so-called 'bio-social' model of madness is popular in current medical theory as well as in psychiatric history. See David Golberg and Peter Huxley, *Common Mental Disorders: A bio-social Model* (London: Routledge, 1992), passim.
- 72 Nancy F. Partner, 'Reading *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Exemplaria*, 3.1 (1991), 29-66 (pp.61-62).
- 73 J.C. Bucknill, for example, diagnoses mental illness in various Shakespearian characters with little regard for contemporary medical ideas. See *The Psychology of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1859).
- 74 Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.16.
- 75 MacDonald, 'Madness, Suicide', pp.209-210.
- 76 Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p.15.
- 77 Ripa, p.5.

Chapter 1

Madness in the Late Middle Ages: Conventions, Practices and Attitudes

It is neither possible nor necessary here to provide a detailed analysis of medical, theological or legal ideas about madness in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, a brief description of the conventions of madness in all areas of medieval culture will enable us more easily to identify representations of madness in the following chapters and to place them in a broader historical context. Naturally there are pitfalls in constructing such a 'backgrounds' chapter. Criticizing certain scholarly works about madness in Renaissance literature, Carol Neely has warned that medical theory, for example, is too often conceived of 'as a unified, unchanging body of material that literature reflects or draws on'.¹ Neely's comment is perhaps less relevant to the medievalist than to the Renaissance scholar: the comparative stability of medieval medical -- and, for that matter, theological -- ideas about madness partly legitimizes a 'blanket' approach. Moreover, the proposition that literature 'reflects' medical ideas is not untenable. Neely is correct, however, to imply that medical theory is not necessarily homogenous. A reflection on the significance of the conventions of madness will support the argument that there was a diversity of attitudes towards madness during the late medieval period, all of which might be manipulated by literary authors.

From the beginning of the Middle Ages, didactic writers regarded all disease as a divine punishment for sin. Ælfric tells how a man who joked that he was St Swithun was struck lifeless and recovered only when he confessed his sin at the saint's shrine.² Abbot Leofstan of Bury Saint Edmunds, meanwhile, was afflicted with various illnesses, including madness, as a punishment for an act of impiety.³ Madness was a punishment for sin in literature as in life. The

graphically described physical and mental sufferings of Herod described in numerous medieval works are always seen as the consequences of spiritual turpitude. Bede, meanwhile, relates how the seventh-century king Eadbald was punished for incestuously marrying his father's second wife. 'His immorality', writes Bede,

was an incentive to those who had [...] submitted to the discipline of faith and chastity, to revert to their former uncleanness. However, this apostate king did not escape the scourge of God's punishment; for he was subject to frequent fits of insanity and possessed by an evil spirit.⁴

Here again insanity is presented not only as the punishment of an individual sinner, but also as a dire warning to others to avoid the temptations of sin.

Such cautionary tales are equally widespread in the late Middle Ages. A grim cautionary story from John Mirk's *Festial* must suffice to convey the powerful medieval association between madness and sin.

Ther was a man, a curset lyuer, þat was an officer to a lord. And as he rode to a maner of þe lordes, he fell wod, and so vnbrydyt his hors þat bare hym into a maner of þe lordes. But when he come yn, anon þe bayly sagh what þe man ayled, and made anon his hynes bynd hym to a post in þe berne. Then when þe bayly had ysoupyd, he bade on of his hynes go loke how þys man dyd. And when he come to þe berne, he segh þre grete doggus as blacke as a cole on yche a side plucke away hys flesche. [...] Thus who so lyueth a fowle lyfe, he may be sure of a foule ende.⁵

As so often in medieval literature, madness here is only one element of a divine punishment that ends in grisly death. Although madness could be seen as a test for improving the just, it was more commonly seen in didactic literature as a token of moral taint. 'To the mediaeval mind', summarize Claridge, Pryor and Watkins, 'madness was a direct result of, and punishment for, unacknowledged or unrepented sin'.⁶

The connection between sin and madness is made clear in the Old Testament. Zechariah prophesizes that those who attack Jerusalem will be punished with insanity: 'On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness' (Zechariah 12:4). In Deuteronomy, which rests on ancient tradition, Moses warns his people that if they 'will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes [...] the Lord will smite you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind' (Deuteronomy 28:15,28). The latter passage is used by the thirteenth-century writer Bartholomeus Anglicus in his preface to his discussion of madness, suggesting the influence of biblical tradition on medieval concepts of madness.⁷

Original Sin, it was thought, disposed all men to madness. Indeed, medieval theologians and didactic writers often attributed all disease to the Fall, even if they also discussed madness in terms of its immediate physical causes such as a psychological disturbance or an imbalance of the humours. Humoral theory stated that all illness is caused by a disequilibrium in the balance of the four humours: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, the melancholy humour. Before the Fall, men's bodies combined these humours in ideal proportion and were therefore free from infirmities. According to the twelfth-century theologian Hildegard of Bingen, the Fall led to a surplus of the melancholy humour in Adam's body. This imbalance disposed him to illness and melancholy madness.⁸

The Fall also caused mental derangement by altering man's psychology. In the Galenic 'three-ventricle' psychological theory, the brain was divided into three areas. The rear ventricle was *memoria*. The middle ventricle, known as *cogitativa*

or *imaginativa*, contained the faculty of reason or estimation; disorders of this faculty caused melancholia. The front or anterior ventricle housed the faculty called *imaginatio* or *phantasia*, disorders of which resulted in mania.⁹ This model is widespread in the literature of the late Middle Ages. The author of the fourteenth-century mystical treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing* attributes mental disorder to the Fall. The prelapsarian *imaginatio*, he explains, was 'obedyent vnto þe reson' such that no 'vnordeynde ymage' was possible. 'Bot now'; he laments; 'it is not so'. Man's first sin has irrevocably altered his physiology so that, unless carefully governed by reason, his imagination leads him into the error of madness.¹⁰

Original Sin, then, is important in the sense that it 'created that physiological degeneration which would incline man to sin and serve as a mechanism through which additional sins might bring about earthly punishment [...] without God's direct intervention'.¹¹ Dishearteningly, this physical imperfection could only become more acute as history unfolded: the myth of the postlapsarian world's gradual decline implied a corresponding degeneration of man's mental and physical condition.¹²

For medieval theologians and didactic writers, then, all disease results from sinfulness, whatever its instrumental causes; in this sense, all men are born with a predisposition towards madness. Nevertheless, insanity, unlike idiocy, was thought to be acquired rather than congenital. In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville distinguished *insania*, an acquired mental disease, from *amentia*, a congenital intellectual deficiency.¹³ Although these categories soon fell out of official use, by the thirteenth century madness and idiocy were widely distinguished along the same lines: idiocy or 'natural folly' was considered to be an insuperable condition of intellectual subnormality; madness, on the other hand, was acquired postnatally and was seen as essentially temporary. This distinction was particularly important in legal contexts, since the property of idiots, but not that of madmen, was alienated to the crown for their lifetimes.¹⁴ English law was therefore mainly

concerned with establishing idiocy; medical and literary authors, meanwhile, displayed far more interest in madness.

If theology tended to reduce the explanation of madness to the presence of sin, medical and literary texts emphasized the diversity of the instrumental causes of madness. Perhaps the best guide to medieval medical ideas about madness is provided by the friar known as Bartholomeus Anglicus in his *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, a popular thirteenth-century encyclopaedia translated into English by John Trevisa at the end of the following century. Bartholomeus was perhaps the most widely read authority on madness in the late Middle Ages and his ideas about madness, which are mostly derived from classical medical authorities, may therefore be taken as typical of his time.¹⁵ There are, explains Bartholomeus, two main sorts of madness, 'madnes þat hatte *mania* and madnes þat hatte *malencia*'.¹⁶ These two distinct forms of madness, we have already noted, affected different areas of the brain: mania was a disorder of the imagination, melancholia of the reason. This basic division of madness into mania and melancholia, and the psychological model which underpins it, is central in most writings about madness in the Middle Ages. Although the three-ventricle psychological schema did not persist in Western thought as long as humoral theories, it was more widely understood in the Middle Ages and is particularly prominent in medieval literature.¹⁷

Bartholomeus lists a number of the instrumental causes of both mania and melancholia. 'Þese passiouns', he says,

comeþ somtyme of malencoly metis; and somtyme of dringke of stronge wyn that brenneþ þe humours and turneþ hem into askes; somtyme of passiouns of þe soule, as of besynes, and grete þou3tes of sorwe, and of to greet studie, and of drede; somtyme of þe bitinge of a wode hound opir of some opir venemous best; sometyme of corrupte and pestilente aier þat is infect; somtyme of

malis of corrupt humour þat hap þe maystrie in þe body of man to brede sicke a sikenes.¹⁸

The causes of madness, then, were remarkably various: thus Jean-Marie Fritz has dubbed the medical discourse on madness 'le discours infini'.¹⁹ Many of these causes imply moral fault on the part of the madman. Penelope Doob even argues that madness was always considered as a sign of spiritual turpitude, regardless of its precise instrumental cause.²⁰ Certainly, as Claridge, Pryor and Watkins state, 'medical literature, though bound to note and discuss the physiological causes, in no way contradicted the strong belief promoted by all other literature of the time, that madness was punishment for sin'.²¹

Moral interpretations of madness did not always, however, take priority over rational ones. Man existed at the nexus of the natural and supernatural worlds. Thus medieval people, like the ancient Greeks from whom they inherited many of their medical ideas, could consider the causes of madness in purely physiological or purely theological terms or, as is often the case, both.²² As Michael MacDonald explains:

The traditional medieval and Renaissance model of the universe postulated the existence of both natural and supernatural forces at work in a hierarchical order of powers and beings. Man existed at the point of convergence between the natural and supernatural orders, and he was subject to both kinds of powers. This model permitted contemporaries to explain mental disorder as the consequence of events that occurred on any of the several planes of existence, acting singly or in concert.²³

Man's ability to keep separate the natural and supernatural realms increased with the rediscovery of Aristotle in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Aquinas played

a particularly important role in stipulating what Walter Ullman calls a 'double ordering of things', according to which 'full value could now be ascribed to the natural and the supranatural'.²⁴ From this point on the natural world could be an object of study in its own right and rational and supernatural explanations of madness co-existed in both imaginative and medical works.

From a modern standpoint, at least, the most irrational medieval explanation of madness is that of demonic possession. According to many twentieth-century psychiatric historians, the theory of possession entirely displaced rational thinking about madness and became the only available explanation of insanity. As suggested in the previous chapter, the prevalence of such one-sided views may be attributed to the influential medical history of Gregory Zilboorg; but the many historians who have accepted his account without question are equally to blame. Despite adducing some contrary evidence, Thomas B. Graham falls back on Zilboorg's work to support his contention that in the Middle Ages 'demonology [...] became an unshakable basis for the medieval treatment of mental disorders'.²⁵ For other commentators, the mad were regarded as witches. Another disciple of Zilboorg, Derek Coon, asserts that 'abnormal behaviour was attributed to supernatural forces such as possession by a devil or the curses of witches and wizards'.²⁶ Similarly, Erwin Ackerknecht complains that 'for over a thousand years the mentally ill were [...] regarded as possessed by the devil and by evil spirits, or were considered to be witches or sorcerers who could produce the illness in others'.²⁷

Each of these statements is in some way misleading. First, the popular misconception that madness was associated with witchcraft in the Middle Ages may be dismissed as an anachronism. Certainly, allegations of witchcraft were made against heretical sects in the late Middle Ages in Europe, and witchcraft trials became increasingly common during the period.²⁸ But witchcraft, it appears, was only rarely associated with insanity: very few of the medical, theological, legal and literary texts dealing with madness link insanity with sorcery. It was

certainly not until the end of the fifteenth century that sorcery became a widespread concern. In 1484 Innocent VIII declared war on witches in his bull 'Summis desiderantes'. Five years later Kramer and Sprenger produced their *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of the Witches), which maintained that disbelief in witchcraft was heresy.²⁹ Moreover, trials for witchcraft peaked not in the Middle Ages but in the seventeenth century. In asserting that witchcraft was a major feature of the Middle Ages, then, Ackerknecht and Coon have 'moved history backwards, describing the events of the 16th and 17th centuries as if they occurred during the ninth through 12th centuries'.³⁰ Coon and Ackerknecht attribute to medieval people the much later concern with witchcraft, rather as other historians confuse the satirical Renaissance concept of folly and the medieval concept of madness. In both cases, attempts to understand medieval attitudes towards insanity have been bedevilled by the inaccurate chronologies of historians of psychiatry.

Unlike witchcraft, demonic possession did indeed have a relation to madness in the Middle Ages and must therefore be explored more fully. Strictly speaking, it is misleading to talk of possession as an *explanation* or even as a *form* of madness: madness and possession were not identical and the causal connection between them was reversible.³¹ Michel Foucault cautions that many mistaken views about madness have been founded on errors and prejudices arising from the confusion of madness and demonic possession and reminds us that 'the complex problem of possession does not belong directly to the history of madness, but to the history of religious ideas'.³² Nevertheless, the concepts of madness and possession are inextricably linked in the Middle Ages.

The Anglo-Saxons believed in possession by elves: Old English *ilfig* means 'mad' or 'frantic'.³³ Even after the advent of Christianity, 'diseases attributed to "devils" by the Church were still attributed to elves by the common folk'.³⁴ Elf-lore seems to have survived into the later medieval period, but was by that time apparently regarded with sophisticated disdain: in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*,

for instance, John the carpenter is ridiculed for his superstitious belief that Nicholas's apparent madness is caused by the operations of 'elves' and 'wightes'.

More widespread in the late Middle Ages was the entirely orthodox belief in possession by demons. In the classical world, of course, possession was not necessarily negative: benevolent *daemons* could inspire artistic creation or prophecy, as Plato notes in the *Phaedrus*.³⁵ Christianity, however, denied this possibility. As Michael Screech puts it,

the one fundamental change which Christians were obliged to make to these Platonic teachings -- apart from replacing classical polytheism with trinitarian monotheism -- was to rule out the 'possession' of a mortal by those good spirits, those good *daemons*, whom Christians termed 'angels' ('messengers'). Only evil *daemons* ('devils') can 'possess' a human being. In this way the often good classical *daemons* become the evil demons of Christianity.³⁶

For the medieval Church, therefore, demonic possession was intimately connected with evil. Accordingly, religious manuals severely rebuke the possessed, although the seventh-century *Penitential of Theodore* reluctantly concedes that 'if a man is vexed by the devil and can do nothing but run about everywhere, and [if he] slays himself there may be some reason to pray for him if he was formerly religious'.³⁷

The best-known biblical possession cases were perhaps those of Saul (I Kings 16:14-23) and the man in the parable of the miracle of the Gadarene swine (Mark 5:1-15; Luke 8:27-35). Both of these men, of course, richly deserve their punishments. Simon Kemp is right to stress that 'demonic possession was not thought to involve a witch or other human agent. The devil or devils was assumed to act on his or their own initiative'.³⁸ Nevertheless, possession could not occur

without God's ordination.³⁹ The good man could therefore be possessed by devils only as a test of faith.

Attitudes towards demonic possession, particularly insofar as it was seen as a cause of madness, appear to have varied among different social groups. Traugott Oesterreich concludes his survey of medieval cases of possession with the remark that they 'are completely similar from whatever century they may come' and 'bear the impress of the stability which characterized that period'.⁴⁰ This should not imply, however, that attitudes towards possession were the same among all sections of medieval society. As scholars in many fields are increasingly coming to realize, the Middle Ages only appears a 'stable' period when its contents are viewed from a single perspective. All of Oesterreich's examples are drawn from Church accounts of exorcisms; but a brief examination of other sources reveals that not everyone in the Middle Ages credited the theory of demonic possession.

Demons became increasingly numerous and ingenious in the late Middle Ages.⁴¹ They could now enter a person's body and take up residence in it. In most cases, possession was sanctioned morally, as in Caesarius of Heisterbach's story about a five-year-old girl who was possessed by a demon. As she was drinking milk her father said to her: 'I wish you might eat the devil in your greediness!'. Immediately she 'felt his presence and was harrassed by him for many years'.⁴² Another popular story about possession is found in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*. A nun wanted to eat a lettuce so eagerly that she neglected first to make the sign of the cross over it. She was immediately possessed by a demon and suffered convulsions. The abbot was summoned and he prayed for her healing, whereupon the terrified devil asked what he had done wrong. 'I was sitting on a leaf of lettuce', complained the demon, 'and she came and ate me'.⁴³

Such stories combine humour with a deep superstition. Nevertheless, another amusing German anecdote from the fifteenth century shows that among the educated, at least, demonic possession was not believed in lightly as a cause of madness. In his *Liber de Reformatione Monasteriorum* Johann Busch relates an

anecdote about his 'cure' of a possessed woman. An agitated ploughman came running from the fields to seek Busch's assistance in curing his wife, whom he thought to be possessed by a demon. Examining the woman, Busch concluded that the woman's 'possession' was no more than one of the 'many fantasies' which tormented her. In order to 'get a whole brain again', Busch advised that the woman should keep to a sensible regimen of food and drink, including a quart of hot ale taken with butter.⁴⁴ The story indicates that belief in possession was more common among the uneducated than the learned.

Examining representations of madness in Shakespeare's plays, Duncan Salkeld notes a number of cases of what he calls 'spurious' possession. In such cases 'the spiritual potency of the terms has been "emptied out", to use Greenblatt's phrase, not only into the fiction of a play but into the fiction of characters who either feign possession or are falsely accused of it'.⁴⁵ Representations of possession in medieval literature are generally less playful. The ranting of Herod or the fractiousness of Noah's wife in medieval mystery plays, for instance, may be attributed to their possession by the Devil. Such outrageous behaviour doubtless constituted a moral lesson as well as a comic spectacle. Nevertheless, both Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* and his *Summoner's Tale* contain examples of 'spurious' possession. By the end of the Middle Ages, moreover, the terms used to refer to possession had become detached from their original meanings. "'Lunacy" and "demonic possession"', writes Luke Demaitre, 'referred more consistently to the intermittent occurrence of the attacks than to their respective causation by the moon or the devil'.⁴⁶

Medical writers certainly gave little credence to the theory of possession. Popular manuals sometimes discuss the phenomenon, but usually without any hint of moral censure. According to the fifteenth-century *Book of Quinte Essence* the possessed are

born vnder þe constillacioun of saturne, þe wickide planete. Forsope to sicke men deuelis wole gladly appere, and minister to hem her priuy temptaciouns wiþinne the cours of her þou3tis, and these men þus tormentid wiþ þe passiouns of malencoly comounly speke wiþ hem, stryue and dispute wiþ hem silf whanne þei be a-loone, þat ofte tymes oþere folk may heere it.⁴⁷

Such men, says the book, are 'turmentid' with 'noyous ymagynaciouns'; but they are not blamed for their conditions. Moreover, the suggested cure for possession here is medical, not superstitious. The focus is therefore on the instrumental, rather than the original supernatural causes of madness.⁴⁸

The major medical texts of the Middle Ages have practically nothing to say about demonic possession. None of the eminent and widely-read authorities on madness, including Bartholomeus Anglicus, considers demonic forces to play any part in the onset of madness. Jerome Kroll goes so far as to state that 'no major medical work taught at the universities prior to the fourteenth century pays attention to demonology'.⁴⁹ There is, to be sure, a glancing reference to demonic possession in the thirteenth-century *Compendium Medicine* of Gilbertus Anglicus. But even for Gilbertus, 'possession was never a central hypothesis'.⁵⁰ Basil Clarke reminds us that the idea of demonic possession was confined mainly to popular tradition and that in the received medical texts explanations of mental disorder were 'kept within the framework of a rational pathology. This means excluding demonic explanations, and they do not feature in the main textbooks, though they may be mentioned as believed in by other people'.⁵¹

Clearly, belief in demonology was confined mainly to popular tradition. Abelard's rejection of 'the idea that the devil caused insanity', for example, certainly shows his own scepticism about demonic possession; but the fact that such denials were felt to be necessary also indicates that such superstitious beliefs

were commonly held.⁵² We can say, however, that demonic possession, which usually implied moral taint, was a far from universally credited cause of madness.

Attitudes towards madness caused by planetary movements were also diverse. Augustine had objected to astrology, of course, because it restricted free will. In the thirteenth century, however, Aquinas stressed that a person has responsibility even for astrological madness. A person's passions may be affected by the movements of the heavenly bodies, but he or she still has the responsibility for opposing those passions. In doing so, Aquinas implies, he opposes also his will, which is free and 'in no way subject to the movement of the heavens'.⁵³ The wise man, according to the theologians at least, is able to avoid illness.

The medical use of astrology as a predictional aid to anticipate or pre-empt the threat of madness was hampered by the church's suspicion of astrology, which was proscribed by canon law. Both Isidore and Bede, however, acknowledged the role of the heavenly bodies in influencing human health. Aquinas even notes that doctors now use astrology as a predictional aid; but he also reflects official suspicions about the art, warning, 'I do not want you to become the companions of devils'.⁵⁴

Astrological speculation was widely regarded as a token of overreaching and deranged imagination. According to Archigenes, for example, madness can lead the educated to launch 'into fantastic astronomical or philosophical theories'.⁵⁵ Christian thinkers regarded such speculation as sinful. For Richard Rolle, the practice of astrology violates the first commandment. 'Alswa in þis commandemente', says Rolle, 'es forbodyn to gyffe trouthe till socerye or tyll dyuynynge³ by sternys, or by dremys, or by any swylke thynges'.⁵⁶ As the author of *Dives and Pauper* explains, those who 'welyn been of Godys preuy counseyl' want to

puttyn God out of his maieste, out of his kyngdom and his lordshepe and out of his fredam and makyn hym more bonde to þe

sterrys þan euere was ony kyng or ony lord or ony man vpon erthe.
 They welyn been of Godys preuy counseyl, wyl God nyl God, and
 rewlyn hese domys.⁵⁷

It is presumably for this reason that the fourteenth-century *Canons of Astesanus* condemns 'the use of the astrolabe for purposes of prognostication' and a later penitential requires two years of atonement for 'one who beholds things to come in an astolabe'.⁵⁸

Astrological studies could merit the punishment of madness. Over-curious philosophers and astrologers who persisted in their folly risked divine retribution, often in the form of insanity. In the eleventh century John of Salisbury wrote ominously that he had 'attended the lectures of a very large number of astrologers, and known quite a few personally; yet I recall none who persisted long in this error, but that in [sic] the Lord's hand brought some condign punishment on him'.⁵⁹ Fra Giordano of Pisa, meanwhile, chastised those who 'want to understand by reason what they should hold by faith, and attain to things not granted to them'. Such people, he warns, 'break their necks, and go blind and mad'.⁶⁰ Such is the fate of Nicholas in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*.

Of all the heavenly bodies, the moon in particular was often credited with causing madness. The close connection between madness and the lunar cycle is suggested by the Old English adjective *monap-seoc* which Toller translates as 'lunatic, epileptic'.⁶¹ Bartholomeus Anglicus writes that the moon has properties that 'ben nou3t ful goode'. Drawing on Ptolemy, he says that the moon causes men to become 'vnstable and changeable, and renninge about fro place to place'. The moon also has the power to bring about defects of the eye, discomfort, sorrow and also epilepsy, the 'fallinge euel'.⁶² Indeed, the epileptics of Trevisa's translation are Bartholomeus's *lunaticis et caducis*.⁶³

Like Bartholomeus, William Langland draws attention to the physical instability of lunatics and their socially outcast state. But his famous description of the 'lunatyk lollares' is admiring rather than condemnatory:

Ac hem wanteth wyt, men and women bothe,
 The whiche aren lunatyk lollares and lepares aboute,
 And madden as þe mone sit, more other lasse.
 Careth they for no colde ne counteth of non hete
 And aren meuyngge aftur þe mone; moneyeles þey walke,
 With a good will, witteles, mony wyde contreyes,
 Riht as Peter dede and Poul.⁶⁴

Langland feels that these harmless madmen have a special dispensation from God for their sins, 'For vnder godes secret seal here synnes ben keuered'.⁶⁵ He therefore advises that 'We sholde haue them to house and helpe hem when they come'. Langland's attitude lends some support to the romantic view of the medieval madman as a blessed wanderer. But such views of madness are uncommon in the late Middle Ages. Moreover, we should be aware that 'the necessity to catechize the common people on charity to the insane suggests that such charity was not the rule'.⁶⁶

Explanations of lunacy were complex. In the third century Origen analysed the case of a biblical lunatic who was possessed by a demon (Matthew 17:14-18), explaining that the devil makes use of the phases of the moon in order to possess individuals.⁶⁷ But in the twelfth century Giraldus of Wales, in Daniel Tuke's words,

combats the interpretation of an expositor of Saint Matthew [Origen], who said that the insane are spoken of by him as lunatics, not because their madness comes by the moon, but because the

devil, who causes insanity, avails himself of the phases of the moon (*lunara tempora*). Giraldus, on the contrary, observes [...] that the malady was in consequence of the humours being enormously increased in some persons when the moon is full.⁶⁸

To be sure, physiological explanations of lunar madness are not the rule: the eminent thirteenth-century physician Gilbertus Anglicus, in his *Compendium Medicine*, refers to lunatics as 'possessed'.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Giraldus's argument typifies the late-medieval tendency to keep separate the natural and supernatural worlds.

As well as being influenced by the moon and the stars, the incidence of insanity was thought to vary according to the seasons. Each season disposed human beings to a certain type of madness.⁷⁰ But all types of madness were generally considered more likely to strike in the summer months. In 1270 Norwich jail refused to release a homicidal madman named Richard of Cheddestan. 'The same Richard is well enough', says an advisory letter from the prison to the court, 'but it cannot be said that he is so restored to soundness of mind that there would not be danger in setting him free, especially when the heat of summer is increasing, lest worse befall'.⁷¹ The frenzy of Charles VI of France always returned in hot weather. In Capgrave's words, 'as long as þe wedir was hote, his sekeneſe ceſed neuyr'.⁷² Hoccleve's *Complaint* also contains the idea that the summer heat induces insanity.

Both Hoccleve and Margery Kempe make extensive use of the analogy between madness and drunkenness. The association between drunkenness and madness, first made in Aristotle's *Problems*, became remarkably common in the Middle Ages: William of Conches, for example, compared the frenzied man to the drunkard, for whom everything is shifting and unstable.⁷³ Chaucer's Friar John remarks that 'Wyn maketh man to lesen wrecchedly / His mynde and eek his

lymes everichon',⁷⁴ and the Pardoner quotes Seneca to the effect that there is no difference

Betwix a man that is out of his mynde
 And a man which that is dronkelewe,
 Save that woodnesse, yfallen in a shrewe,
 Persevereth lenger than doth dronkenesse.⁷⁵

Drunkenness was the perfect analogy for madness, since both were manifested by essentially temporary bouts of riotous behaviour.

Drunkenness and madness were also connected causally. The tenth-century Persian physician Haly Abbas notes that 'ebriety, if frequent, brings many evils to the body, among them the destruction of the ruling power' and 'weakening of the mind'.⁷⁶ Later in the Middle Ages, Bartholomeus Anglicus describes how one of the types of madness he classifies -- *stupor* -- can result from excessive drinking, which quenches the body's natural heat.⁷⁷ Such humoral arguments are also used by Bartholomeus to explain madness induced by excessive eating. 'If mete and drink passeth mesure', he warns,

moisture waxiþ to swithe and kynde hete febliþ [...] þat malicious
 smoke [...] disturbiþ þe substaunce and þe vse of resoun, and ryueþ
 and apeireþ þe tongue þat tellith what resoun meneþ, and makeþ þe
 tonge stamere and faille, as it is iseye in dronken men.⁷⁸

From a purely practical viewpoint, alcohol unfitted a man for his public duties. In his *The Office and Dewtie of Kingis*, William Lauder advises that those responsible for the selection of priests 'sulde nocht chuse vnto that cure / Ane Vinolent nor wod Pasture'.⁷⁹ In religious contexts drunkenness is considered a moral atrocity. It is in itself the specific sin of gluttony, as well as a cause of

further sins. Bartholomeus, for example, warns of the deleterious effects of drinking wine: 'wyn makeþ hem þat drinkeþ þerof wood and out of here witte and rese woodliche in opere men'.⁸⁰ Drunkenness was also a voluntary rejection of God-given reason, rendering it all the more heinous. As Chaucer's Parson baldly declares, 'whan a man is dronken, he hath lost his resoun; and this is deedly synne'.⁸¹ Thus the drunken man is often likened to a beast. Indeed, the stages of drunkenness were sometimes classified according to different animals, a convention to which Chaucer's Manciple refers when he chastises the Cook with the obscure words, 'I trowe that ye dronken han wyn ape'.⁸² As H.W. Janson notes, 'being a synonym for "fool", the ape was particularly well qualified to suggest the irrational antics of toppers'.⁸³ But since, in philosophical contexts, apes were compared to men in all but the faculty of reason, 'the word *ape* became widely used to signify a man who lacks the power of reason'.⁸⁴

Excessive study was considered a common cause of madness in the Middle Ages. Unlike the eighteenth century, the Middle Ages regarded the over-use of human reason not as the antithesis of madness, but its apotheosis. Michel Foucault's comment on the connection between learning and madness in the Renaissance -- although suggestive of the satirical spirit of that era -- also holds good for the Middle Ages:

madness is the punishment of a disorderly and useless science. If madness is the truth of knowledge, it is because knowledge is absurd, and instead of addressing itself to the great book of experience, loses its way in the dust of books and in idle debate; learning becomes madness through the very excess of false learning.⁸⁵

This idea, of course, is a longstanding one. 'He that increaseth knowledge', according to Ecclesiastes, 'increaseth sorrow' (Ecclesiastes 1:18). In Acts, Paul's

account of his career before Agrippa attracts the censure from Festus: 'Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad' (Acts 26:24).

The late-medieval emphasis on the virtues of a weak intellect combined with a distrust of the learning of scholars to fortify the connection between study and madness. Many medieval illustrations picture the fool in a long white gown 'that has associations both with madmen and with scholars'.⁸⁶ Study is posited as a cause of madness in many of the literary texts examined here, and is a cause of madness in medical textbooks. Study-induced madness could be seen as a punishment for the presumption of over-curiosity, although medieval physicians generally note study as a cause of madness with no tinge of moral censure.⁸⁷

In certain contexts, anger is regarded as a cause, and sometimes a form of insanity; according to Doob, 'habitual anger *is* madness; it is not simply *like* madness'.⁸⁸ Religious writers eagerly made the connection between *ira* and madness. According to Dan Michel, ire makes a man 'al oute of wytte'.⁸⁹ John Mirk, meanwhile, asks the reader of his *Instructions for Parish Priests*: 'Hast þow any tyme be wroth so / Pat þy wyt hath be a-go?'.⁹⁰ The major medical texts seldom mention anger as a cause or a form of madness. In romances, however, the common adage *ira est furor brevis* is often exemplified by the knights who fight, in Malory's words, 'woodly' or 'as men outraged of resoun'. The courtly fondness for anger madness is also reflected in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*; here the Temple of Mars is inhabited by the disturbing personification of 'Woodnesse, laughyng in his rage' (2011).

Anger could overlap with other passions to produce madness. According to Lydgate's account of Herod's life in the *Fall of Princes*, Herod enters a jealous fury following his slaughter of his allegedly adulterous wife:

Reste hadde he non novther day nor niht,
 Troublid with furye that he wex frentik,
 With dremys vexid & many an vnkouth siht;

Of cheer nor clour to no man he was lik,
 And eueri moneth onys lunatik.⁹¹

Herod's subsequent acts of random violence, embellished by Lydgate from the historical accounts, ensure that his raging madness quickly becomes a grotesque spectacle, like that of the choleric friar in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*.

Grief, sorrow and fear constitute a further category of causes of insanity. In medieval literature, these are most common in the romances, which place particular emphasis upon the emotions of their protagonists. Bartholomeus Anglicus reminds us that melancholia 'comeþ of drede and sorwe'.⁹² But grief could also induce manic behaviour. Thus Jacob, believing his son to be dead, 'rent his cloths, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days' (Genesis 38:34). Similarly, Chaucer's Melibee, on hearing of the injury done to his wife and daughter, 'lyk a mad man, rentynge his clothes, gan to wepe and crye'.⁹³

Medieval attitudes towards grief depended largely upon the extent and duration of mourning. In the appropriate circumstances, a certain amount of grieving indicates a noble sensitivity. As Gottfried von Strassburg notes in his *Tristan*, 'when a man grieves for his friend and acts loyally towards him when he has died, this ranks above all reward, this is the very crown of loyalty'.⁹⁴ Thus Chaucer's grieving Man in Black solicits more sympathy than condemnation, and the same is arguably true of Melibee. But although 'clamorous mourning' can be seen 'as an edifying thing' in the late Middle Ages, prolonged grief is treated with suspicion, especially in the romances.⁹⁵ In Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés*, Soredamors' grief at the death of Alexander is so great that she dies of a broken heart. Alis and Cligés, on the other hand, are praised for ceasing their grief in due course: 'Alis and Cligés both mourned him becomingly, but finally ceased their grief, for sorrow, like everything else, must be outlived. To continue in sorrow is wrong, for no good can come of it'.⁹⁶

Medieval theologians stressed the immorality, as well as the mentally deleterious effects of excessive mourning. The ninth-century *Penitential of Saint Hubert*, for example, proscribes the outward display of grief: 'If anyone lacerates himself over his dead with a sword or his nails, or pulls his hair, or rends his garments, he shall do penance for forty days'.⁹⁷ When Malory's Lancelot faints for grief at Guinevere's funeral, a hermit upbraids him: 'Ye be to blame, for ye dysplese God with suche maner of sorow-makyng'.⁹⁸ As Doob comments, 'although literary judgments are seldom so harsh, we must still be aware of the possibility of moral fault in characters temporarily mad through grief such as Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo*, the Dreamer in *Pearl*, or Melibee'.⁹⁹

A rarer but nevertheless significant cause of madness in the Middle Ages is fear, particularly in the context of battle. The convention has a long history. As H.M. Chadwick notes, 'the incident of a warrior going mad in the course of battle is of not infrequent occurrence in the Irish stories relating to seventh and following centuries'.¹⁰⁰ In the Irish poem *Buile Suibhne* (The Frenzy of Suibhne), battle-madness is an instrumental cause of the hero's madness, which is a punishment for an earlier impiety:

Now, when Suibhne heard these great cries together with their sounds and reverberations in the clouds of heaven and in the vault of the firmament, he looked up, whereupon turbulence, and darkness, and fury, and giddiness, and frenzy, and flight, unsteadiness, restlessness, and unquiet filled him, likewise disgust with every place in which he used to be and desire for every place which he had not reached. His hands were palsied, his heart beat quick, his senses were overcome, his sight was distorted, his weapons fell naked from his hands, so that through Ronan's curse he went, like any bird of the air, in madness and imbecility.¹⁰¹

Likewise, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, Merlin becomes mad after a battle. These two poems are the earliest in which the theme of madness is central. Although neither Suibhne nor Merlin is entirely blameless for his madness, both are portrayed sympathetically. As J.S.P. Tatlock puts it, 'it is highly probable that Geoffrey's extremely original and striking poem [...] started the vogue of the hero as madman sympathetically regarded'.¹⁰²

Finally, there is 'love madness' or *erotomania*, which is widely considered a form of madness in medieval literature. This belief has been challenged from a number of perspectives. Michel Foucault suggests a philosophical reason why love was not a prominent cause of madness in the Middle Ages: 'As long as there was an object', he writes, 'mad love was more love than madness'.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the insanity of earthly love is emphasized by the churchmen. 'Moral Gower' holds that

Dum carnalis amor animum tenet illaqueatum,

Sensati racio fit racionis egens:

Dum iubar humani sensus fascatur in umbra

Carnis, et in carnem mens racionis abit,

Stans hominis racio calcata per omnia carni

Seruit, et ancille vix tenet ipsa locum.

[When carnal love holds the mind ensnared, an intelligent man's reason becomes irrational. When the brightness of human intelligence is clouded over by the shadow of the flesh, and the spirit of reason withdraws into the flesh, man's reason stands utterly scorned. It is a slave to the flesh, and scarcely retains the post of handmaiden].¹⁰⁴

Insanity caused directly by love, however, rarely features in medieval literature. Chaucer's Palamon may be described by Arcite as 'sik and wood for love' (1600);

but in the romances, as Judith Neaman points out, 'love madness [*erotomania*] does not exist'.¹⁰⁵ The heroes of romance become mad not for love, but for the loss of love, that is, through the instrumental causes of grief, fear, anger or some combination of these passions.

This brief survey of the causes of madness illustrates the difficulty in generalizing about madness in the Middle Ages; nevertheless, it also provides a definite conclusion. Although madness was associated with sinfulness in religious writing, medical works -- especially the major textbooks of the late Middle Ages -- did not usually include moral explanations. Physiological causes of madness were not always seen as the mere instruments of higher forces and it is hasty to assume that they presuppose wickedness as the root cause of madness.

This point is clearly illustrated by the accounts of two famous late-medieval cases of madness. Froissart's *Chronicles* relate that Charles VI of France was suddenly struck with delusions and frenzy when on a campaign against the Duke of Brittany in August 1392. As Doob writes,

Charles's case is highly representative of medieval attitudes toward madness. Almost every conceivable cause is considered except for possession. [...] More important, the story illustrates the tendency of every man to interpret the disease as he wishes: to Guillaume [a physician] it is physiological only; to the popes it is moral; to the king's brothers it suggests no weakness on the king's part, coming instead from poison or from spells cast by political enemies.¹⁰⁶

Another theory was that Charles's madness was due to his extreme anger at the Duke of Brittany, which overheated his black bile.¹⁰⁷

Attitudes towards the madness of the Flemish painter Hugo van der Goes were similarly diverse. Fortunately for the fact-starved student of the history of madness, we have an unusually full account of the circumstances surrounding

Hugo's madness. The onset of Hugo's first psychotic attack recalls that of Charles VI's breakdown. While on a journey in about 1480 the painter 'was struck by a strange disorder of the imagination. He cried out incessantly that he was doomed and condemned to eternal damnation. He would even have injured himself had he not been forcibly prevented by his companions'.¹⁰⁸ We might conjecture that the painter's madness was in some way related to his 'artistic temperament'. In the post-medieval, as in the ancient world, an artist's divine inspiration has often been regarded as a form of insanity: Tasso himself associated his poetic gifts with the violent psychosis for which he was institutionalized; later, the romantics made a sentimental connection between poetry and madness, epitomized by the sorry example of Hölderlin. But such ideas were not current in Northern Europe in Hugo's time.

After Hugo's death, Gaspar Ofhuys -- Hugo's biographer and *infirmarius* of his monastery after 1482 -- summarized contemporary opinion about the painter's affliction. Despite his feeling that 'only God can tell' what ailed Hugo, Ofhuys suggests some possibilities. 'We may thus have two diverse opinions on the disease of our brother', writes Ofhuys;

on the one hand we might say that his was a case of a natural disease. [...] There are of course, several types of the disease depending on its original cause: sometimes the cause is melancholic food; at other times it is the consumption of strong wines which heat the body juices and burn them to ashes. Furthermore, frenzies may occur because of certain sufferings of the soul like restlessness, sadness, excessive study and anxiety. Finally, frenzy may be caused by the virulence of noxious juices, if such abound in the body of a man who inclines to that malady.¹⁰⁹

Ofhuys's list of the causes of madness recalls that of Bartholomeus Anglicus; indeed, it is by no means unlikely that Ofhuys had encountered the latter's popular encyclopaedia through his medical training. The significant point here, however, is that all of these suggested causes are rational.

Ofhuys was writing, however, as a chronicler as well as a physician. Unlike Bartholomeus, he records contemporary speculation about the possible moral causes of madness. Some of Hugo's acquaintances believed that it was

God's all-loving providence which had ordained this malady. This brother had been flattered enough in our Order because of his great art -- in fact, his name became more famous this way than if he had remained in the world. But since he was, after all, just as human as the rest of us, he had developed a rather high opinion of himself due to the many honours, visits and compliments which were paid to him. But God, not wanting his ruin, in his great mercy sent him this chastening affliction which, indeed, humbled him mightily. For brother Hugo repented and, as soon as he had recovered he exercised the greatest humility.¹¹⁰

The disagreement about the explanation of Hugo's illness suggests that by the fifteenth century a scepticism about supernatural causes of insanity existed alongside less rational beliefs. With the increase in the circulation of medical texts in the fifteenth century it is likely that this scepticism filtered downwards to a wider section of society. At all events, the works of writers who lived in quite different circumstances, such as Thomas Hoccleve and Margery Kempe, contain similarly diverse explanations of madness.

In theory, at least, the identification of madness was rather easier than its explanation. As Judith Neaman points out, mental disorders in the Middle Ages were 'diagnosed largely by behavioural symptoms which are conceived of as clear

and easily recognisable'.¹¹¹ Sometimes, however, an individual's speech was made the basis of diagnosis. This was certainly the case with idiocy. In 1383 Emma de Beston of Bishop's Lynn was questioned by a panel in order to determine whether she was an idiot. The importance of the panel's decision has already been outlined: the property of idiots or 'natural fools' was alienated to the Crown. Emma's interrogation, held at St Benedict's church in Lincoln, proceeded as follows:

Being asked in what town she was, she said that she was at Ely.

Being asked what day that Friday was, she said she did not know.

Being asked how many days there were in the week, she said seven, but could not name them.

Although she had been married three times, Emma could recall the name of only one of her husbands. Her responses to questions about the relative values of various coins were equally unsatisfactory. The interrogating panel found that Emma 'was not of sound mind, having neither sense nor memory nor sufficient intelligence to manage herself, her lands or her goods'. The record only adds as an afterthought the comment that, 'as appeared by inspection, she had the face and countenance of an idiot'.¹¹² Clearly, Emma's mental condition was ascertained principally by an analysis of her thought-processes rather than her appearance or behaviour.

Insanity, however, usually gave itself away. For Bartholomeus Anglicus the 'tokenes and signes' of madness 'is diuers, for som criep, and lepib, and hurtip and woundip hemsilf and opir men, and lotiep and hidip hemsilf in pri[u]ey place and hidelis'.¹¹³ These symptoms, most of which are associated with mania, are equally commonplace in literature. In *Piers Plowman*, Langland's 'lunatik lollares' leap about the countryside aimlessly. The manias of Margery Kempe and Heurodis

in the fourteenth-century romance *Sir Orfeo* are manifested by self-mutilation and screaming.¹¹⁴

Indeed, mania was characterized by violent gestures of excess. Melancholia, by contrast, entailed the absence of interest and energy, macabre thoughts and a tendency to solitary grieving. The madman's desire for solitude often causes him to flee civilization and become wild or bestial. The biblical prototype for this behaviour is of course Nebuchadnezzar, whose pride is punished by madness:

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like bird's claws. (Daniel 4:33)

In his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, the Renaissance physician Robert Burton records a number of cases of melancholy madmen who believed themselves to be, and in some cases were seen to be, bears or cattle. Another form of insanity, remarks Burton, is lycanthropy or 'Wolfe madnesse, when men runne howling about graves and fields in the night, and will not be perswaded but that they are Wolves or some such beasts'.¹¹⁵ Bartholomeus Anglicus notes that some men in the throes of what he calls *passio melancolya* 'if they here the kockes crowe they rereth vp here armes and crowith, and trowith that hemsilf be kockes'. Such fantasies, he continues, are based ultimately on biblical tradition, as in the case of

a nobleman þat fel into suche a madnes of melancolye þat he in alle wise trowed þat he himself was a catte, and þefore he wolde nowher reste but vndir beddes þere cattis waitid aftir myse. And in cas in wreche of his synnes Nabugodonosor was ipunyshid wip

suche a peyne, for it is iwriten in stories þat seuen þere hym semed
þat he was a best þurouȝ diuers schappis: lyoun, egle, and ox.¹¹⁶

Even English legal discourse reflects this association between madness and animality. The thirteenth-century legal theorist Bracton saw the civil status of individuals as dependent on their possession or lack of reason and he compared not-responsible individuals to animals.¹¹⁷ This extremely loose criterion attests to the medieval West's increasing preoccupation with distinctions between civilization and animality.

Literary madmen such as Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, Merlin and the Middle English Orfeo take on the appearance of wild men and wander alone in the forests. Particularly moving is the plight of the Middle Irish Suibhne, the battle-maddened hero who wanders emaciated and naked through desolate countryside in appalling weather conditions, all the time described as a bird. Like the beasts, madmen lost the power of speech. 'And so if men askep of suche what þey drede and wherefore þei bep sory', says Bartholomeus, 'þey haueþ none answeþe'.¹¹⁸ Thus Malory's Dynadan finds the deranged Lamerok in the forest, where 'he lay lyke a fole grennyng and wolde nat speke'.¹¹⁹ The muteness of the madman indicates both his total separation from social conventions and his physical and moral degradation to the condition of a beast. Indeed, the behaviour of the medieval madman always betokens a radical loss of identity. The tearing of garments, a symptom of grief-madness in many medieval texts including *Sir Orfeo* and Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*, is more than a random act of destruction; in an age in which clothes supposedly indicated social station, it also signifies an abdication of rank.

Real lunatics behaved like literary madmen. As Jean-Marie Fritz points out, the forest is the traditional haunt of madmen in reality as well as in the romances: like any romance hero, Charles VI was struck with madness in the forests of Northern France.¹²⁰ It is therefore extremely difficult to separate

conventional and actual expressions of insanity in the Middle Ages. In real life and in works of medicine, literature and even law, the symptoms of madness are described in remarkably similar ways. All medieval writers were deeply influenced by biblical accounts of madness. The behaviour of the possessed man in the miracle of the Gadarene swine, for example, resembles both Bartholomeus Anglicus's description of mad behaviour and the conduct of the insane knights of medieval romance: 'Always, day and night', says St Mark, 'he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones' (Mark 5:5).

Such precedents do not account, however, for the ways in which the mad were cared for in the Middle Ages. We have already noted that the medieval madman did not lead an entirely 'easy wandering existence'. While it may be true that, 'in contrast to diehard nineteenth-century interpretations, the treatment of the insane in the Middle Ages was characterised by tolerance', the insane were often confined or restrained.¹²¹

Madmen in the Middle Ages were treated well under the law. Measures were taken to ensure that the madman's property was not misappropriated or misused. In fourteenth-century Bristol it was the custom that

the mayor must see that his goods and chattels are taken and given to his nearest friends to look after until he recovers his sound mind. And his friends must place a sufficient guard on the persons of such madmen as will ensure that they come to no harm or loss and that they do not harm to others.¹²²

This treatment is certainly favorable compared with that of natural idiots, whose goods were alienated to the crown.

If the preservation of the madman's property was a public matter, the care of his person was often left to individuals. In the Anglo-Saxon period, at least, there is no evidence of a 'regular custom of confining even violent mental patients

in churches and prisons'.¹²³ In fact, throughout the Middle Ages madmen were usually looked after at home by relatives or were simply allowed to wander freely, especially if they posed no threat to public order. The madman's life was often peripatetic: madmen held in town jails were often expelled to other cities at public expense, while certain almshouses turned away insane or quarrelsome vagrants.¹²⁴ Arrangements were flexible and ad hoc. In fifteenth-century Scotland a deranged or idiot girl was sent by her parents to be looked after by a gentleman on the remote Monarch Isles off North Uist 'lest she should be seen of strangers'.¹²⁵ This expulsion indicates that the insane were popularly thought to constitute an embarrassing spectacle.

In the late Middle Ages there is evidence that European public authorities assumed limited responsibility for the control of the insane. Between 1377 and 1397, for example, the city of Nürnberg had 37 insane people in its charge. The municipal accounts of Hildesheim, meanwhile, show expenditures for 82 lunatics between the years 1384 and 1480. Often these madmen were confined: throughout Germany in the fourteenth century, madhouses or mad cells were built for this purpose.¹²⁶ There is also evidence of institutional confinement in medieval France. In Caen and St-Omer at least, madmen were confined in towers, as Michel Fosseyeux puts it, 'comme des prisonniers'.¹²⁷ The insane were also sent for detention at Châtelet of Melun, south of Paris.¹²⁸

In cases of violent frenzy, confinement was combined with physical restraint. Here again, imaginative works reflect the social reality. In the fourteenth-century poem *Sir Orfeo* the madmen lying in the Fairy King's castle are casually described as 'ybounde'.¹²⁹ Indeed, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Bartholomeus Anglicus's injunction that madmen 'be ibounde, þat þey hurte not hemsilf and oþir men' was put into practice across Europe.¹³⁰ When asked if he would join the Cistercian order, Walter Map wryly instructed his attendants: 'should it ever so happen that I resolutely insist on becoming a monk then bind me with chains and fetters as a lunatic who has lost his wits, and keep

me in close custody until I repent and recover my senses'.¹³¹ In Mallorca in 1360, the guardian of a certain 'den Cassellas' was given the following instruction by the governor of the island: 'to avoid any danger, we give you permission [...] that the said Casellas be locked up at home or manacled, or whatever you think best, and do it in such a way that no harm can be done to anyone by that person'.¹³² In the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris, some of the mad were placed in enclosed beds with two observation windows; those in ordinary beds were tied to them with strong bonds.¹³³ Clearly, violent madmen, at least, were distinguished from other ill people in late-medieval hospitals.

Indeed, the hospitalisation of the mad begins not in the Age of Reason, but in the late Middle Ages. In 1409 Juan Gilabert Joffre established the West's first hospital for the insane at Valencia, after being moved at the sight of a group of boys stoning and insulting a madman. This famous story, as H.C. Erik Midelfort points out, is significant for two reasons:

first, because it is evidence that not all elements of medieval society accepted madness as part of life, and second, because it demonstrates that the founding of mental hospitals did not wait for the "absolutist" or "bourgeois" repression of the seventeenth century.¹³⁴

J.H. Baas long ago showed that special houses for the insane were established in various Spanish towns throughout the fifteenth century.¹³⁵

At the end of the Middle Ages the insane in England were occasionally confined and restrained in hospitals or prisons. As early as 1216 there was a hospital at Chester for 'poor silly people', a phrase which suggests that the insane and the poor were not then clearly distinguished and that wealthier lunatics were cared for at home by relatives.¹³⁶ But it is only in the later part of the fourteenth century that the hospitalization of the insane becomes a major concern. In 1369 a

chaplain, Robert Denton, obtained a licence to found a hospital at All Hallows, Barking, for 'priests and others, men and women who suddenly fell in a frenzy and lost their memories until such time as they recover'.¹³⁷ Salisbury's Holy Trinity hospital was also admitting insane patients in the fourteenth century.¹³⁸

Bethlem hospital in 1403 contained six men described as *menti capti*. The hospital inventory records 'six chains of iron, with six locks; four pairs of manacles of iron, and two pairs of stocks'.¹³⁹ The *Historical Collections* of the mayor of London indicate that by the middle of the fifteenth century Bethlem was already receiving significant numbers of insane patients, some on a short-term basis, others pending the operation of divine grace:

And yn that place ben founde many men that ben fallyn owte of hyr wytte. And fulle honestly they ben kepte in that place; and sum ben restoryd unto hyr witte and helthe a-gayne. And sum ben a-bydyng there yn for evyr, for they ben falle soo mucche owte of hem selfe that hyt ys uncurerabyllle unto man.

Hospital records note donations for the insane throughout the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁰ A lazar house in Holloway, Bath, was 'appropriated to the use of lunatics' sometime during the fifteenth century.¹⁴¹

Baas attributes the belated flourishing of lunatic asylums to ecclesiastical prejudice against the insane. This accords only too well with the dubious liberal assumption that madhouses were essentially benevolent institutions and that sympathy for the insane was impossible until the dawn of the Age of Reason. In any case, we have already seen that the medieval insane were not always, as Baas claims, 'regarded as persons "possessed" by the devil and his male and female assistants'.¹⁴² The only clear fact that emerges from a discussion of hospitalization is that madmen were not always allowed to wander freely, especially towards the end of the Middle Ages.

The mad were not held responsible for any crimes they committed while insane, and were simply imprisoned in the interests of public safety until they recovered from what was often regarded as a temporary condition. The best example is that of the homicidal maniac Richard of Cheddestan, a Norfolk man who in 1270 murdered his wife and two children before attempting suicide. He was confined in prison indefinitely. Some time later, a letter from Norwich jail to local justices reported that 'the same Richard is well enough; but it cannot be said that he is so restored to soundness of mind that there would not be danger in setting him free'.¹⁴³ The prison in this case seemed to serve as a sort of early mental hospital. There is, at all events, no suggestion that Richard's prolonged detention had a punitive aspect: if madmen were regarded by moralists as responsible for their sufferings, they seem nevertheless to have enjoyed sanctuary under the law.

Confinement and restraint were useful in cases of short-term insanity, especially in violent cases; but they were not considered to be cures for madness. Yet throughout the Middle Ages physicians battled against madness and argued about the best remedies for it. Like the causes of madness, the treatments advocated for insanity were sometimes religious or superstitious, sometimes rational in character. Moreover, although remedies for madness focussed primarily on the body, there is also evidence that what are now termed 'psychotherapeutic' practices were applied to the insane in the Middle Ages. As Basil Clarke writes, 'One conclusion which is certain is that at no point in the Middle Ages will one generalisation serve to describe all the formulations and treatment of mental illness which were being employed'.¹⁴⁴

The only specifically religious remedy for insanity was exorcism. It is still unclear how commonly exorcisms were performed and it would be easy to overestimate their importance. The Church itself seems to have been unsure of the usefulness of exorcism: a decretal of the synod of Reims, for example, warns that lunatics are more in need of medical aid than exorcism.¹⁴⁵ At all events, 'insanity

was thought to be curable through physical and mental methods without recourse to demonology, especially in psychoses which had been caused through emotional upset'.¹⁴⁶ Exorcisms are certainly not represented in medieval English literature.

Throughout the medieval period, and well beyond, popular cures for insanity included the use of herbs, incantations or holy relics and the visting of holy shrines and wells.¹⁴⁷ Such remedies did not, of course, constitute a coherent system of treatment and tended to combine rational and superstitious elements. The madman in the thirteenth-century French play *Le Jeu de la Feuillée* is advised to go home and take rest after a cure by holy relics proves ineffective. Popular remedies often involved physical cruelty: a thirteenth-century window at Canterbury depicts a maniac being dragged by his friends to the shrine of St Thomas, tied with ropes and thrashed with birch-rods.¹⁴⁸ Many such treatments for insanity continued to be used until the nineteenth and even the twentieth century.

In the late Middle Ages, rational treatments for insanity also become important. For Michel Foucault, the medieval madman had not yet become the subject of positivist medicine. It is certainly true that the ideas of the medical schools did not immediately or entirely displace popular religious beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, as Brian Stock writes, 'in contradistinction to what Weber proposed, the historical evidence suggests that the Middle Ages were the period in which rationality began to play a significant role in Western society and culture'.¹⁴⁹ From the twelfth century onwards, methods of dealing with insanity were transformed as the increasingly important medical schools of Salerno, Montpellier and Paris trained physicians in the treatment of madness.¹⁵⁰ By the end of the Middle Ages the growing medical scepticism about supernatural cures of madness is reflected in Guy de Chauliac's contemptuous dismissal of the 'wommen and [...] many ydeotis or foles, the whiche remitten seke men for all manere of sekenesse onliche to seyntes'.¹⁵¹

Some of the remedies for insanity in the textworks are bizarre to the modern reader. Bartholomeus Anglicus, for example, suggests that in cases of frenzy the patient ought not to be shown images, his head should be shaved and washed in vinegar and his forehead smeared with the juice of lettuce or poppy.¹⁵² Nevertheless, it seems that many peculiar and even apparently cruel physical remedies for madness were motivated by compassion rather than cruelty and were often based on rational principles.

One such treatment is flogging. Although this practice is not mentioned in late-medieval medical texts, it was employed in the Middle Ages, especially in the early period. A tenth-century leech book recommends: 'in case a man be lunatic, take the skin of a mere-swine, work it into a whip. Swinge the man therewith, soon he will be well. Amen'.¹⁵³ Basil Clarke asserts, inexplicably, that this practice implies a 'simple belief in demonism'.¹⁵⁴ But this is not the only possible explanation of flogging. In fact, whipping may have been employed only to diminish the madman's capacity for violence in accordance with Bartholomeus Anglicus's observation that 'harsh treatment of the body removes pain from the head and soothes frenzy'.¹⁵⁵ This rationale presumably underlies Bartholomeus's suggestion that the man suffering from *stupor* should 'be drawe and ihalid strongliche be þe here of his berd and of his hed, and þat his face be often iwassche with coolde watir and his feet ifrotid often vndir þe soles'.¹⁵⁶ The physician Bernard de Gordon advocates a very similar treatment for lethargy:

And if they are in a profound torpor, as I have seen many, their hair on the head, beard and chest should be pulled; they should be seized by the nose, their finger squeezed and their lower members tightly tied.

But Bernard is aware of the thin line between harsh but necessary treatment and abuse, claiming that 'many die because the medical attendants think that this

treatment is cruel'.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, medieval medicine took what might be called an humane approach to the treatment of madness. Even haphazard and dangerous surgical operations, normally only undertaken as a last resort in cases of stubborn insanity, were well-intentioned.¹⁵⁸

Psychiatric historians have concerned themselves mainly with the physical cures for insanity in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, madness, although regarded principally as a somatic affliction, was often treated by methods which worked on the mind rather than the body. An asylum founded by King Alonzo at Zaragoza in 1425 became famous for giving good 'moral treatment' for madness.¹⁵⁹ Usually such treatment consisted of down-to-earth advice. In his *Castel of helth* (1539) Thomas Elyot writes that

Affectes and passions of the mynde [...] yf they be immoderate [...] bringe a man from the use of reason, and sometyme in the displeasure of almighty god. Wherefore they [men] do not only require the helpe of phisyke corporall, but also the counsell of a man wyse and well lerned in morall philosophye.¹⁶⁰

Elyot's opinion that melancholics should 'flee darknes, moche watche, and busynesse of mynde, moche companieng with women' is typically medieval and recalls the advice given by the beggar to the melancholic Hoccleve in the Prologue to his *Regement of Princes*.¹⁶¹

The textbooks of the Middle Ages commonly recommend a sort of occupational therapy. Paul of Aegina suggests 'suitable exhilaration of the mind', while Bartholomeus Anglicus advises that the madman refrain from 'busy þou3tis' and find some gentle occupation.¹⁶² Reading and rational discourse were considered appropriate diversions. The Roman physician Celsus points forward to Hoccleve's *Dialogue with a Friend* when he advises that

the patient is to be agreed with rather than opposed, and his mind slowly and imperceptibly is to be turned from irrational talk to something better. At times also his interest should be awakened; as may be done in the case of men fond of literature, to whom a book may be read.¹⁶³

Music was also considered to calm the mind. Bartholomeus Anglicus follows Celsus in recommending that the madman be 'gladed wip instrumentis of musik', and in cases of possession, music could mollify evil spirits.¹⁶⁴ Music therapy was used to cure Hugo van der Goes, whose case has already been mentioned. The account of Hugo's mental breakdown by the painter's biographer Gaspar Ofhuys indicates how both the perception and the treatment of madness were influenced by biblical tradition. When Hugo became deranged, Ofhuys relates, the prior of his monastery was summoned to the scene of his collapse:

Seeing this sick man and learning all that had happened he presumed that brother Hugo was suffering from the same complaint that had once afflicted King Saul, and reflecting that Saul's disorder had yielded when David played his harp, he immediately gave orders to play music frequently in Hugo's presence.¹⁶⁵

The prior's conduct here is incredible to the modern reader: despite assimilating thoroughly the particular details concerning the onset of Hugo's madness, his instructions are finally based on biblical precedent. To the medieval mind, both the diagnosis and the treatment of madness were inextricably bound up with tradition.

The survey of medieval attitudes towards madness provides a number of conclusions. First, it is clear that the symptoms of madness in real life conform closely to literary, especially biblical, precedents. This makes any firm distinction

between fictional and real cases of madness extremely difficult -- a point to which we will return later.

Other conclusions challenge certain assumptions about medieval medical approaches to madness. Although madness was considered principally as a somatic affliction, it was sometimes recognized and treated in mentalistic terms. Thus the medical practices of late Middle Ages point forward to the modern concept of madness as a disease of the mind rather than the body: hence Hoccleve's view, discussed in Chapter 5, that a man's mental condition cannot always be detected by his appearance.

For other reasons, generalized views of the Middle Ages or its approach to insanity are untenable. Madness, it has been seen, was habitually interpreted by the churchmen as a sign of moral taint. Yet theological interpretations of madness did not prevent rational investigation, especially as the prestigious medical schools developed in the late Middle Ages. Even the widespread superstitious belief in demonic possession was not credited by all sections of medieval society. In fact, rational and spiritual explanations of madness co-existed throughout the Middle Ages. This means that the theme of madness could be used in literary texts to produce diverse effects ranging from moral condemnation to sympathy. The chapters that follow attempt to describe some of the ways in which these effects are manipulated by medieval authors.

Notes to Chapter 1

- 1 Carol Thomas Neely, 'Did Madness Have a Renaissance?', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44 (1991), 776-791 (p.784).
- 2 *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat (London: EETS os 78, 1881), pp.458-460.
- 3 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.3.
- 4 *A History of the English Church and People*, trans, by Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1968) II.5, pp.108-109.
- 5 *Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. by Theodor Erbe (London: EETS es 96, 1905), p.56.
- 6 *Sounds from the Bell Jar: Ten Psychotic Authors*, ed. by Gordon Claridge, Ruth Pryor and Gwen Watkins (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1990), p.49.
- 7 'He schal smyte þee wip woodnes and lost of witte and of mynde and wip stonynges, *et cetera*'. Bartholomeus Anglicus, 7.5, p.348. Bartholomeus begins several of his chapters on madness with biblical quotations.
- 8 For Hildegard see Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.8. William of Conches also regarded the Fall as the cause of man's physiological decay. See Raymond Klibansky, Fritz Saxl and Erwin Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy* (Cambridge: Nelson, 1963), p.105.
- 9 Bartholomeus Anglicus, 7.7, pp.349-350.
- 10 *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. by Phyllis Hodgson (London: EETS os 218, 1944), p.117.
- 11 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.8.
- 12 See Lawrence Babb, *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press), p.58.

- 13 *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Joseph R. Strayer *et al.*, 13 vols (New York: Scribner, 1982-), VI, p.492.
- 14 Nigel Walker, *Crime and Insanity in England*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968) I, p.25; see also Neugebauer, 'Treatment of the Mentally Ill', p.159. Neugebauer repeats this discussion in 'Medieval and early modern theories of mental illness', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 36 (1979), 477-483.
- 15 Zilboorg (p.138) wrongly asserts that 'Bartholomeus appears to have been an unusual exception, a voice from a very remote, healthy past or from just as remote a future'. Kroll reminds us that *De Proprietatibus Rerum* was an extremely popular work throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, surviving in numerous manuscripts and books. Jerome A. Kroll, 'A reappraisal of psychiatry in the Middle Ages', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 29 (1973), 276-283 (p.276).
- 16 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.6, pp.349-350.
- 17 See for example François Villon's parody of ventricle theory in *Le Lais*, in which he invokes Aristotle's view that disorders of the faculty of reason produce madness. *The Complete Works of François Villon*, trans. by Anthony Bonner (London: Museum Press, 1960), p.16. In the following century Edmund Spenser makes use of the same model. See Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by Thomas P. Roche Jr (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), II.ix.50. Humoral theories, by contrast, were less widely known in the Middle Ages; see Laharie, p.137.
- 18 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.6, p.350.
- 19 See Fritz, pp.115-152.
- 20 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, Chapter 1.
- 21 *Sounds from the Bell Jar*, p.51.
- 22 For Greek explanations of mental illness see Agnes Carr Vaughan, *Madness in Greek Thought and Custom* (Baltimore: J.H. Furst, 1919);

- Jackie Pigeaud, *Folie et cures de la folie chez les médecins de l'antiquité gréco-romaine: la manie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1987); Rosen, pp.73-83.
- 23 Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.177.
- 24 *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1966), p.122.
- 25 Thomas B. Graham, *Medieval Minds: Mental Health in the Middle Ages* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), p.60.
- 26 Derek Coon, *Introduction to Psychiatry: exploration and application* (St. Paul: West, 1983), p.501.
- 27 Erwin Ackerknecht, *A Short History of Psychiatry* (New York: Hafner, 1959), p.279.
- 28 Rosen, p.11; Lynn White, 'Death and the Devil', in *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance: Beyond the Fields of Reason*, ed. by Robert S. Kinsman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 25-46 (pp.34-41).
- 29 Rosen, p.239; Simon Kemp, 'Modern Myth and Medieval Madness: Views of Mental Illness in the European Middle Ages and Renaissance', *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 14.1 (1985), 1-8 (p.2).
- 30 Kroll, p.279. Even Zilboorg (p.132) acknowledges that the persecution of witches is a later phenomenon.
- 31 Neaman, *Suggestion of the Devil*, p.40.
- 32 Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, p.64.
- 33 William Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study in History, Psychology and Folklore* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp.257-263. See also Clarke, pp.46ff.
- 34 Bonser, p.117.
- 35 See Plato, *Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII*, trans. by Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin, 1973), pp.46-48. Madness could therefore have a

positive significance. 'Intrinsically there is nothing in it [madness] to frighten us', concludes Socrates, 'and we must not allow ourselves to be alarmed and upset by those who say that the friendship of a man in his sober senses is preferable to that of one whose mind is disturbed' (p.48).

- 36 Michael A. Screech, 'Good madness in Christendom', in *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, ed. by William F. Bynum, Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd, 3 vols (London: Tavistock, 1985) I, pp.25-39 (p.30).
- 37 *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales*, ed. by J.T. McNeill and H.M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.207.
- 38 Kemp, p.3.
- 39 See Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.13.
- 40 Traugott K. Oesterreich, *Possession (Demonic and Other)* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930), p.185.
- 41 Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (London: Paladin, 1976), pp.68-74.
- 42 Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, ed. by G.G. Coulton and E. Power, trans. by H. von E. Scott and C.C. Swinton-Bland, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1929), p.354.
- 43 Quoted in A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. by J.M. Bak and P.A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.188.
- 44 Quoted in G.G. Coulton, *A Medieval Garner* (London: Constable, 1910), p.649.
- 45 Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.25.
- 46 *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VI, p.490.

- 47 *The Book of Quinte Essence*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall (London: EETS os 16, 1866), p.17.
- 48 *The Book of Quinte Essence*, p.18.
- 49 Kroll, p.281.
- 50 Clarke, p.90.
- 51 Clarke, p.85. Avicenna notes that 'some ascribe melancholia to the influence of demons, but I do not share their views'. Quoted in Zilboorg, p.125.
- 52 Graham, p.61.
- 53 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.20.
- 54 Quoted in Clarke, p.104 note 54.
- 55 Klibansky *et al.*, p.47.
- 56 Richard Rolle, *The Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle de Hampole*, ed. by G.C. Perry (London: EETS os 20, 1921), p.10.
- 57 *Dives and Pauper*, ed. by Phyllis H. Barnum, 2 vols (Oxford: EETS 275 & 280, 1976 & 1980), I, p.117.
- 58 *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, pp.43 and 365.
- 59 Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.247.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), p.696.
- 62 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 8.18, p.494-495.
- 63 Bartholomeus Anglicus, III, p.106.
- 64 William Langland, *Piers Plowman: the C-text*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Berkeley: California Press, 1978), 9.106-112, p.166.
- 65 Langland, 9.138, p.167.
- 66 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.70.

- 67 For Origen see Fritz, pp.231-232.
- 68 Tuke, p.9.
- 69 Clarke, p.90.
- 70 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.20.
- 71 Walker, I, p.23.
- 72 John Capgrave, *John Capgrave's Abbreuiacion of Cronicles*, ed. by Peter J. Lucas (Oxford: EETS os 285, 1983), p.201.
- 73 Aristotle, *Problems*, trans. by W.S. Hett, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1937), II, pp.157-159; Fritz (p.364) quotes Conches's *Dragmaticon philosophiae*: 'Phrentici et ebrii est proprium, quod iuxta sui cerebri commotionem omnia sibi moveri videantur, unde affirmant, terram cum suis aedificiis moveri'.
- 74 *Summoner's Tale*, 2054-2055. All citations from Chaucer refer to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
- 75 *Pardoner's Tale*, 494-497.
- 76 Harvey, p.19.
- 77 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.7, p.350.
- 78 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 4.5, p.146.
- 79 Lauder, *The Office and Dewtie of Kingis*, ed. by Fitzedward Hall (London: EETS os 3, 1896), p.12.
- 80 Bartholomeus Anglicus, II, 183, p.1078.
- 81 *Parson's Tale*, 821.
- 82 *Manciple's Prologue*, 44.
- 83 H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1952), p.246.
- 84 David Burnley, *A Guide to Chaucer's Language* (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1983), p.172.
- 85 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.25.

- 86 Rose A. Zimbardo, '*The Book of the Duchess and the Dream of Folly*', *Chaucer Review*, 18 (1983-84), 329-346. On the distrust of the intellect in the late Middle Ages see F.R.H. DuBoulay, *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Nelson, 1970), pp.160-178.
- 87 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.6., p.350. Overstudy is also noted as a possible cause of the madness of the painter Hugo van der Goes. See Rudolf Wittkower and Margot Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1963), p.109.
- 88 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.24.
- 89 *The Ayenbite of Inwit*, ed. by Richard Morris (Oxford: EETS os 23, 1866), p.150.
- 90 *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. by Gillis Kristensson (Lund: Gleerup, 1974), 1139-1140, p.133.
- 91 John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems: Part I*, ed. by H.N. MacCracken (London: EETS es 107, 1911), 111-117, p.205.
- 92 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.6, p.349.
- 93 *Tale of Melibee*, 973.
- 94 Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan (with the 'Tristan' of Thomas)* trans. by A.T. Hatto (London: Penguin, 1960), p.65.
- 95 J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. by F. Hopman (London: Penguin, 1955), p.49.
- 96 Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by W. Wistar Comfort (London: Everyman, 1975), p.125.
- 97 *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p.294. See also p.313.
- 98 Thomas Malory, *The Works of Thomas Malory*, ed. by Eugène Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p.880.
- 99 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.30.

- 100 H. Munro Chadwick and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932-40), I, p.113.
- 101 *Buile Suibhne*, ed. and trans. by J.G. O'Keefe (London: Irish Texts Society 12, 1913), p.15.
- 102 Tatlock, p.286.
- 103 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.30.
- 104 *Vox Clamantis*, in *The Latin Works of John Gower*, ed. by G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 5.235-240, p.207. Translated in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, trans. by Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p.201.
- 105 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.154. John Reinhard also notes that 'there are not so many instances of amatory frenzy in the literature of Western Europe'. *Amadas et Ydoine: An Historical Study* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1927), p.19.
- 106 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.48. This quotation seems to acknowledge here, against the main argument of Doob's book, that madness could be regarded as a physical condition only.
- 107 See *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VI, p.492.
- 108 Wittkower, p.109.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Wittkower, pp.109-110.
- 111 Neaman, *Suggestion of the Devil*, p.151.
- 112 *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery)*, 7 vols (London: HMSO, 1968), VII, p.227.
- 113 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.5, p.350.
- 114 Kempe's madness is treated at length in Chapter 6; *Sir Orfeo*, ed. by A.J. Bliss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 78-82.

- 115 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling and Rhonda L. Blair, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), I, p.133.
- 116 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 4.11, p.162.
- 117 Walker, I, p.28.
- 118 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 4.11, p.161.
- 119 Malory, p.511.
- 120 The forest, as Fritz (p.34) observes, is the place of madness '[...] pas seulement dans nos romans, puisque Charles VI est frappé de folie dans la forêt aux confins de Bretagne et du Royaume: et plus tard encore, Philippe le Bon erre à travers les entendues boisées du Nord sous une pluie battante, comme un nouveau Lancelot'.
- 121 *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VI, p.490.
- 122 Walker, I, p.30.
- 123 Clarke, p.57.
- 124 Rosen, p.140; Rotha Mary Clay, *The Medieval Hospitals of England* (London: Methuen, 1909), p.34.
- 125 Clarke, p.133. Clarke also notes (p.41) a man's reference to his wife's 'shameful insanity'.
- 126 Rosen, p.140.
- 127 Michel Fosseyeux, 'Cure Balnéaire et Thaumaturgique des Aliénés au Moyen Age', *Société Française d'Histoire de la Médecine*, 33 (1939), 21-32 (p.22).
- 128 Rosen, p.140.
- 129 *Sir Orfeo*, ed. by A.J. Bliss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 394.
- 130 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.6, p.350. Compare Paul of Aegina, *The Seven Books of Paulus Aegineta*, trans. by Francis Adams, 3 vols (London: The Sydenham Society, 1844), I, p.385.
- 131 Quoted in Tuke, p.9.

- 132 A.C. Mas, 'Notes on the history of psychiatry in Majorca in the Middle Ages', ed. by N. Evans, *History of Psychiatry*, 20.5.4 (1994), 475-481 (p.476).
- 133 Rosen, p.140.
- 134 Midelfort, p.253.
- 135 Baas, Joh. Herman, *Outlines of the History of Medicine and the Medical Profession*, trans. by H.E. Handerson, 2 vols (Huntingdon, New York: Robert E. Krieger, 1971). First edition in 1 vol [n.p.: n.pub., 1889], p.347.
- 136 Clarke, p.81.
- 137 *World History of Psychiatry*, ed. by John G. Howells (London: Ballière Tindall, 1975), p.179.
- 138 Rosen, p.140.
- 139 Tuke, p.52.
- 140 Clay, pp.32-33; See also Clarke, p.80.
- 141 Clay, p.34.
- 142 Baas, p.347.
- 143 Walker, I, p.23.
- 144 Clarke, p.70.
- 145 Fosseyeux, p.29.
- 146 Charles H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England* (London: Purnell, 1967), p.182.
- 147 Tuke, pp.3-7; Fosseyeux, passim, Clarke, pp.112-142.
- 148 Clay, p.31.
- 149 Brian Stock, 'Max Weber, Western Rationality, and the Middle Ages' in *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, ed. by Brian Stock (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1990), pp.113-139.
- 150 On the rise of Salerno and Montpellier as centres of medical learning and training see Talbot, pp.38-63.

- 151 *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, ed. by Margaret S. Sinclair (London: EETS os 265, 1971), p.10.
- 152 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.5, p.349.
- 153 Quoted in Tuke, p.7.
- 154 Clarke, p.45.
- 155 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.41.
- 156 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.7, p.351.
- 157 Quoted in Talbot, pp.105-106.
- 158 Talbot, Chapter 7.
- 159 Kroll, p.282.
- 160 Quoted in Richard Hunter and Ida MacAlpine, *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, 1535-1860* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.7.
- 161 Ibid.
- 162 Paul of Aegina, I, p.384; Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.6, p.350.
- 163 Aulus Cornelius Celsus, *De medicina*, with an English trans. by W.G. Spenser, 3 vols (London: Heinemann, 1935-38), I, p.295. Celsus's ideas were popular among medieval physicians; see following note.
- 164 See Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.6, p.350; Celsus, I, p.254. On music as a cure for possession see Rosen, pp.31-34.
- 165 Wittkower, p.109.

Chapter 2

'Knights that ar so wood': The Meanings of Madness in Middle English Romance

Cultural historians have detected an increased preoccupation with, and sometimes incidence of madness in various epochs. Thus Michael MacDonald holds that 'interest in insanity quickened about 1580', while Lynn White Jr contends that a number of factors, such as the experience of famine and warfare, made the period 1300-1650 the most 'psychically disturbed' era of European history.¹ Whatever the merits of these necessarily vague claims, it is a true generalization that in the twelfth century madness, which was receiving increasing attention as a subject of study in the medical schools, emerged as a common theme in Western literature.²

The renewed interest in madness is most evident in the medieval romances. These works tend to present insanity in a stereotypical fashion, illustrating the paradigms of mad behaviour and certain conventional interpretations of madness. These traditional ideas about madness have deep historical roots: although the texts discussed here are primarily English works of the late Middle Ages, their portrayals of madness are typical of the continental romances on which they are generally based. This typicality makes the romances a useful starting point for a discussion of madness in Middle English literature.

There are contradictory critical opinions about the general attitude towards madness in the romances. Many years ago John Revell Reinhard, in his introduction to the French romance *Amadas et Ydoine*, stated that 'the Middle Ages did not understand lunacy, and so, in literature at least, it was always cured by miraculous, unexplainable means'.³ Reinhard is correct in part: although they are perfectly explicable within a Christian framework of sin and punishment, supernatural cures of madness are common in the romances. Nevertheless, rational

explanations and treatments also abound. In the 1930s, Elizabeth A. Wright found that 'medieval French romances and plays reflect a worldly, comparatively realistic view of mental illness, little influenced by the doctrines of the churchmen'.⁴ The romances often eschew fantastical and supernatural explanations of madness. To take one example, romance heroes do not, like Nebuchadnezzar or the Irish hero Suibhne, physically metamorphosize into beasts during their periods of madness. Despite being referred to as a 'creature' throughout his madness, Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain remains a man.⁵ Clearly, the romances incorporate both supernatural elements and realistic description. Here, as in other genres of medieval literature, madness has a double nature, attesting both to the power of God to chastise sinners and to more secular concerns.

In the non-chivalric romances, the moral interpretation of madness tends to prevail. The hero's madness marks a transition from sinful to holy folly, as in the remarkably popular metrical romance *King Robert of Sicily*.⁶ Like Nebuchadnezzar, Robert is a proud and powerful king who oppresses his subjects and whose crimes are eventually punished by madness. In all the versions of the story, he is chastened by an angel after boasting of his great might. Robert's claims to kingship are taken to be the delusional ravings of a madman; his head is shaved and he becomes a fool.⁷ His appearance alters so much that he is unrecognisable, even to his own brothers, and he is forced to sleep every night with dogs. At his lowest point, he becomes a maniac, tearing his hair and wringing his hands. In the English version of the tale, Robert compares his plight to that of Nebuchadnezzar. Eventually, like his biblical predecessor, he acknowledges the superior might of God and is immediately restored to his senses.

A similar pattern is apparent in the fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gowther*, the English version of the popular Robert the Devil legend.⁸ Gowther, the duke of Austria, is born of a union between his mother and the devil. Like Robert, he abuses his power to oppress the weak, especially those in religious orders. After learning about his diabolical origins, however, Gowther goes to Rome to be

absolved of his sins by the pope. The penance he receives is to adopt the standard trappings of the madman:

'Pow shalt walk norþ and sowþe,
 And gete þi mete owt of houndis mouþ;
 Pis penaunce shalt thow gynne.
 And speke no word, even ne odde,
 Til þow have very wetyng of Godde
 Foryevyn be all þy sinne.' (283-288)⁹

Gowther faithfully follows these directions. First he wanders into a 'fer contree' for three days, where he is fed by a greyhound. He then enters a castle, where he sits in silence beneath the king's banqueting table gnawing a bone brought to him by a spaniel. The courtiers regard him as a madman. After a suitable period of abjection, he becomes 'Godes child' and undergoes a spiritual and social regeneration. By the end of the tale, Gowther has become a saint with the power to cure the insane.

The hero of the fifteenth-century English romance *The Tale of Beryn* undergoes a comparable transformation.¹⁰ Beryn is the spoiled son of a Roman Senator, Faunus, and his wife Agea. As a young man he oppresses and attacks the poor and innocent, behaviour that recalls that of Robert the Devil and which has a similar outcome. Beryn also plays at dice, a conventional fool activity; in short, he is caught in the snare of folly. Eventually the destitute Beryn is forced to wear rags (1295-1298). In this wretched and distracted state he shuns the town and wanders to the church. Like Gowther during his exile, he begins to show the symptoms of insanity, such as an inability to speak (1321-1322).

Naked and held in general 'disdeyn', Beryn begins to repent his youthful folly. Visiting his mother's tomb, he is so bitterly afflicted with grief and remorse for his previous neglect that he loses his senses and collapses (1336-1344). That

Beryn becomes mad through an internal passion rather than some external agency suggests that he has more in common with the knights of Arthurian romance than with figures like Robert of Sicily. When he regains consciousness, he displays the conventional symptoms of mania:

So atte last, when Beryn a litill wakid were,
 He trampelid fast with his feet, & al to-tare his ere
 And his visage both, ry3t as a woodman,
 With many a bittir tere, that from his eyen ran;
 And sighid many a sore sigh, & had much hevynes; (1349-1353)

Only now, in his greatest abjection, does Beryn ask mercy of God for his 'mys-dede & foly' (1362). As in many works of late-medieval literature, madness constitutes a spiritual turning point in the life of the sinner. Like Gowther, Beryn is made to recognize his sinfulness through a period of penitential madness; also like Gowther, he determines to atone for his misdeeds. Beryn now becomes a fool in the eyes of the world by abandoning his worldly privileges and journeying to a foreign and hostile land. Finally, the theme of 'wise folly' is introduced through Beryn's association with a tonsured fool named Geoffrey, who helps the hero to overcome his enemies.

Clearly, the heroes of all of these romances progress from the sinful folly of youth to Christian foolishness, via a brief period of insanity. This pattern, so common in didactic contexts, is apparent in a variety of medieval literary works, including *The Book of Margery Kempe*.¹¹ Madness was clearly an attractive theme to medieval religious writers, who often adapted or interpolated non-Christian material to meet the didactic requirements of their texts. From the viewpoint of the 'religious' romances, madness is a useful metaphor for sinfulness.

The same value is often attached to madness in the chivalric or Arthurian romances, especially, perhaps, in England. In her comparison of the English and

French *Yvain* poems, for example, Penelope Doob has argued that the English romance shows a greater concern with the moral condition of its hero than its continental source.¹² Nevertheless, the briefest comparison of these works with those discussed above indicates the diversity of the works categorized as romances and suggests other, secular meanings of madness. In his article 'The Nature of Romance', W.T.H. Jackson warns against interpreting all medieval romances according to a Christian framework. A secular work, he points out, 'may have its own context of interpretation, its own rules, and its own existence'.¹³ Works like *Sir Gowther* and *King Robert of Sicily* present madness as an isolated blow of fate involving only one individual; moreover, the attitudes towards madness in these romances are uniformly negative. The Arthurian romances, by contrast, present a broader canvas and include a variety of responses to the insanity of their heroes, often depending on the observer's social class; in short, they encourage speculation about the social milieu of madness.

The circumstances of the mad knights of romance are certainly quite different to those of Gowther or Robert of Sicily. First, the madness of the romance knights always takes the form of wildness, the chief symptoms of which are blackness and hairiness and a great capacity for physical violence.¹⁴ Not all wild men, of course, are insane. Perhaps the best-known medieval English Wild Man, the figure of the Giant Herdsman in the fourteenth-century romance *Yvain and Gawain*, is kindly and helpful.¹⁵ Moreover, the sexual aggressiveness of true wild men is not a characteristic of the wild heroes of romance. Finally, genuine wild men, unlike the insane knights, are permanently wild. Thus, as Judith Neaman summarizes, 'the wild knight was a madman not a true wild man'.¹⁶

The earliest romance featuring a wild hero is Chrétien de Troyes's astonishingly influential *Yvain*. Realising that he has breached his promise to his lady, Yvain is ashamed and

would rather be banished alone in some wild land, where no one would know where to seek for him, and where no man or woman would know of his whereabouts any more than if he were in some deep abyss.¹⁷

This melancholia quickly develops into mania: 'Then such a storm broke loose in his brain that he loses his senses; he tears his flesh and, stripping off his clothes, he flees across meadows and fields'; grief-stricken, he runs to the forest, 'senseless and deprived of speech'.¹⁸ Here he finds sustenance at the lodging of a old hermit, who charitably leaves food outside his door, as if for an animal. Yvain also frightens the hermit, who will not venture outside his hut until the deranged knight has departed from the area. Throughout Yvain's period of madness Chrétien, like the author of the Irish *Buile Suibhne*, refers to his hero as if he were describing an animal.

In the English version of *Yvain*, the fourteenth-century metrical romance *Ywain and Gawain*, the hero's animality is exaggerated. Like Chrétien's knight, Ywain wanders in the forest 'Als it wore a wilde beste'; but the English author gives the story a grotesque twist by having his hero drink the 'warm blode' of a freshly killed deer.¹⁹ Penelope Doob suggests that blood-drinking is a traditional remedy for melancholy madness and that its failure to cure Ywain suggests the spiritual nature of his madness.²⁰ Whatever the case, the poet departs significantly from his usual practice of omitting or 'toning down [...] cruel or bloody passages'.²¹

Given this emphasis on the bestial nature of the mad romance hero, it is appropriate to examine late-medieval attitudes towards wildness. The mixture of horror, amusement and admiration that characterized the late-medieval attitude towards wildness is well exemplified in the late romance *Valentine and Orson*. Here the Wild Man, Orson, so terrifies the townsfolk that 'also sone as the men of the vyllage sawe the wylde man, they ranne into their houses, and for great fere

shytte their dores so that none myght entre', an action which recalls the response of the hermit to the wild Yvain; similarly, when Orson's civilized brother Valentine attempts to take Orson to Orleans, the porters shut the gates in fear.²² These reactions are rational: Orson has already proved his capacity for a variety of criminal activities, including theft and rape.²³ From the point of view of civilized society, the wild man is a dangerous and disruptive figure of fantastic carnal appetite. Little wonder that the wildmen or 'wodwos' in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* rank among the hero's bestial adversaries.²⁴

In *Sir Gawain* there is also, however, a degree of thinly disguised admiration for the wildness of Bertilak, who represents the inexorable laws of nature. By the late fourteenth century, wild men had become figures of fascination to civilized people. They were even associated with the royal court: thus Charles VI of France was entertained by men dressed in animal skins; in Capgrave's words, the king was even 'arayed lich a wodwous' himself; and in *The Receyt of the Ladie Kateryne*, three 'woddosys' pull a pageant before the king.²⁵

In *Valentine and Orson*, the positive aspects of wildness are even clearer. When defeated in combat by his brother, Orson submits to his conqueror with good will:

And whan that he [Valentine] had bound hym fast he mounted on horsebacke and ledde him with hym as a beast tyed, without that euer this same Orson didde hym any harme, or made hym an euyl semblaunt, that was a thyng myraculous.²⁶

As the final comment here indicates, the wild man's magnanimous behaviour confounds the pessimistic expectations of civilized society.

By the end of the Middle Ages, then, the Wild Man could be seen as a vehicle for social criticism, like the 'noble savage' favoured by the satirical writers of a later age. The prestige of the Wild Man is indicated by the fact that the

recognition of his nobility is the preserve of the upper class: thus the king in *Valentine and Orson* praises the Wild Man's innate courtliness, remarking that 'how wel that he is roughe, yf he were clothed as we be, he wolde seme a right fayre knyght'.²⁷ As well as functioning as a warning of what may happen to the unwary civilized man, wildness may also disguise true nobility.

The Wild Man is clearly a morally ambiguous figure. Hayden White observes that

by the end of the Middle Ages, the Wild Man has become endowed with two distinct personalities, each consonant with one of the possible attitudes men might assume with respect to society and nature. If one looked upon nature as a horrible world of struggle, as animal nature; and society as a condition which, for all its shortcomings, was still preferable to the natural state, then he would continue to view the Wild Man as the antitype of the desirable humanity, as a warning of what men would fall into if they definitively rejected society and its norms. If, on the other hand, one took his vision of nature from the cultivated countryside, from what might be called herbal nature, and saw society, with all its struggle, as a fall away from the natural perfection, then he might be inclined to populate that nature with wild men whose function was to serve as antitypes of social existence.²⁸

White further suggests that the increasingly positive status of the Wild Man in the late Middle Ages is related to social changes 'in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the social bonds of medieval culture began to disintegrate'.²⁹ As Larry Benson puts it, the positive presentation of wildness 'seems to have had an especially strong appeal to the later period, in which the chivalric ideals of the earlier Middle Ages no longer held unquestioned dominance'.³⁰ It is easy to see

the imaginative appeal of wildness in an age so often described as one of social unrest and spiritual turmoil.³¹

To the medieval mind, wildness, insofar as it involved exclusion from society, implied a loss of humanity. Medieval thought about the relationship between individuals and society followed Aristotle's *Politics*, whose principles are summarized as follows by Scott Meikle:

Society is a natural growth, something constituted by nature. Man is by nature a social animal, and society is not an artificial construct imposed on natural man but a manifestation of human nature itself. Society is the natural form of existence for man, and the capacity for social life is what is specific to humans alone among gregarious animals. [...] One who can exist separately from society and be self-sufficient is either a lower animal or a god, but not a man.³²

The opposition of wildness and order is of great concern to twelfth-century theorists. The conservative view of the ideal organization of society is elaborated in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, a work of seminal importance for medieval political philosophy and which was completed as the wild hero was becoming a central figure in literature. 'Civil life should imitate nature', he writes, 'otherwise, life is duly called not merely uncivil, but rather bestial and brute'.³³ While the natural world could provide a model for human social organisation, those who exist outside society align themselves with anti-nature. From a conservative point of view, therefore, the asocial Wild Man is essentially unnatural and irrational.

Although true wild men and madmen must be distinguished, the interpretation of the Wild Man's popularity as a symptom of increasing dissatisfaction with civilization as it is currently constituted may account for the often positive portrayal of madness in the medieval romances. In the Arthurian romances, the knights are affiliated to an institution, the Round Table, which does

not and cannot recognize the individual desires of its members. Unlike epic heroes, the heroes of romance, as well as fulfilling the demands made on them by society and its institutions, are also irresistibly compelled to pursue their own apparently self-defined goals.

The tension the knights feel between their compulsion to pursue their own ends and the necessity of knightly service often leads to their madness. This theory has been most fully articulated by the Malory critic Robert Merrill, who theorizes that

the general condition of psychosis implies that the "me" or the culturally determined component so totally dominates the "I" component that the "I" cannot find expression except in violent and destructive acts (i.e., marginal behavior), whether against itself or the outside world.³⁴

This highly schematic formulation describes the nature of many cases of madness in medieval literature, such as the maniacal behaviour described at the beginning of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The romances, in particular, repeatedly illustrate its truth. If, as Merrill argues, 'cultural over-determination' is the 'essential character of the late Middle Ages', the insanity of Thomas Malory's knights may be seen as the inevitable product of the conflict between what he calls institutional 'indoctrination' and the knights' desire for self-creation. The result is

a class of psychotics from which a rebel will emerge who will not be content until the old model is thoroughly dismantled. This tragic pattern underlies the careers of the four best knights whose repressed individuality leads to such acts as loving the king's wife, fighting their best friends (optimal means of securing worship) or

the madness in which they alienate themselves from the society that depends on them for its security.³⁵

In Merrill's view, the madness of Malory's knights is due to their 'repressed individuality'.

In the light of much previous medieval scholarship, this view appears problematic in a number of ways. Quite apart from the controversial question of the historical purchase of the Freudian concept of repression, Merrill's theory presupposes that individuality was an intelligible concept in the Middle Ages. Many medievalists remain cautious about this possibility. Karl Weintraub, for example, suggests that the notion of individuality might have been an 'embarrassment' for medieval writers so that expressions of individuality of the sort found in modern, especially autobiographical, literature were rare.³⁶ Nevertheless, many other commentators detect an increasing interest in the individual in the late Middle Ages.

The term 'individual' must be used carefully in an historical context. In the Middle Ages the word *individuum* belonged not to the discourse of human relations, but to that of logic; the semantic shift of the word to its present sense did not happen until the Renaissance.³⁷ The fact that the Middle Ages had no term for 'individuality' or 'individualism' does not imply, however, that what we call individuality was unintelligible in earlier periods.

Colin Morris argues that a variety of factors, including the Church's insistence on regular confession and the rise of portraiture and satirical writing, contributed to, and resulted from, an increasing awareness of individuality in the period 1050-1200.³⁸ A growing concern with expressions of individuality and self-consciousness pervaded late-medieval culture. As one authority on these issues concludes, it is 'one of the most interesting phenomena of the period from the late twelfth century on that we find in entirely different and quite unrelated fields, if not an objection to the conscious norm, at any rate a greater inclination to pay

attention to the individual's own features'.³⁹ Stephen Knight notes some of the manifestations of this impulse in the later period, including the increased mobility created by the development of the market economy and 'the cult of *devotio moderna* which focuses on the private Christian'. 'In literature and art', continues Knight, 'there is a marked development of concern with the individual, in the 'dance of death' motif especially, but also in the development of realism, a mode which bases itself on the validity of the individual sensual response'.⁴⁰

The new emphasis on the individual in the twelfth century is accompanied by an increasing interest in interiority and the inner lives of individuals. A.C. Spearing notes that in the twelfth century there emerged a 'new focus on the inner landscape or subjectivity of the human being -- new at least since Augustine's *Confessions*'.⁴¹ This shift is marked by a range of developments in twelfth-century culture, especially in the area of religious meditation. It was no doubt given impetus by the Lateran Council of 1215, which made it obligatory for all Christians to attend confession at least once a year. If confession, by its nature, involves 'psychological self-examination' and 'increased self-awareness' it must also contribute 'to more refined feelings, to a divided self, to the possibility of realising the self as against the crowd'.⁴² These new confessional practices produced the man of feeling, whose epitome is the romance hero.

The madness of the romance heroes must be understood against this background of an increasing awareness of individuality and interiority. In many works of the twelfth century, such as *Buile Suibhne*, madness is a central theme. Yet Suibhne is hardly a fully self-conscious figure like Chrétien's Yvain or Malory's Tristram. Suibhne becomes mad through an external cause, the curse of St Ronan. But while the heroes of romance may also become mad because of external events such as the breaking of an agreement (Yvain's situation), they also exhibit a high degree of psychological refinement and insight. Judith Neaman states that

with the development of the romance came an increased exploration of the subtler emotions which might move a man to break the ties which bound him to civilisation. [...] Internal compulsion, not an external curse or spell, drives [Chrétien's] hero, Yvain, to plunge from the heights of a mannered and lavish civilisation to the depths of a shabby and disordered primitivism.⁴³

Indeed, Yvain represents a radical individualism that he himself recognizes as a sort of madness. 'My foolish heart draws me there', he remarks at one point; 'I will do as my heart wills'.⁴⁴ From the Christian perspective, of course, exclusive orientation towards the self is inherently sinful; it is included in Augustine's notion of *cupiditas*, 'a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one's self, one's neighbor, or any corporeal thing for the sake of something other than God'.⁴⁵

In the works of Thomas Malory, the wilfulness of the knights is incomprehensible to the representatives of the court, as the story of Balan and Balin shows. After pulling the sword from the stone, Balin becomes thoroughly socialized, while Balan, who virtually disappears from the tale, comes to represent, as Robert Merrill puts it, 'the absolutely unique individual'.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, the two brothers are unable to recognize one another when they meet again at the end of the tale, leading to the combat and the 'dolerous stroke' by which Balin slays his own brother. Merlin's response to this tragedy is revealing. At Balin and Balan's tomb he acknowledges only the civilized Balin:

In the morne cam Merlyn and lete wryte Balyns name on the tombe with letters of gold that 'here lyeth Balyn le Saveage that was the knyght with two swerdes and he that smote the dolorous stroke.' Also Merlyn lete make there a bedde, that ther shold never man lye therin but he wente oute of his wytte. (69-70)⁴⁷

For Merlin, Balan's life outside of society has no value; it is simply dismissed as a sort of insanity.

Lancelot and Tristram are judged insane by their peers for similar reasons. In a remark to Tristram, Dinadan recognizes the self-destructive nature of Malory's two chief knights with a mixture of admiration and aversion:

'But ye fare,' seyde sir Dynadan, 'as a man that were oute of hys mynde that wold caste hymselff away. And I may curse the tyme that ever I sye you, for in all the worlde ar nat such two knightes that ar so wood as ys sir Lancelot and ye, sir Trystram! For onys I felle in the felyshyp of sir Launcelot as I have now with you, and he sette me so a werke that a quarter of a yere I kepte my bedde. Jesus deffende me,' seyde sir Dynadan, 'frome such two knyghtys, and specially frome youre felyshyp.' (379-380)

Dinadan perceives the anti-social and immoderate aspects of Lancelot and Tristram. Like Balin and Balan, whose mighty feats of arms are attributed to magical or diabolical influence, Tristram and Lancelot appear super-human. As Judith Neaman says, 'the hero is inordinate in relation to other men because even his superior qualities arise from a lack of *mésure*'.⁴⁸ For Dinadan, who represents prudence, discretion and moderation, Lancelot and Tristram are insane. His reaction illustrates Neaman's comment that 'the more the tradition of heroic exaggeration pervaded the culture or style of the writer, the more trivial was the deviation which evoked the epithet "mad"'.⁴⁹ Dinadan not only testifies to the knights' foolhardiness in battle, but also hints that their recklessness and wilfulness may lead eventually to outright insanity.

Tristram's loyalties, of course, are divided between King Mark and Isolde. The dilemma of whether Tristram should choose his own or the common good becomes pressing when King Helias challenges Mark. Tristram is torn between his

duty to champion his uncle in battle and his instinct for self-preservation, for he is aware that Mark will try to have him executed later:

'Sir,' seyde sir Trystram, 'now I undirstonde ye wolde have my succour, and reson wolde that I sholde do all that lyyth in me to do, savyng my worshyp and my lyff, howbehit that I am sore brused and hurte. And sytthyn sir Elyas proferyth so largely, I shall fyght with hym'. (469)

Tristram's will here is governed explicitly by 'reson', the faculty which is able to discern the hierarchy of goods. According to reason, Tristram must defend his king, for, as Aquinas asserts, 'right reason judges that the common good is better than the good of the individual'.⁵⁰ But as Robert Merrill points out, Malory 'constructs the situation so that Tristram's own good is precisely the opposite of the good which is rational'.⁵¹ Of course, Tristram is not insane at this point; but it is clear that he can only escape the repressive demands of his fealty by rejecting the imperatives of rationality. Indeed, madness seems to have had a radical appeal in the late Middle Ages. Margery Kempe, as we shall see, presents madness as a token of individual rebellion, while Malory presents Tristram's dilemma in terms which suggest his own continual struggles for freedom from authority. Here, as elsewhere in medieval literature, madness is associated with the conflict between private desire and public expectation.

Vinaver notes that Malory does not dwell on the causes of Tristram's madness.⁵² Suspecting Isolde of an affair with Kayhedins, the forlorn Tristram rides into the forest, where he is treated harshly by the rustics:

And than was he naked, and waxed leane and poore of fleyshe. And so he felle in the felyshyppe of herdmen and sheperdis, and dayly they wolde gyff hym som of their mete and drynke, and whan he

ded ony shrewd dede they wolde beate hym with roddis. And so they clypped hym with sherys and made hym lyke a foole. (369)

It has been said that this passage 'has an unusual quality which one would look for in vain in the *Lay Mortel* inserted in the corresponding place in the Prose Romance'.⁵³ Clearly, Tristram's madness has a special resonance for Malory. Tristram is perceived as a child or an animal that can only be disciplined by crude methods. Despite all his sufferings, however, he nobly defends the shepherds when they are set upon by Dagonet and his squires (371).

Malory emphasizes the pitiable rather than the sinful aspect of Tristram's madness. As Judith Neaman points out, although the King Mark of the *Folie Tristan* poems mocks the madman, both Malory's Mark and Lunette in *Yvain*, 'explicitly state that kind treatment of a madman is an act of charity'.⁵⁴ King Mark's court sees Tristram's madness as an unfortunate affliction. Even although his identity is at first unknown, Tristram is treated 'with fayrenes' when he is found by Mark's knights, who 'keste mantels uppon sir Trystramys, and so lad hym unto Tyntagyll. And there they bathed hym and wayshed hym, and gaff hym hote suppyngis, tulle they had brought hym well to hys remembraunce' (373).

The very different treatments of Tristram by the upper and lower classes recall the divided attitudes towards the mad Lancelot. Lancelot, according to dame Brusen, 'cam into thys contrey lyke a madde man, wyth doggys and boyes chasyng hym thorow the cyté of Corbyn' (613). He is treated compassionately, however, when he is recognized and eventually restored to his wits by Elaine and Brusen. Similarly, the mad French hero Amadas is mocked by 'petit et grant':

Mais tuit cil qui sevent les estres
 Saillent as huis et as fenestres
 Pour la grant merveille esgarder [...]
 Grans est la noise et grans li cris

Des garçons, des enfants petis,
 Qui l'empaignent et qui le batent,
 Qui le descirent, qui le gratent. (2705-2707, 2741-2744)⁵⁵

As the *Amadas* editor John Revell Reinhard comments, 'the people of the Middle Ages regarded the madman as their just prey'; the author of *Amadas*, however, regards his insane hero with the pity proper to a sensitive and cultured man.⁵⁶

Despite the similarities between the treatments of Malory's Lancelot and Tristram at the hands of the upper and lower classes, the two knights undergo quite different sorts of cure. Lancelot is healed of his madness by the Holy Grail whereas Tristram is cured by common sense methods -- a departure from the *Prose Tristan*, in which the manner of Tristram's cure is unclear.⁵⁷ This suggests that we are supposed to take a relatively sympathetic view of Tristram's madness. From our point of view, if not Tristram's, wildness appears to be an escape from social repression. By pursuing the king's wife, he shows that he is 'willing to reject the dictates of social order and to assume his otherness as an individual', even if such a course leads to insanity.⁵⁸

Lancelot's insanity, like Tristan's, grows out of the conflict he feels between his personal desires and courtly expectations. In the early thirteenth-century *Prose Lancelot* he goes mad no fewer than three times. The first two episodes of madness-- Lancelot's madness in prison and later when he fails to find Galehot -- are not particularly significant. Lancelot's final madness, the only one preserved in Malory, is treated more substantially.⁵⁹ Here Lancelot is tricked by the enchantments of dame Brusen into sleeping with Elaine of Corbenic for the second time. When he is discovered by Guinevere, the mortified hero leaps from the window and runs wild in the forest for two years (604).

Despite being cured eventually by a religious relic, those who witness Lancelot's madness take a commonsense approach to his cure. When Sir Blyaunte encounters Lancelot during his madness he judges that the knight has 'more nede

of a slepe and of warme clothis than to welde that swerde' (604). Such reactions recall the commonsense approaches to madness discussed in the previous chapter and contradict Edelgard DuBrock's comment that 'the medieval Christian saw in [the madman] the workings of the devil and had no reason to try to help him'.⁶⁰ Nor is madness, at this point at least, entirely disgraceful. Although capable of incredible violence and despite the torments of the townsfolk of Corbyn, Lancelot's uncivilized behaviour is often commendable. He even breaks the fetters in which he has been placed to save Blyaunte from his attackers (606). Clearly, Lancelot, like Tristram, has much in common with the increasingly popular figure of the Wild Man.

Robert Merrill quotes Freud's opinion that 'a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals' as a way of explaining Lancelot's madness.⁶¹ In Merrill's terminology, Lancelot's madness in the *Prose Lancelot*

appears whenever he is in a position that demonstrates to him that as the flower of knighthood he embodies the explanatory synthesis; it appears because he understands that in submitting himself totally to the quest for the explanatory center he has relinquished everything that might be uniquely his.⁶²

Inevitably, then, Lancelot constantly returns to his self-destructive, and socially impermissible passion for Guinevere. As Stephen Knight observes, 'the dominant theme of "The Tale of Launcelot and Guinevere" is how the private love between those two great characters increasingly disturbs the public life of the Round Table'.⁶³ The courtly requirement of secrecy in love affairs demands that Lancelot's passion must remain private: Lancelot is 'sette inwardly' on the queen 'in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis' (744). For Lancelot and Tristram,

therefore, the pursuit of the ideal of knighthood involves a painful separation of emotions and behaviour.

This point is nowhere more obvious than in Malory's account of Palomides's mental breakdown. Palomides possesses a self-consciousness and a concern with appearances typical of the ostentatious fifteenth century. Like Arthur's other knights, he seeks to win his lady by increasing his 'worship', the precious commodity that underpins the social identities of Arthur's knights. After his humiliating defeat by Tristram, however, he becomes 'araged out of his witte' (400). Following a suitable period of absence from the tale, he reappears as a suicidally melancholic wanderer and eventually suffers a complete crisis of identity. 'Malory', as Knight says, 'has made the forces of private desire urgently pressing' to the extent that they drive the hero to distraction:⁶⁴

So uppon a day, in the dawninge, sir Palomydes wente into the foreste by hymselff alone; and there he founde a well, and anone he loked into the welle and in the watir he sawe hys owne vysage, how he was discolowred and defaded, a nothyng lyke as he was. 'Lorde Jesu, what may this meane?' seyde sir Palomydes. And thus he seyde to hymselff: 'A, Palomydes, Palomydes! Why arte thou thus defaded, and ever was wont to be called one of the fayrest knyghtes of [the] worlde? Forsothe, I woll no more lyve this lyff, for I love that I may never gete nor recover.' (576-577)

The self-referential language of the passage indicates a deep sense of self-division. The faded knight seen in the well is the public man who is perceived by the 'inner' Palomides with disgust. This recognition prompts Palomides's determination to commit suicide with his sword, the only object which can earn him vital 'worship'. Since it involves treating oneself as both the subject and the object of

the act, suicide is the ultimate expression of self-division: Palomides is unable to live with himself.

A similar scene occurs in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. During his exile in Thebes, Arcite suffers the classic symptoms of lovesickness, the 'loveris maladye / Of Hereos'.⁶⁵ He is also afflicted by a form of madness which Chaucer describes, characteristically, in the terminology of faculty psychology:

And in his geere for al the world he ferde
 Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye
 Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye,
 Engendred of humour malencolik
 Biforen, in his celle fantastik.
 And shortly, turned was al up so doun
 Bothe habit and eek disposicioun
 Of hym, this woful lovere daun Arcite. (1372-1379)

Despite the equivalence between Arcite's inner condition and his external appearance, madness here brings about a split between inner and outer, between 'habit' and 'disposicioun'. After he has bemoaned his separation from his lady, Arcite himself perceives this bifurcation in an act of self-reflection which recalls Palomides's:

[...] he caughte a greet mirour,
 And saugh that chaunged was al his colour,
 And saugh his visage al in another kynde.
 And right anon it ran hym in his mynde
 That, sith his face was so disfigured
 Of maladye the which he hadde endured,
 He myghte wel, if that he bar hym lowe,

Lyve in Atthenes everemoore unknowe. (1399-1406)

In both style and content this looks forward to the scene in Thomas Hoccleve's *Complaint* in which the melancholy poet scrutinizes his face in his mirror. As the passage switches between Arcite's thoughts and his appearance, Arcite is aware of himself as both a suffering subject and a shameful object in the eyes of others. As in the works of Hoccleve and Margery Kempe, madness in the romances involves an acute sense of self-division.

In the cases of Palomides and Arcite, madness is spectacular. As the critic Duncan Salkeld writes, madmen, until at least the time of Descartes, 'presented a spectacular physical image, and bore their illness in the flesh and matter of their bodies'.⁶⁶ When Malory's Lancelot goes mad and jumps from the window, for example, Elaine tells Guinevere that she has lost her lover: 'for I saw and harde by his countenance that he is madde for ever' (594). However, unlike the Hoccleve of the *Complaint*, whose mirror-searching is discussed later, neither Palomides nor Arcite questions whether or not the reflected image he sees is trustworthy; there is no room for doubt about his true mental condition.

Melancholy in medieval romance, then, is characterized by consciousness of the body, a body that instantly betrays inner anguish in discolouration and disfigurement. In Arthurian romances, as Judith Neaman observes, 'every internal change is set forth as an image [...] so medieval authors externalized states of mind, setting them in loci, investing them with movements, portraying them with features immediately recognisable to the reader'.⁶⁷ The difference between the chivalric romances and other literary genres such as epics, however, is one of perspective: the spectacle of madness is available not only to those who observe the madman, but also to the madman himself.

Palomides, Arcite and the other distracted knights, then, are exquisitely self-conscious during their identity crises. Chrétien de Troyes's description of Yvain's spectacular madness contains a sense of the hero's sinful falling away

from the ideal of knighthood. Thus a damsel reports her discovery of Yvain to her mistress:

My lady, I have found Yvain, who has proved himself to be the best knight in the world, and the most virtuous. I cannot imagine what sin has reduced the gentleman to such a plight. I think he must have had some misfortune, which causes him thus to demean himself, for one may lose his wits through grief. And any one can see that he is not in his right mind. Would that God had restored him to the best sense that he ever he had, and would that he might then consent to render assistance in your cause.

When Yvain regains consciousness after his insanity, he finds himself beneath the tree where he has fallen asleep and

sees that he is as naked as ivory, and feels much ashamed; but he would have been yet more ashamed had he known what had happened. As it is, he knows nothing but that he is naked. [...] But he is ashamed and concerned because of his nakedness, and says that he is dead and utterly undone if anyone has come across him there and recognised him. Meanwhile, he clothes himself and looks out into the forest to see if any one is approaching.⁶⁸

This sensitivity about madness is shared by many of those who witness madness. To spare Yvain unnecessary embarrassment, the lady who discovers Yvain at first pretends not to have seen the hero, allowing him first to catch sight of her. Here again, madness is associated with an exquisite consciousness of the body. The shameful spectacle may be mocked by the lower classes; but as the experience of Thomas Hoccleve attests, it is a sight from which the refined avert their gaze.

These attitudes towards madness are retained in the English adaptation of Chrétien's romance, *Ywain and Gawain*.⁶⁹ The association between madness and the sleep beneath the tree is, of course, a Celtic motif which features in other English romances such as *Sir Orfeo*. More importantly, however, this detail, together with the nakedness and shame of Yvain/Ywain on his recovery, strongly suggests the circumstances of Adam and Eve after the Fall.

Malory's Lancelot, on his recovery from madness, is particularly anxious that no-one should hear of his disgrace:

'Sir', seyde dame Elayne, 'into thys contrey ye cam lyke a mased man, clene oute of youre wytte. And here have ye ben kepte as a foole, and no cryature here knew what ye were, untill by fortune a mayden of myne brought me unto you whereas ye lay slepyng by a well. And anone as I veryly behylde you [I knewe you]. Than I tolde my fadir, and so were ye brought afore thys holy vessell, and by the vertu of hit thus were ye heled.'

'A, Jesu, mercy!' seyde sir Launcelot. 'Yf this be sothe, how many be there that knowyth of my woodnes?'

'So God me helpe,' seyde dame Elayne, 'no mo but my fadir, and I, and dame Brusen.'

'Now, for Crystes love,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'kepe hit counceyle and lat no man knowe hit in the worlde! For I am sore ashamed that I have been myssefortuned. (610)

Lancelot's shame proceeds from his departure from the codes of knighthood and from his sense of sinfulness. As Beverly Kennedy notes, Lancelot now takes the name 'Le Shyvalere Ill Mafeete, that ys to sey "the knyght that hath trespassed"' (611) and later refers to his 'foly' 'in a way which suggests that he regards his madness as a punishment for his sexual sin'.⁷⁰

Madness and the Fall are explicitly associated in the little-read *Partonope of Blois*, a fifteenth-century English translation of a twelfth-century French romance.⁷¹ Having betrayed his mistress, the eponymous hero compares his plight to that of Adam, who also 'loste paradyse thorowe hys folye' (6471). He then leaves civilization for the forest where, like other melancholic heroes, he wanders alone, naked and emaciated (6644-6672).

The story of the Fall, then, clearly underpins the presentation of madness in the romances, connecting the melancholy of the romance heroes with their moral transgressions. Norbert Elias argues that the Fall involved a 'step on the way to a new form of self-consciousness'. 'In paradise', he explains,

the ancestors of mankind were unaware of their nakedness; then they ate the forbidden fruit of knowledge and became aware of their nakedness. We find here a vivid expression of how closely the increase in self-consciousness is bound up with an increase of conscience.⁷²

Elias also notes how the experience of shame leads to the individual's sense of himself as a subject:

It is [...] this conflict within the individual, this "privatisation", the exclusion of certain spheres of life from social intercourse and the association with them of socially instilled anxiety, such as feelings of shame or embarrassment, which arouses within the individual the feeling that he is "inwardly" something quite separate, that he exists without relation to other people.⁷³

Madness, of course, does not necessarily 'implicate an interiorised condition of subjectivity'.⁷⁴ Indeed, certain forms of insanity, at least for their duration, entail

a diminution rather than an increase in insight. Nevertheless, the experience of melancholy madness described in the romances and many other medieval works of literature is characterized by guilt, self-consciousness and a sense of social alienation of the kind described by Elias.

In these 'secular' romances, the significance of madness is quite different from that in didactic works such as *Sir Gowther* and *King Robert of Sicily*. Those romances concentrate on the hero's transition from unholy to holy folly and present a traditional view of the ideal form of human existence, according to which madness is temporary social and moral exile. The chivalric romances, by contrast, take a more ambiguous view of madness, challenging Doob's thesis that madness always implies spiritual turpitude. In these works madness may be read as a form of rebellion against over-determined or repressive society.

This does not mean that the chivalric romances regard all cases of madness alike. In Malory, for example, the madness of Arthur's two chief knights are treated very differently. Although he is abused by the shepherds, the mad Tristan is treated well by the upper class and is cured by natural means, in keeping with Malory's tendency to reduce the importance of the supernatural or marvellous elements he found in his sources. Clearly, madness could inspire sympathy, perhaps because of the relatively positive late-medieval attitude towards wildness. On the other hand, Lancelot's madness, like that of Gowther or Beryn, is the shameful token of his sinful 'foly' and it can be cured only by a supernatural means. A similar double attitude towards madness is used in a quite different way in *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

What is common to all of the romances is the conception of madness as a spectacle. Sometimes this spectacularity takes the form of public vilification, as in the case of Amadas or Lancelot. On other occasions, however, the melancholic knights perceive for themselves their inner degradation by scrutinising their appearance. In both cases madness entails self-consciousness and self-reflection and an awareness of difference from others. This is particularly apparent in

Malory, whose works are far more concerned with individual psychology than are their sources. From the very beginning, the romances contain the sorts of tortured psychological experiences that characterize Thomas Hoccleve's autobiographical account of his madness.

Indeed, the central position of madness in medieval romance, a genre frequently denounced by orthodox spokesmen as frivolous and insignificant, suggests a general cultural movement towards individualism in a collapsing feudal order. Malory's work, as one commentator has said, may be 'a dream of a world past, recreated in imagination amid the cruder realities of a changed society'; by the same token, however, it also bears witness to the social concerns of its own unstable times.⁷⁵ Malory's treatment of madness, like that of his contemporaries, attests to the tension between individuals and society. Unlike Hoccleve's *Series* or even Kempe's *Book*, the romances seldom make madness a central concern; nevertheless, insanity bears the same meaning here as in those works. Explicit moral interpretations of madness do not detract from the significance of insanity as a manifestation of cultural alienation, whose existence official culture simultaneously denied and made necessary.

Notes to Chapter 2

- 1 Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.2; Lynn White Jr, 'Death and the Devil', in *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance: Beyond the Fields of Reason*, ed. by Robert S. Kinsman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp.25-46 (p.26).
- 2 Of the twelfth-century *Vita Merlini* J.S.P. Tatlock writes 'after search and consideration I find it [insanity] making no such striking and essential appearance anywhere at all in imaginative literature (except in Greek tragedy and a single case in the younger Seneca) before the *Vita Merlini*, and not at all prominent even in medical writings until after the dates involved here'. 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*', *Speculum* 18.3 (1943), 265-287 (p.285-286).
- 3 Reinhard, p.119.
- 4 'Medieval Attitudes Toward Mental Illness', *Bulletin of the History of English Medicine*, 7 (1939), 352-356 (p.356).
- 5 Fritz, p. 315. For Yvain see Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by W. Wistar Comfort (London: Everyman, 1975).
- 6 For *King Robert of Sicily* see *Middle English Metrical Romances*, ed. by Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, 2 vols (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930). For variants of this tale see Lillian Herlands Hornstein, 'King Robert of Sicily: Analogues and Origins', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America*, 79 (1964), 13-21. For a discussion of this story and that of Robert the Devil see Welsford, pp.125-126.
- 7 On the tonsure as a token of folly see Jean-Marie Fritz, *Le discours du fou au Moyen Age* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), pp.39-44;

- see also Philippe Ménard, 'Les fous dans la Société Médiéval: Le Témoignage de la littérature au XIIe et au XIIIe siècle', *Romania*, 98 (1977), 433-459 (pp.436-439).
- 8 For *Sir Gowther* I follow the text in *The Breton Lays in Middle English*, ed. by Thomas C. Rumble (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965).
- 9 On the association of fools and dogs see Francesca Sautman, 'Les Metamorphoses du Fou à la Fin du Moyen Age', in *Pour une Mythologie du Moyen Age: études rassemblées par Laurance Harf-Lancner et Dominique Boutet* (Paris: Ecole Normal Supérieure, 1988), pp.197-216 (p.206).
- 10 The tale is based on the first section of the French romance *Bérinus: Roman en prose du XIVe siècle*, ed. by Robert Bossaut, 2 vols (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1931).
- 11 In fact, *The Book of Margery Kempe* exhibits many of the structural features of the medieval romances. See Maureen Fries, 'Margery Kempe' in Paul E. Szarmach, *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp.217-235 (p.219).
- 12 *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.141.
- 13 W.T.H. Jackson, 'The Nature of Romance', *Yale French Studies*, 51 (1975), 12-25, (p.15).
- 14 Benson, pp.72-90.
- 15 *Ywain and Gawain*, ed. by Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington (London: EETS 254, 1964), pp.8-9, 243-312.
- 16 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.268.
- 17 Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, p.216.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 *Ywain and Gawain*, 1654, 1669.
- 20 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.147.
- 21 *Ywain and Gawain*, Introduction, p.lvii.

- 22 *Valentine and Orson*, ed. by Arthur Dickson, trans. by Henry Watson (London: EETS os 204, 1937), pp.71-73.
- 23 *Valentine and Orson*, p.64.
- 24 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by Theodore Silverstein (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), p.55, 721.
- 25 Capgrave, p.201; *The Receyt of the Ladie Kateryne*, ed. by Gordon Kipling (Oxford: EETS 296, 1990), p.75.
- 26 *Valentine and Orson*, p.70.
- 27 *Valentine and Orson*, p.73.
- 28 Hayden White, 'The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea', in *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. by E. Dudley and M.E. Novak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), pp.3-38 (p.28).
- 29 Hayden White, p.22.
- 30 Benson, p.80. Benson is summarising the argument of Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp.106-120.
- 31 The fifteenth-century, for Edward P. Cheyney, is one 'of restlessness, of criticism, of insurgency against fixed conditions'. *The Dawn of a New Era* (New York: Harper, 1936), p.226.
- 32 Scott Meikle, 'The metaphysics of substance in Marx', in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. by Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.296-319 (p.305). For the last assertion see Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. by Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), I.2, p.37.
- 33 John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. and trans. by Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6.21, p.127.
- 34 Robert Merrill, *Sir Thomas Malory and the Cultural Crisis of the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p.239.

- 35 Robert Merrill, p.141; pp.238-239.
- 36 Karl Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.71.
- 37 Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, ed. by M. Schröter, trans. by E. Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.161; see also Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (London: SPCK, 1972), p.64.
- 38 Morris, passim.
- 39 Ullman, p.104.
- 40 Stephen Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.146.
- 41 A.C. Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.182.
- 42 Derek Brewer, *English Gothic Literature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), p.25.
- 43 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.220.
- 44 Morris, p.136.
- 45 See *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. by D.W. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobb-Merrill, 1958), p.88; Robert Merrill, p.290.
- 46 Robert Merrill, p.146.
- 47 All quotations from Malory are taken from the most widely available text, *The Works of Thomas Malory*, ed. by Eugène Vinaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).
- 48 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.280.
- 49 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.272.
- 50 Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1962), II.2, p.138.
- 51 Robert Merrill, pp.289-290.
- 52 Vinaver, III, p.1472.

- 53 Ibid.; See *Le Roman en Prose de Tristan*, ed. by E. Löseth (Paris: Macon, 1890), p.68.
- 54 Neaman p.281.
- 55 *Amadas et Ydoine*, ed. by John R. Reinhard (Paris: Libraire de la Société des Anciens textes Français, 1926).
- 56 Reinard, p.158.
- 57 *Roman en Prose de Tristan*, ed. by E. Löseth (Paris: Macon, 1890).
- 58 Jacqueline T. Schaefer, 'Spectacularity in the Medieval *Folie Tristan* Poems or Madness as Metadiscourse', *Neophilologus*, 77.3 (1993), 355-368 (p.365).
- 59 See *Lancelot*, in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 7 vols (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908-1916) III, IV, V. On Lancelot's bouts of madness see Reinhard, p.116-117.
- 60 DuBrock, p.180.
- 61 Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, trans. by J. Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), p.34.
- 62 Robert Merrill, p.297.
- 63 Knight, *Arthurian Literature*, p.129.
- 64 Knight, *Arthurian Literature*, p.146.
- 65 *Knight's Tale*, 1373-1374. See John Livingston Lowes, 'The Loveris Maladye of Hereos', *Modern Philology*, 11 (1913-14), 491-546; M. Ciavolella, 'Medieval Medicine and Arcite's Love-Sickness', *Florilegium*, 1 (1979), 222-241; Mary F. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).
- 66 Salkeld, p.76.
- 67 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.262.
- 68 Chrétien de Troyes, p.219.

- 69 *Ywain and Gawain*, 1793-1794.
- 70 *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), p.249.
- 71 *Partonope of Blois*, ed. by A. Trampe Bödtker, (London: EETS es 109, 1912).
- 72 Elias, p.105.
- 73 Elias, pp.121-122.
- 74 George MacLennan, *Lucid Interval: Subjective writing and madness in history* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), p.5.
- 75 Margaret Greaves, *The Blazon of Honour* (London: Methuen, 1964), p.46.

Chapter 3

'Reson en bestialité': Madness, Animality and Social Class in Book I of Gower's *Vox Clamantis*

Eric Auerbach long ago pointed out that courtly culture 'was decidedly unfavorable to the development of a literary art which should apprehend reality in its full breadth and depth'.¹ To turn from the medieval romances to John Gower's *Vox Clamantis* is to turn from a genre in which social realities are implicit to one which directly and boldly concerns itself with the condition of late fourteenth-century England. We also move from presentations of madness as an abstract token of moral disruption or cultural dissatisfaction to the specific deployment of the language of madness in an account of a major historical event -- the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. In short, the *Vox* shows how the social and moral significances of madness revealed in the romances could function at the level of an explicit ideology.

Reason is central in Gower's moral philosophy. As C.S. Lewis points out, 'nearly all moralists before the eighteenth century regarded Reason as the organ of morality'.² George Coffman even argues that for Gower, man's ethics are guided primarily by this faculty.³ Accordingly, sin involves the abandonment of reason. Especially important in Gower's major works -- in particular the first book of the *Vox Clamantis* -- is the longstanding clerical association of insanity, sin and animality. In its graphic presentation of the 1381 rebels as unreasoning animals, the *Vox* constitutes the most substantial medieval illustration of the polemical use of the language of madness.

Stories of human metamorphosis abounded in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, functioning as moral exempla in medical as well as literary texts. We have already noted the extraordinarily influential story of Nebuchadnezzar's

transformation into an ox and its moral significance for medieval writers. As Robert Burton explains, the transformation of human beings into animals implies vanity and madness:

We, as long as we are ruled by reason, correct our inordinate appetite, and conforme our selves to Gods word, are as so many living Saints: but if wee give reines to Lust, Anger, Ambition, Pride, and follow our owne wayes, wee degenerate into beasts, transforme our selves, overthrowe our constitutions, provoke God to Anger, and heap upon us this of Melancholy, and all kindes of incurable diseases, as a just and deserved punishment for our sinnes.⁴

The man who loses his reason through sin, then, becomes an animal. Like Aristotle, late-medieval churchmen saw man as a compound of the two quite separate qualities of animality and rationality. As Maria Wickert puts it, 'man equals animal plus *ratio*. By a reversal of the equation, man, if his *ratio* loses control, becomes an animal. That is neither allegory nor poetic display, but a kind of theological mathematics'.⁵ As Burton implies, the metamorphosis of a man into an animal was a heinous degradation. The Aristotelian definition of man served not to link humanity and the beasts, but to expel animals from the privileged realm of order and hence from human fellowship. As Michel Foucault puts it, 'why should the fact that Western man has lived for two thousand years on his definition as a rational animal necessarily mean that he has recognised the possibility of an order common to reason and to animality?'.⁶

The wilful adoption of the appearance of animals was regarded as an especially sinful perversion in the late Middle Ages. Jacques de Vitry relates the following cautionary story:

I have heard of one man who, wishing to do penance, even as he had likened himself to the beasts in sin, so he would make himself like to a beast in his food; wherefore he rose up at dawn and browsed on grass without touching it with his hands; and thus he would oftentimes eat daily.⁷

When this 'voluntary Nebuchadnezzar' wonders what order of angels he should be allowed to join after such abject penance, he receives a humbling rebuke from a heavenly voice:

'By such a life thou hast not deserved to be of the Order of Angels, but rather of the Order of Asses. For, as saith St. Bernard: "He who hath not lived as a man shall live as a beast"'; so this man fell from discretion into presumption.⁸

The story exemplifies the intimate connection of sin, madness and brutishness in clerical writings.

The Nebuchadnezzar story was clearly a favourite among didactic authors in the Middle Ages, functioning as a warning to the powerful to shun the vice of pride; in the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower himself tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into an ox.⁹ The relevance of such stories to the lower classes is not immediately obvious: since medieval churls did not wield political power, the idea of a mad peasant was largely redundant. The *Vox Clamantis*, however, like many other contemporary texts, reflects a widespread official fear at the attempts of the rebels of 1381 to challenge and even seize power. Unsurprisingly, such presumption is perceived by Gower as utter madness.

The chroniclers of the Revolt attribute the mad brutishness of the rioters to their sinfulness. If sin is ubiquitous, corrupting even those of high degree, its stigma nevertheless attaches most firmly to the lower class. As Chaucer's Parson

puts it, 'Every synful man is a cherl to synne'.¹⁰ Despite its apparent even-handedness, this remark cynically reinforces the widespread notion of the peasantry as a degenerate class. The man of high degree is degraded by his sin; the peasant, on the other hand, is of a lower moral calibre by birth. As Lee Patterson has argued, this emphasis on the medieval peasant's spiritual inferiority is based on a peculiar misrepresentation of Augustinian ideas which resulted in his definition as 'belonging to another order of being, as a member of a different race, a nonhuman'.¹¹

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the language of madness, possession and brutishness dominates clerical descriptions of social disturbances involving the lower classes. This is particularly evident in condemnations of popular churchyard dances, which often involved transvestism or dressing as animals. Such behaviour incurs severe penalties in medieval penitentials. 'If anyone [does] what many do on the Kalends of January as was done hitherto among the pagans', says the *Burgundian Penitential*, 'seats himself on a stag, as it is called, or goes about in [the guise of] a calf, he shall do penance for three years, for this is demoniacal'.¹² The *Penitential of St Hubert*, meanwhile, recommends three years of penance for 'anyone who performs dances in front of the churches of saints or anyone who disguises his appearance in the guise of a woman or of beasts'.¹³

As Judith Neaman writes, 'if men, by indulging in pagan rites, mimic the beasts or pervert the human forms which God gave them, they bring upon themselves the anathema of the Church'.¹⁴ Thus St Aurelius 'condemns men who cover themselves with the hides of animals and dance in the heads of animals so that they "do not seem to be men"', and St Peter Chrysologus calls such bestial rites '*vanitas, qualis dementia*' (a foolishness like a dementia).¹⁵ The following citation from Johannes Crysostomus in the pseudo-Bonaventura's *Pharetra* is particularly germane to Gower's vision of the revolters:

Comparatus est, ait propheta, homo iumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est eis. Peius est comparari quam nasci. Naturaliter non habere rationem tolerabile est, verum ratione decoratum irrationabili creature comparari voluntatis est crimen non nature.

[Man is compared, says the prophet, to the foolish beasts of burden, and he became like them. It is worse to be likened to one than to be born [one?]. To lack reason by nature is bearable, but to liken a creature endowed with reason to a brute beast is to level an accusation against his will and not his nature].¹⁶

Later in the Middle Ages John of Salisbury complains that

human dignity is manifestly thrown away if man devotes himself to being on the same level with, if not goats and pigs, then lions and panthers, leopards and satyrs, peacocks, nightingales and parrots, or any beasts or insensate creatures whatsoever.¹⁷

'Who of those who affect the endowments of beasts', he continues, 'deem it proper for themselves actually to be beasts?'.¹⁸ St Maximius comments that

the langour of those is more serious and incurable who are deceived by the sweetness of delusions and are unhealthy in the guise of outward health. Are not all of those false and mad (*falsa et insana*) since they were made by God, when they change into sheep or beasts or monsters [of depravity]?¹⁹

Maximius is referring here to internal rather than external changes, which are 'all the more iniquitous because they are so hard to detect'.²⁰ It is precisely such inner transformations that Gower detects in the hearts of the rebels of 1381. Clearly,

while they are generally characterized as outbursts of random, demented action, both social revolt and the sorts of church dances described above imply a degree of organization that is deeply disturbing to the authorities.

Book I of the *Vox Clamantis* constitutes a lengthy and vehement denunciation of the sinful, irrational and bestial behaviour of the peasants during the Revolt. No doubt civil disobedience provoked allegations of madness in England both before and after the Revolt. In 1194 the leader of an uprising in London, William Fitzosbert, is called mad in an official account of the event. Three hundred years later Adam of Usk refers to the 'savage fury' of the workmen who beheaded the Lord Despencer at Bristol.²¹ But as Lee Patterson has shown, during the 1381 Revolt the language of insanity and demonic possession is ubiquitously invoked by conservative commentators. Thus the leader of the rebels, John Ball, is described by Henry Knighton as 'a most famous preacher to the laity', who for many years 'had sowed the word of God in a most foolish manner'. Thomas Walsingham, meanwhile, blames Ball for spreading 'the perverse doctrines of the perfidious John Wycliffe, and the insane opinions that he held'.²² As Patterson says,

for Walsingham, the Revolt as a whole is an expression of the *insania nativorum* -- the madness of bondmen -- and his account is [...] saturated with terms like *dementes*, *irrationibile*, and *stulti* and invokes throughout the language of satanic possession: the rebels are *ganeones daemoniaci* (children of the devil), perhaps even *peiores daemonibus* (worse than devils).²³

The response of the English rebels to such rhetoric was to insist on their dignity and rationality. According to John Ball, for example, the disordered state of England could only be set to rights by 'prudent men'.²⁴

The association between madness and social and moral revolt is already prominent in Gower's first long work, the Anglo-French *Mirour de L'Omme*. Here Gower identifies the sins with animal nature. The source of all sin in the world, he says, is man, the 'Beste [...] A qui dieus ad reson donné' (*MO*, 26789-26790).²⁵ Like other churchmen, Gower sees the man lacking reason as both bestial and immoral. Sin causes man to lose his rationality, turning 'reson en bestialité' (*MO*, 24).

These ideas are elaborated in Book VII of the *Vox Clamantis*, which was written before Book I:

Et sic bruta quasi perdit humanae rationis
 Virtus, dum vicium corporis acta regit.
 Est homo nunc animal dicam, set non rationis,
 Dum viuit bruti condicione pari.
 Nescia scripture brutum natura gubernat,
 Iudicis arbitrium nec rationis habet:
 Est igitur brutis homo peior, quando voluntas
 Preter naturam sola gubernat eum. (7.1171-1178)

[And so the power of human reason perishes as if it were that of a beast, so long as vice governs the actions of the body. Now, I should say that man is an animal, but not a rational animal, as long as he lives in a condition like a brute beast's. A nature ignorant of learning governs a beast, and it has no power of judgement or reason. Man is therefore worse than a beast when his will alone governs him contrary to nature].²⁶

Two passages from the *Mirour* illustrate the social application of Gower's theological thinking about madness. The first concludes the section dealing with the peasantry in Gower's discussion of the estates:

Mais certes c'est un grant error

Veoir l'estat superiour

El danger d'un vilein estant.

Me semble que la litargie

Ad endormi la seignourie,

Si qu'ils de la commune gent

Ne pernont garde a la folie [...]

Car ja ne serront arrestuz

Par resoun ne par discipline. (*MO*, 26482-26504)

[But certainly it is a great error to see the higher class intimidated by the peasant class. It seems to me that lethargy has so put the nobility to sleep that they do not guard against the folly of the common people [...] for they will not be stopped by reason or by discipline].²⁷

Although unique, Gower's prognostication of the Revolt is far from uncanny, especially if one regards peasant revolts as natural to seigneurial regimes.²⁸ News of the French *Jacquerie* of 1358 no doubt made an impression on English imaginations, especially at a time of increasing peasant discontent.²⁹ Gower clearly perceives the danger of a peasant insurrection some five years before the event; and the rhetoric of madness which pervades Book I of the *Vox* is already in evidence here.

The second passage, in which Gower introduces the image of the peasants as so many animals, also anticipates the events of 1381:

Qant pié se lievre contre teste,

Trop est la guise deshonneste;

Et ensi qant contre seignour

Les gens sicomme salvage beste
 En multitude et en tempeste
 Se lievent, c'est un grant erreur;
 Et nopourquant la gent menour
 Diont que leur superiour
 Donnent la cause du moleste,
 C'est de commune le clamour:
 Mais tout cela n'est que folour,
 Q'au siecle nul remede preste. (*MO*, 27229-27240)

[When the foot rebels against the head the behavior is wholly illegitimate; thus when the people rise up like savage beasts in tempestuous multitude against the nobleman, it is a great mistake. And notwithstanding, the inferior people say that their superiors give the cause for their injury -- this is the common cry. But all this is but folly for which there is no immediate remedy].³⁰

The first lines invoke what has become known as the 'organic analogy' of society. Although of classical pedigree, this social model was first applied to the feudal Middle Ages by John of Salisbury in the *Policraticus*, a work of monumental significance for subsequent political philosophy.

According to John's model, human society is a reflection of a divine ideal. A properly functioning society is like a healthy human body; the disordered human body, on the other hand, is a metaphor for social disruption and revolt. The head of the feudal body, of course, is the sovereign. 'The feet', according to Salisbury, 'are the name of those who exercize the humbler duties, by whose service all the members of the republic may walk along the earth. In this accounting may be included all the peasants who always stick to the land'.³¹ The organic analogy remained popular in the late Middle Ages, appearing in such diverse works as the

writings of the fourteenth-century bishop Thomas Brinton and the fifteenth-century political poem 'The Descryving of Mannes Membres'.³²

For conservative theorists such as John 'the human body becomes a useful image [...] because it stresses the subordination of the parts to the whole, and the inability of the parts to function as independent and self-sufficient units'.³³ John's model of society describes not the teeming aggregate of competing individuals of later political philosophy, but a hierarchical structure held together by natural or pietal, rather than contractual bonds. This is the ideal form of human society whose unattainability is lamented in the *Paradiso* and the *Monarchia* and it no more corresponds to reality than Dante's vision; indeed, the organic society, as radical critics so frequently remind us, seems to have been in decay since its inception.³⁴

The view that medieval society was homogenous and harmonious has nevertheless found many twentieth-century defenders. The classic and much attacked articulation of this position is D.W. Robertson's statement that 'the medieval world was innocent of our profound concern for tension. [...] We project dynamic polarities on history as class struggles, balances of power, or as conflicts between economic realities and traditional ideals. [...] But the medieval world with its quiet hierarchies knew nothing of these things'.³⁵ Yet Gower's community was not as unified as he and other promoters of the organic analogy might have wished. Although there is no space to rehearse the arguments here, many recent studies suggest that class relations were far from harmonious and that market competition threatened the cohesion of late-medieval English society.³⁶ Gower did not, of course, perceive the disintegration of feudalism and the rise of capitalism; on the contrary, the feudal system is the only social order he could have understood. Like many others, however, he is clearly troubled by the increasing autonomy of certain social groups. The author of the early fifteenth-century *Dives and Pauper* shares the same concern. 'Euery man', he complains,

wil ben his owyn man & folwyn his owyn fantasyys & despysyn her souereynys, her doom & her gouernance ne 3euyn no tale of Goddis lawe ne of londys lawe ne of holy chiche ne han men of vertue ne of dignete in worchepe but for pride han hem in dispyt and ben besy to worchepyn hemself in hyndryng of opere.³⁷

Clearly, by the late fourteenth century an embarrassing disparity is apparent between feudal ideology and social realities.

For Gower, as for the author of *Dives and Pauper*, the collapse of social hierarchy is attributable to individual pride, a sin punishable by madness. But this should not prevent us from discussing the economic reasons for social change in the late Middle Ages. At the bottom end of society, major economic changes were affecting the relationships between peasants and their masters. Peasants began to enjoy greater mobility in the labour market, so that laws against higher wages had to be introduced to prevent them from leaving their natural lords. Moreover, the historian Rodney Hilton observes that during the period from 1350 to 1450 a 'relative land abundance was combined, for various reasons, with a relaxation of seigneurial domination and a notable lightening of the burden on the peasant economy' so that 'peasant society, in spite of still existing within (in broad terms) a feudal framework, developed according to laws of motion internal to itself'.³⁸ The result was a growing economic self-sufficiency and self-confidence among the peasantry.

For Gower, as for many of his contemporaries, the only answer to these alarming developments was to restate and attempt to uphold official ideology. As John Fisher succinctly says of the two passages from the *Mirour de L'Homme* quoted above:

both passages represent the practical application of the theories of law and order emerging at the end of the *Mirour*. Reason and human law supported the social hierarchy just as natural law supported the natural hierarchy. Rebellion against the social hierarchy represented rebellion against reason and law, and ultimately against the divinely instituted universal order, and it reduced the rebels to the level of unreasoning beasts.³⁹

The *Mirour de L'Omme*, then, introduces both the theological framework and the social vision informing the first book of *Vox Clamantis* and reflects the uneasiness of the seigneurial class about the increasing autonomy of the peasantry.

Book I of the *Vox* was added by Gower as an afterthought to an already extensive work.⁴⁰ It has many artistic flaws, chiefly a lachrymose monotony. Even so, as Eric W. Stockton opines, 'Gower's account of the revolt is the most interesting and original part of the *Vox Clamantis*'.⁴¹ It is also Gower's final damning judgement of society. Although an afterthought, Book I graphically depicts the disintegration of a community, the various causes of which are analysed in more leisurely fashion in the remaining books. Even disregarding the first book's overwhelming concern with madness, then, it is not unreasonable to restrict our interest in the *Vox* to the first book.

The Book begins with an idyllic description of England shortly before the Revolt in June 1381. The narrator, basking in sunshine and listening to birdsong, admires the plenitude of nature. This paradisiacal experience is, of course, entirely fictitious both in terms of the state of English society before the Revolt and from the point of view of Gower's own expectations: in the *Mirour* Gower had already acknowledged peasant discontent and had anticipated their rising. Book I's utopic vision, then, has dramatic rather than historical validity. A hideous transformation of the natural order is about to take place, one which is clearly intended to mirror the Fall from Paradise, the event which inaugurated human madness and man's

descent into animality. As Robert Burton laments, the Fall made man 'inferiour to a beast' and 'much altered from that he was, before blessed and happy, now miserable and accursed'.⁴²

At the end of the first chapter the narrator falls asleep and his dream-vision begins -- even although, bewilderingly, he has already indicated that everything hitherto has been a dream. There follows an astonishing version of the Peasants' Revolt, in which various bands of peasants metamorphosize into domestic animals:

Ecce dei subito malediccio fulsit in illos,
Et mutans formas feceret esse feras.
Qui fuerent homines prius innate rationis,
Brutorum species irracionis habent: (175-178)

[Behold, the curse of God flashed upon them, and changing their shapes, it had made them into wild beasts. They who had been men of reason before had the look of unreasoning brutes].

The first band of rioters is transformed into a group of braying asses, the second into oxen, and so on.

Worse still, each group undergoes a second transformation, so that it forsakes nature and becomes wild:

Sic asini fatui, quos fastus concitat, omni
Postposita lege condita iura negant.
Hos intemperies sic aeris inficiebat,
Quod transformati sunt quasi monstra michi: (221-224)

[Thus did the fatuous asses, whom arrogance aroused, refuse their appointed duties by overthrowing all control. The madness in the air so ruined them that they seemed to be transformed into monsters].

In their pride the animals, which in their proper place partook of the plenitude of nature, have now forsaken nature. According to Michel Foucault, animals have always been associated with the unnatural and with madness. 'From the start', he says,

Western culture has not considered it evident that animals participate in the plenitude of nature, in its wisdom and its order. [...] In fact, on close examination, it becomes evident that the animal belongs rather to anti-nature, to a negativity that threatens order and by its frenzy endangers the positive wisdom of nature.⁴³

For Gower, the commoners, like the animals, are useful in their place; but once they have cast off their burdens and refuse to work, they threaten social order. The animals have become monsters.

Such a view is supported by a weight of contemporary rhetoric which insisted on the essentially bestial nature of the lower classes. Adam of Usk, for example, describes Richard II's Cheshire archers as 'by nature bestial, not drawn from the gentlemen of the countryside but from the rustics or tailors or artisans. [...] Men who at home were hardly worthy to take off the shoes of their masters have behaved like equals and fellows of their lords'.⁴⁴ Peasant resentment at being considered as so many animals to be contained is detectable throughout the Middle Ages and may very well have contributed to the rising. 'Euery beste that leuyth now', laments a popular fifteenth-century song, 'Is of more fredam than thow'.⁴⁵

In the opening chapters of the *Vox* the description of the rebels as wild beasts is complemented by the language of insanity and demonic possession. The third rebel band, for example, is transformed into possessed swine:

Hii fuerant porci, maledictus spiritus in quos
Intravit, sicut leccio sancta refert. (377-378)

[They were swine into which a cursed spirit had entered, just as holy writ tells of].

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, writers such as Carlisle and Swift used the parable of the Gadarene swine as a political allegory for the gullibility of the masses. Gower, however, subscribes to the moral interpretation found in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, which asserts that not only the sinner in the parable, but also the possessed swine, were figuratively sinful,

lacking speech and reason, given to filthy deeds, grazing on the mountain of pride. And unless a man lives thus like a pig, the devil receives no power over him, or rather, he receives power only to test him, not to destroy him.⁴⁶

The same ideas are present in the later passage:

Demonis ex stirpe furiens fuit illa propago,
 Horrida facta viris et violenta deo;
 Contemprix superum, seueque auidissima cedis,
 Vt lupus est, ouium dum furit ipse fame. (751-754)

[This was the mad progeny of the devil's breed, rendered horrible in the eyes of men and rash in the eyes of God, contemptuous of higher powers and ferociously eager for slaughter, just as the wolf is when it goes mad with hunger for sheep].

As Maria Wickert remarks, 'the bestial rebel becomes the demonic'.⁴⁷ Even after the rebels have been subdued, the diabolical stigma persists:

Sic ope diuina Sathane iacet obruta virtus,

Que tamen indomita rusticitate latet; (2097-2098)

[Satan's power lay prostrate, overwhelmed by divine might; but nevertheless it lurked in hiding among the ungovernable peasantry].

Gower's attitude towards madness is evidently that of his fellow churchmen and medieval social theorists such as John of Salisbury.

To a far greater degree than their successors, medieval people developed their sense of purpose and identity through their experiences in the civic sphere. It is therefore unsurprising that, as John Fisher says, Gower presents London as 'the symbol of order'.⁴⁸ The marauding peasantry, by contrast, are presented as the bestial and satanic forces of chaos and destruction. But the symbolic nature of Book I of the *Vox* entails major distortions of historical fact. Indeed, Gower's version of the events of the Revolt is almost as fictitious as the utopian vision of England with which the poem begins: the rebels did not, for example, sack or defile churches as the narrator claims. Gower includes this allegation because it makes sense that the devil's servants would do such things.

Book I of the *Vox*, then, is one of the most sustained and vitriolic pieces of English writing to use the language of madness. What makes it significantly different from other literary descriptions of madness is its concern with the derangement of an entire social class rather than one individual. Moreover, madness here is a metaphor for insurrection and political subversion. We must therefore question the assumption that madness was not yet considered a 'problem of the city' and that it had not yet taken on a 'political, social and ethical status'.⁴⁹

Indeed, the association of madness, demonic possession and serious civil disorder is found in many medieval accounts of urban dancing frenzies.⁵⁰ The third-century Christian writer Minucius Felix attributes to the pagan gods responsibility for

the madmen, whom you see running out into the streets, themselves soothsayers of a kind but without a temple, raging, ranting, whirling round in the dance; there is the same demoniacal possession, but the object of the frenzy is different.⁵¹

In the fourteenth century Robert Mannyng denounces as insane those who took part in the semi-legendary dance at Kölbigk three centuries earlier.⁵²

Of more immediate relevance to the *Vox Clamantis*, however, are contemporary descriptions of the dancing frenzies which swept North-Western Europe in 1374. The condition of the participants in these dances is described in a monk's eyewitness account:

Both men and women were abused by the devil to such a degree that they danced in their homes, in the churches and in the streets, holding each other's hands and leaping in the air. While they danced they called out the names of demons, such as Friskes and others, but they were unaware of this nor did they pay attention to modesty even though people watched them. At the end of the dance, they felt such pains in the chest, that if their friends did not tie linen clothes tightly around their waists, they cried out like madmen that they were dying.⁵³

The monk goes on to note that the dancers, who were drawn predominantly from the lower classes, considered openly revolting against the clergy, and would have done so if the priests's exorcisms had not proved so effective in quelling the disturbances. Indeed, the dancing frenzy of 1374 was simply a repetition on a grand scale of the frequent popular dances which took place in churchyards throughout the Middle Ages. As we have seen, the participants in such dances were denounced by the churchmen in the language of madness and demonic

possession. It is unsurprising, then, that the English rebels of 1381 were described in precisely these terms by the representatives of official culture.⁵⁴

Given the ubiquity of peasant disorder in the *Vox Clamantis*, it is no surprise that the equanimity of the entire society is jeopardized. As Gower reminds us in Book VII of the *Vox*,

Sic minor est mundus homo, qui fert singula solus,

Soli solus homo dat sacra vota deo.

Est homo qui mundus de iure suo sibi mundum

Subdit, et in melius dirigit inde status:

Si tamen inmundus est, que sunt singula mundi

Ledit, et in peius omne refundit opus: (7.645-650)

[Thus man, who alone does everything, is a microcosm; and man alone pays sacred devotion to God alone. The man who is pure in his own right subjects the world to himself, and accordingly guides its circumstances for the better. If he is impure, however, he is injurious to everything which pertains to the world, and redirects its whole fabric for the worse].

This view of the 'little world of man' accords both with John of Salisbury's organic metaphor of society and with the essentially somatic approach to illness and madness in the Middle Ages. Thus the actions of rebellious or simply autonomous sections of society were seen to have a deleterious effect on the social body. 'Civil life should imitate nature', writes John of Salisbury, 'otherwise, life is duly called not merely uncivil, but rather bestial and brute'.⁵⁵

The remainder of Book I deals with the destruction of a once proud city and the dreamer's descent into brutishness. In Chapter 15 of Book I, Gower depicts the solidarity of the upper class in its physical and mental anguish:

Ora rigant fletus, tremit et formidine pectus,
 Gaudia que fuerant deuorat ipsa dolor,
 Aspiceres alios flentes terraque iacentes,
 Quos dolor alterius proprius atque dolet, (1337-1340)

[Tears wetted people's faces, and breasts trembled with fear, and grief consumed the joys which once had existed. You might have seen some lying on the ground weeping for others, and one's own sorrow was another's grief].

For many, grief leads to outright madness:

Sic magis orbatas quam sepe maritis
 Femineas vidi corde dolente genas;
 Sepe manus stringi, dirumpere sepeque crines,
 Ungues et propriam dilaniare cutem. (1223-1226)

[With grieving heart I saw the woman bereaved of her husband often wet her delicate cheeks, often wring her hands and tear her hair, and her nails lacerate her own skin].

As in many medieval romances, grief-madness here is principally intended to inspire sympathy rather than imply moral taint.

The dreamer himself is now afflicted with grief-madness. Like the exiled Ovid of the *Tristia*, on which Gower now draws frequently, he endures an abject exile in the 'wild woodlands' in order to escape the angry mobs (1382). He even comes to resemble the hero of the French romance *Renaus et Montauban*, hiding from his enemies and living 'like a hunted animal':⁵⁶

Attamen ad tantam rabiem pedibus timor alas
 Addidit, et volucris in fugiendo fui.

Sic vagus hic et ibi, quo sors ducebat euntem,
 Temptauit varia cum grauitate loca:
 Pes vagat osque silet, oculus stupet et dolet auris,
 Cor timet et rigide diriguere come.
 Sicut aper, quem turba canum circumsona terret,
 Territus extrema rebar adire loca. (1389-1396)

[Nevertheless, fear of this great madness added wings to my feet, and I was like a bird in my swift flight. So, wandering here and there as chance led me as I went, I made a serious attempt for several places. My steps wandered, and my lips were silent; my eye was struck with amazement and my ear was in pain; my heart trembled and my hair stood stiffly on end. Panicky as a wild boar which a pack of dogs frightens by barking around it, I thought about withdrawing to very remote places].

The dreamer's comparison of himself to a bird recalls the experience of the Irish hero Suibhne, who becomes so deranged with fear at the battle of Magh Rath that, 'through Ronan's curse he went, like any bird of the air, in madness and imbecility'.⁵⁷ Indeed, however much they owe to classical sources, the dreamer's desire for remoteness, his aimless wandering, his muteness, his meagre diet of acorns and his bed of grass all recall the physical hardships of the Irish hero.

Gower also clearly draws on the wild man tradition of medieval romance as he 'begins to resemble the beasts who attack'.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, his madness is presented sympathetically, like that of the bestial heroes Yvain and Tristan. Moreover, the dreamer's abject condition links him with John the Baptist, the figure most commonly associated with the phrase to which Gower's title alludes -- 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'. In the *Cursor Mundi*, for example, the prophet appears as an English Wild Man subsisting 'wit rotes and wit gres'.⁵⁹ In

the light of these precedents, the dreamer's madness takes on a quite different moral significance from the frenzy of the city rebels.

The dreamer later refers to the 'insane look upon my anxious face' (*trepidoque insania vultu* [1479]) and in various places to his speechlessness, pallor, sleeplessness, leanness, loss of appetite and thoughts of suicide. All of these, of course, are conventional manifestations of melancholy madness. Like the distracted heroes of the romances, he is so changed that he loses his human appearance and becomes quite unrecognisable even to himself (1480). The dreamer's mental state is throughout connected with his physical degeneration:

Sic magis a longo passum quod corpus habebam,

Vix habuit tenuem qua tegat ossa cutem;

Sicque diu pauidas pariter cum mente colorem

Perdideram, que fui sic nouus alter ego.

Vix fuerat quod ego solida me mente recepi. (1487-1491)

[I underwent long suffering because of the fact that my body scarcely possessed even a thin skin to cover my bones. And suffering just as long a time in mind, too, I lost my color, and so I was like another self. It was with difficulty that I kept myself in sound mind].

The dreamer suffers -- from the inside, as it were -- a crisis of identity analogous to that of the romance heroes. Although he is haunted by recollections of the violent events of the past, his memory seems constantly to be in jeopardy:

Ha, quociens fuerat mea mens oblita quid essem,

Dum status anterior posteriora tenet! (1421-1422)

[Alas! How many times did my mind forget what I was, as [in] its wonted way it clung to the past].

Elsewhere he tells us that 'Vt lapis a mente sepe remotus eram' (1574) [I was often far out of my mind [and] like a stone].

Like the madness of the grieving woman in Chapter 15, the dreamer's madness is intended to inspire sympathy rather than condemnation, and it too is caused by grief. 'Grief', he tells us, 'was my mind's principal concern' (1449). Fear and sorrow, of course, are also prominent emotions throughout the entire vision; the dreamer's madness, then, is caused by one or a number of the 'passions', which implied far less moral taint in the Middle Ages than demonic possession. Also, unlike the frenzy of the rebels, the dreamer's madness has a penitential aspect: the dreamer suggests that his co-sufferers must take some responsibility, however limited, for their inability to maintain social order. This sense of collective responsibility for the calamitous Revolt is echoed in contemporary analyses of its causes. 'Let us acknowledge that we are all to blame', writes Thomas Walsingham after the Revolt, 'and amend as best we can those sins which we have knowingly committed'.⁶⁰ Like John the Baptist, the dreamer seeks the regeneration of the faithful through a renunciation of sin.

Clearly, 'Gower's tears and those of his audience are intended, as rueful tears of the sacrament of penance, to lead to a reconciliation with God and to a regeneration of the individual as well as of the people'.⁶¹ What the dreamer fears most, even more than a grisly and ignoble death at the hands of the rebels, is that his temporary alienation from God will become permanent:

Plura dolens timui tunc temporis, et super omne

Ira dei magni causa timoris erat: (1455-1456)

[Even as I was grieving over these many things, I was very much afraid at this time; and above all, the wrath of God was a considerable cause of fear on my part].

As Penelope Doob has argued, the exile of the lone madman has always a penitential aspect.⁶² The outcast dreamer, however pathetic, is therefore spiritually as well as socially alienated.

Indeed, the dreamer's wildness has much in common with Gower's description, in *Confessio Amantis*, of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation and pathetic life in the wilderness. Gower tells this story in great detail and from a subjective point of view; he is also sympathetic towards the fallen king:

Upon himself tho gan he loke;
 In stede of mete gras and stres,
 In stede of handes longe cles,
 In stede of man a bestes lyke
 He syh; and thanne he gan to syke
 For cloth of gold and for perrie,
 Which him was wont to magnefie.
 When he behield his Cote of heres,
 he wept and with fulwoful teres
 Up to the hevene he caste his chiere
 Wepende, and thoghte in this manere;
 Thogh he no wordes myhte winne,
 Thus seide his herte and spak withinne:
 'O mihti godd, that al hast wroght
 And al myht bringe ayein to noght,
 Now knowe I wel, bot al of thee,
 This world hath no prosperite.' (I.2992-3008)

As Doob comments, Nebuchadnezzar's 'madness is subordinated to his bestiality'; in this way it invites comparison with the madness of the dreamer in the *Vox*.⁶³ Nebuchadnezzar's subsequent confession and his pledge of amendment also recall

the penitential aspect of the dreamer's sylvan existence. It is even possible that Gower had Book I of the *Vox* in mind when he turned his attention to Nebuchadnezzar in the later work. In these passages Gower draws on a very different sort of rhetoric about madness to that which prevails at the beginning of the *Vox*.

Huizinga and others have characterized the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a period of melancholy pessimism in which the nobility felt 'a sentimental need of enrobing their souls in the garb of woe'.⁶⁴ Gower's unrelentingly apocalyptic view of a doomed world overrun by merciless madmen is in this sense typical of his age. For Gower, the frenzied events of the Revolt are both signs and causes of the world's end. Thus Gower anticipates the destructive images of late Gothic art. In Michel Foucault's solemn words, 'it is the tide of madness, its secret invasion, that shows that the world is near its final catastrophe; it is man's insanity that invokes and makes necessary the world's end'.⁶⁵ In fifteenth-century literature, certainly, the madness of men ushered in the world's end. In 'The Fiftene Toknys Aforne the Doom', Gower's follower John Lydgate gives a macabre description of mute madmen in the last days which recalls the *Vox* in tone:

The tenth day, from kavernys & ther kavys
 Men shal come out, lyk folk that kan no good,
 And renne abrood lyk drounke men that Ravys
 Or as they weren frentyk, outhir wood,
 Dedly pale, and devoyde of blood;
 Nat speke a woord Oon vnto anothir,
 As witles peple of resoun and of mood [mind],
 No queyntaunce maad, brothir vnto brothir.⁶⁶

The jaundiced sentiments of the *Vox* also prefigure Villon's hopeless vision of humanity in his *Ballade (de bon conseil)*:

Hommes faillis, bersaudez de raison,
 Desnaturez et hors de congoissance,
 Desmis du sens, comblez de desraison,
 Fols abusez, plains de descongoissance,
 [O soul sick men, barred from reason,
 perverted, beyond consciousness,
 deranged, no longer rational,
 deluded fools filled with ignorance].⁶⁷

Like Villon, the Gower of the *Vox* believes that the only solution to this general madness is repentance before the Last Judgement. Although the peasants are chiefly to blame for the violence of 1381, the insanity of the Revolt is an abomination for which all men must take some responsibility and which affects all sections of society. In this sense, the significance of madness as a cosmic drama intertwines with quite specific historical and political concerns.

A concern with madness and sinfulness, of course, is not uncommon in late fourteenth-century literature. In the poem *Pearl*, for example, the maiden calls the worldly dreamer mad on several occasions and the dreamer finally comes to realise his spiritual turpitude with the Gowerian sentiment, 'Lorde, mad hit arn that agayn the stryven'.⁶⁸ The *Vox Clamantis*, however, couches both moral and civil disorder in terms of madness. Gower applies the traditional warning that the disordered human society is bestial and unnatural to the more immediate social concerns of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a period in which, as John Bellamy puts it, 'the preservation of public order was very often the biggest problem the king had to face. Neither before that time nor since has the issue of public order bulked so large in English history'.⁶⁹ Gower also illustrates the

theological and social concepts underlying the relationship between madness and social class with all the gloomy pessimism of his age. Nevertheless, that epoch, like every other, was by no means one of literary homogeneity. As the works of Chaucer demonstrate, Gower's is not the only possible reaction to the apparent madness of the Peasants' Revolt.

Notes to Chapter 3

- 1 Auerbach, p.142.
- 2 C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p.158.
- 3 For the importance of reason in Gower's moral philosophy see George R. Coffman, 'John Gower in His Most Significant Role', *University of Colorado Studies, Series B (Studies in the Humanities)*, 2.4 (1945), 52-56 (pp.53-55). As Erik W. Stockton points out, however, 'Gower [...] usually places faith as superior to reason'. See the Introduction to *The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The Voice of One Crying and the Tripartite Chronicle*, trans. by Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p.332 note 40. Indeed, the elevation of reason over faith, as Pecoock discovered in the following century, would have been likely to arouse orthodox suspicions.
- 4 Burton, I, p.128.
- 5 Wickert, *Studies in John Gower*, trans. by Robert J. Meindl (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), p.34.
- 6 *Madness and Civilisation*, p.77.
- 7 Quoted in G.G. Coulton, *A Medieval Garner*, p.194.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 See *Confessio Amantis*, in *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. by G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), I, 2772-3042. It should be noted, however, that the concept of madness as a divine punishment is less prominent in Gower's version than many others. 'Gower's version of the tale', notes Doob, 'is more concerned with the pathos of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation than with his role as a just prince overthrown by one vice'. *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.86.

- 10 *Parson's Tale*, 763.
- 11 Lee W. Patterson, 'No Man His Reson Herde', in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1540*, ed. by Lee W. Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 113-155, p.135.
- 12 *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p.277.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p.293.
- 14 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.261.
- 15 St. Aurelius, *Sermo CXXIV*, *PL*, CXXIX, 2001; Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo CLV*, *PL*, LII, 609. Both translated in Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.262.
- 16 Pseudo-Bonaventura, *Pharetra*, lib.1, cap.7. Quoted in Wickert, p.35. The commentary is on Psalms 48:13.
- 17 John of Salisbury, 8.12, p.182.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 St. Maximus *Homilia XVI*, *PL*, LVII, 257. Translated in Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.262.
- 20 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.262.
- 21 For Fitzosbert, who was hanged for his crimes, see G.G. Coulton, *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919), p.356. Adam of Usk's remark is quoted in DuBoulay, pp.68-69.
- 22 R.B. Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.136, 374. For John Ball's heretical ideas see Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free* (London: Temple Smith, 1973), p.227. Heretics, of course, were considered to be in error, but not, strictly speaking, incoherent or psychotic; see Paul Zweig, *The Heresy of Self-Love: A Study in Subversive Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p.49. Nevertheless, heretics were commonly denounced in the language of madness.
- 23 Patterson, 'No Man His Reson Herde', p.145.

- 24 Dobson, p.375.
- 25 All quotations from Gower in this chapter are taken from *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).
- 26 All translations of the *Vox Clamantis* are from *The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The Voice of One Crying and the Tripartite Chronicle*, trans. by Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962).
- 27 Trans. by John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1968), pp.98-99.
- 28 This is the view of Marc Bloch. Dobson (pp.27-28) takes a different view. 'The truth of the famous dictum that "la révolte agraire apparaît aussi inséparable de regime seigneurial que, par exemple, de la grande entreprise capitaliste, la grève", is a little less self-evident than Marc Bloch assumed. In fifteenth-century English conditions, tenants apparently did not find it impossible to resist pressures from their landlords by more peaceful methods -- refusal to take up holdings, collective bargaining and even on occasion the "rent-strike". With the historian's unfair benefit of hindsight, it might well seem that the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 was -- in both the Marxist and more general sense -- a historically unnecessary catastrophe'. Compare Hilton, *Bond Men*, pp.11-14.
- 29 See Dobson, p.75.
- 30 Trans. by Fisher, pp.98-99.
- 31 John of Salisbury, 6.20, p.125.
- 32 For Brinton see G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p.587. For 'The Descrying' see *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, ed. by J. Kail (London: EETS os 124, 1904), pp.64-68.
- 33 Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, culture and society in late medieval writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.27.

- 34 See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), 9-12 and passim; Eagleton, p.36.
- 35 *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p.51. Such statements are difficult to reconcile with the fact of the Peasants' Revolt, which is often conveniently bracketed out of English history. The Chaucerian John Speirs asserts that 'Chaucer's poetry implies that his English community was, comparatively, a homogenous community in which folk of diverse 'degrees' (the Knight and the Plowman) were interdependent and intimate, as by comparison persons in the modern classless mass are isolated; it implies, perhaps, the most nearly inclusive social order that has ever been implied in English and (despite the Peasants' Revolt) the most harmoniously integrated'. *Chaucer the Maker* (London: Faber, 1964), p.20.
- 36 For a summary of this research see the Introduction to Aers, *Community, Gender*.
- 37 *Dives and Pauper*, I, p.357.
- 38 Rodney Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 1990), p.76. On the growing freedoms of the peasantry see also DuBoulay, pp.54-55 and passim.
- 39 Fisher, p.170.
- 40 See Macaulay, introduction to *The Complete Works of John Gower*, p.xxxii.
- 41 Stockton, Introduction to *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, p.15
- 42 Burton, I, p.122.
- 43 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.77. In the Middle Ages those who committed particularly heinous sins might be compared unfavourably with the beasts. Thus the author of the thirteenth-century *Hali Meidenhad* reminds his audience that lechers are even more degraded than the beasts: 'take notice how this immorality maketh thee not only an equal and a like

to them [beasts], but maketh thee much viler, and for to be blamed that misshapest thyself, wilfully and purposely, into their nature'. *Hali Meidenhad*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall (London: EETS os 18, 1922), pp.35-36.

44 Quoted in DuBoulay, p.203.

45 *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p.62.

46 *PL*, CXIV, 275; trans. in Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.15.

47 Wickert, p.37.

48 Fisher, p.173.

49 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.65; Felman, 'Madness and Philosophy', p.211.

50 As Gregory Zilboorg says (p.142), 'the inaccurate terms applied to these phenomena, such as "mass hysteria" or "mass psychosis," are merely descriptive literary phrases and not diagnostic terms, for the individuals who form part of these mass reactions need not be and are not always mentally sick'.

51 Quoted in Welsford, p.77.

52 Robert Mannyng of Brunne, 'The Dancers of Colbek', in *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, ed. by Kenneth Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), pp.4-12. George Rosen suggests (p.199) that although the dance at Kölbigk has been described as a legend, 'there probably was a nucleus of fact involving a group of poor, sick peasants who came to pray for help and danced in the churchyard'.

53 J.F.C. Hecker, trans. by Rosen, pp.196-197.

54 We should not forget, of course, that some of the lower clergy were instrumental in the 1381 uprising. As Dobson notes (p.15), 'the prominent role played by 'poor priests' as sowers of discord and as rebel leaders is one of the best-known features of the revolt. John Wrawe and John Ball, to

take the two most famous examples, were members of the large ecclesiastical proletariat of late medieval England, a class whose clerical status was too rarely rewarded by a sufficiently responsible religious function'. Compare Hilton, *Bond Men*, pp.207-213.

55 John of Salisbury, 6.21, p.127.

56 See Neaman, p.264-265; Fisher, p.174.

57 *Buile Suibhne*, p.15.

58 Kurt Olsson, 'John Gower's *Vox Clamantis* and the Medieval Idea of Place', *Studies in Philology*, 2 (1987), 134-158 (p.144).

59 *Cursor Mundi*, ed. by Richard Morris, 3 vols (London: EETS 57,59,62, 1875-76) II, p.638, 11109. For more on John the Baptist as a 'Holy Wild Man' figure see Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, pp.160-161.

60 Thomas Walsingham, quoted in Dobson, p.369.

61 Wickert, p.29.

62 *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.12 and passim.

63 *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.89.

64 J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. by F. Hopman (London: Penguin, 1955), p.33.

65 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.17.

66 Lydgate, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part I*, ed. by Henry Noble MacCracken (Oxford: EETS es 107, 1911), 49-54, p.119.

67 Villon, p.133.

68 *Pearl*, ed. by E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p.43, 1199.

69 John Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1973), p.1. J.R. Lander writes that 'the functions of English government in the late middle ages were distinctly limited -- limited externally to defence and internally to ensuring that public order did not fall below a certain, but somewhat indefinite standard,

which most people regarded as tolerable'. *Government and Community in England 1450-1509* (London: Arnold, 1980), p.65.

Chapter 4

'Thou mayst nat werken after thyn owene heed': Madness and Rationality in Chaucer's *Miller's* and *Summoner's* Tales

The enormous stylistic differences between the works of Gower and Chaucer can frustrate comparative literary criticism. As John Fisher notes, 'to modern readers, Chaucer's and Gower's treatments of the same material are so different that comparison appears fruitless, if not downright wrongheaded'.¹ Nevertheless, since Chaucer and Gower were both active writers during the Peasants' Revolt, it should not surprise us that Chaucer's *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales explore, albeit in a quite different tone, the same powerful connection between madness and social class that Gower exploits in the *Vox Clamantis*.

Neither psychiatric historians nor literary critics have had much to say about the theme of madness in Chaucer. The nineteenth-century historian Daniel Hack Tuke remarked disappointedly that 'there is not much to be found in Chaucer [...] bearing in any way upon the insane'.² Tuke's statement is fair insofar as it refers to examples or discussions of actual madness. Melibee is afflicted with grief-madness when he learns of the injury done by his enemies to his wife and daughter. There are also examples of anger-madness scattered throughout the *Canterbury Tales*; and Rose Zimbardo has argued for the insanity of the narrator of *The Book of the Duchess*.³ Madness, however, is rarely a prominent theme. Not even Chaucer's works of romance contain insane protagonists. Although each becomes lovesick for his love of Emily, Palamon and Arcite cannot properly be described as mad; not even Troilus's love languishment, as Judith Neaman observes, develops into a full-blown psychosis.⁴ Nevertheless, examples of feigned or spurious insanity are relatively common in the *Canterbury Tales*. The

Miller's and *Summoner's* tales, in particular, show a sophisticated awareness of the rhetorical uses of the language of madness.

A discussion of these tales is conspicuously absent from Penelope Doob's study of the conventions of madness in Middle English literature.⁵ One reason for this omission is that any discussion of madness in the tales involves close attention to historical detail, whereas Doob is concerned principally with the literary manifestations of the trans-historical Christian association between madness and sin. The value and persuasiveness of Doob's thesis has already been noted; but the application to medieval literature of conventional ideas about madness should not preclude investigation into social context.

The current ideas about madness at any historical point, of course, are never easily separable from conventional or traditional ones. Throughout the Middle Ages the rhetorical use of the language of madness, in particular, is often remarkably similar from one genre to another. This becomes clear when one compares the language of madness in religious and secular texts. The cleric Dan Michel writes that heretics, unbelievers and those who commit sacrilege are 'ase wode houndes / þet biteþ and ne knaweþ na3t hare lhord'.⁶ Clearly, Michel is talking about the madness of sin. But substitute a secular for a heavenly 'lhord' and the remark could be drawn from any of the official invectives on the Revolt of 1381: Book I of the *Vox*, it has been seen, presents the revolting peasants as so many insane and ungovernable animals. Similarities between clerical and other fields of discourse about madness are evident even in writings of different historical periods; indeed, Michel's work predates the Revolt by some forty years.

Despite such overlaps between historical and conventional detail, Chaucer's concern with insanity in the *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales may be fully understood in relation not to conventional Christian ideas about insanity, but to the political climate of England in the early 1380s. From this point of view, the fact that the *Miller's Tale* -- and arguably the *Summoner's Tale* -- falls into the fabliau genre poses a particular problem. Literary criticism has tended to focus on the

continental sources of the fabliaux, perhaps hindering attempts to set the tales in their historical contexts. Yet, as John Hines suggests of the English fabliaux, 'it is often more productive to refer [...] to their immediate historical context to achieve a critical understanding and appreciation of this literature than to compare them with foreign-language counterparts'.⁷ Such an approach seems particularly fruitful in the case of the *Miller's Tale*, in which some of the most prominent themes -- such as madness, astrology and the scholarly life -- are Chaucerian additions to the basic fabliau story.⁸

Hitherto, the only critic to have examined the theme of madness in Chaucer in the light of its historical context is Lee Patterson.⁹ Patterson shows that the historically-charged language of madness at the end of the *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales reflects the vocabulary used in the invectives of the seigneurial class against the peasantry at the time of the 1381 Revolt. Direct political commentary is not, of course, a Chaucerian trait: the Revolt is only explicitly mentioned by Chaucer in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.¹⁰ Nevertheless, echoes of the Revolt are detectable in the *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales. This chapter shows how the conventions of insanity which permeate these texts are manipulated so as to denaturalize the concept of madness and reveal its constructedness. More particularly, it is argued that in these tales the perceived madness of the peasantry is contrasted ironically with the superior rationality of clerks and scholarly discourse.

The interplay between madness and rationality in the *Miller's* narrative invites comparison with the preceding tale. Throughout the *Knight's Tale*, the Theban cousins act irrationally: Arcite in particular is referred to habitually as 'wood'. Yet their deranged behaviour is described coolly. Donald W. Rowe says of the *Knight's Tale* that 'in its [...] measured pace, its distancing of the emotionally disruptive, its highly stylised and deliberate order, it enacts rationality'.¹¹ The *Miller's Tale*, too, is a *tour-de-force* of narrative craftsmanship. By telling a tale even more polished than the *Knight's*, the *Miller*

provocatively establishes order and rationality as aesthetic priorities in his own tale, despite the madness of the action he narrates and his own intimidating animality.

Indeed, the drunken Miller himself offers a clue to the understanding of the function of insanity in the *Miller's Tale*. Lee Patterson observes that the Miller is a deeply 'irrational' figure.¹² Walter Clyde Curry long ago discussed how the Miller's physiognomy, described in the *General Prologue*, betrays his gross, foolish, lawless and lecherous nature.¹³ It is also possible, however, that Chaucer modelled the Miller after an historical individual. It has been suggested, for example, that the Miller recalls 'Robert or Robyn the knavish apprentice of John de Seinte Fredeswide of Oxford in 1355, involved in that year in the riot during which townsmen dislodged or broke down the doors of gownsmen'.¹⁴ This suggestion, made all the more credible by the Miller's proven way with doors, seems significant in view of the tale's concern with town-gown tensions and allegations of peasant irrationality.

Whatever the case, the Miller's description emphasizes his bestial and uncivilized nature. His massive size, his beard as red 'as any sowe or fox', his huge mouth and black, hairy nostrils and his predilection for physical violence all authenticate his self-confessed *vilain* status. More particularly, these details evoke the descriptions of wild men which fascinated and repelled medieval people. Indeed, the Miller resembles King Claudas in the vulgate *Lancelot*. A handsome knight from the neck down, Claudas sports the grotesque head of a Wild Man: like the Miller, he has an ugly nose, a red beard, a large mouth and an intimidating physique.¹⁵ The Wild Man, the traditional antitype of the chivalric hero, is a fitting identification for the Miller, who seeks to undermine the courtly world of the preceding tale.

The suggestion that the Miller possesses the stock characteristics of the Wild Man implies his irrationality. Moreover, drunkenness was regarded as a form of madness in the Middle Ages, as Harry Baily implies when he calls the Miller a

'fool' whose 'wit is overcome' (3135).¹⁶ The sophistication of the churl's narrative therefore comes as a surprise. This reversal of expectation again links the Miller with the Wild Man, whose rough appearance often belies a superior rationality. Chaucer's principal interest, however, is in the subversive political significance of such undercutting of expectations. By presenting his peasant narrators 'with intellects far higher than those of brute beasts', Chaucer hints at 'a potentially egalitarian levelling of differences between social classes'.¹⁷ Both the *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales, it emerges, are concerned with the relationship between rationality and social class.

The theme of madness is central in the *Miller's Tale*; but before considering its structural and political importance, we may say something about the deranged psychology of the characters who inhabit what David Williams has aptly called the 'mad world' of the tale.¹⁸ Although madness is directly imputed only to Nicholas and John in this tale, Absolon's addiction to fantasy and his ridiculous behaviour border on insanity. At the root of Absolon's distracted condition is, of course, the sin of pride. But Chaucer also hints at the instrumental physical cause of his detachment from reality. In terms of medieval faculty psychology -- a branch of medicine in which Chaucer shows interest in many of his works -- Absolon's 'maladye' until his shocking cure is consistent with a derangement of the faculty of *imaginatio* or *phantasia*. This faculty, medieval physicians and philosophers agreed, was responsible for apprehending images; damage to the *imaginatio* could therefore make things seem other than they are.¹⁹ Thus Patrick Gallagher echoes medieval psychological terminology when he notes that 'for Absolon, fantasy begins to outrun perception, the imaginary to usurp the real'.²⁰

Absolon's errors spring more immediately from the fact that his faculty of *cogitatio* or *imaginativa* -- the discriminatory faculty responsible for combining and separating impressions received by the brain into *imaginatio* -- is acting on false information. Absolon consequently becomes a 'veritable zany of

indiscrimination', whose every action betrays his 'extreme inability to make proper distinctions'.²¹ His physical gaucheness and his inappropriate speech are symptoms of the perilous diminution of proper perspective and judgement which culminates in the misdirected kiss.

Chaucer uses the language of madness throughout the tale to satirize the deluded vanity of all the main characters. The term 'fantasie', for example, is applied first to Nicholas, and it comprehends several of the scholar's dubious attributes. Nicholas's 'fantasie' indicates his lack of discrimination, which is shown by his mixing of secular and religious songs and his later ill-fated decision to 'surpassen al the jape' on Absolon. 'Fantasie' also has the meaning of 'amorous fancy', a sense which applies equally well to the tale's other male characters.²² The term also has senses more specifically relevant to Nicholas. In medieval psychology, as in modern usage, 'fantasie' or 'imaginacioun' is the faculty necessary for 'speculating about the future' and the 'devising of works of art', activities for which Nicholas shows flair later in the tale.²³

Most pertinently, 'fantasie' is a term which in the late Middle Ages -- and especially in Chaucer -- is intimately connected with the self-delusion that springs from social isolation and self-absorption, Chaucer's 'privetee'. In the *Merchant's Tale*, for example, January's short-sighted choice of a young wife results from his 'heigh fantasye' and his culpable rejection of others' counsel:

For whan that he hymself concluded hadde,
 Hym thoughte ech oother mannes wit so badde
 That impossible it were to repplye
 Agayn his choys; this was his fantasye. (1607-1610)

Such abstracted isolation is intolerable in the quotidian fabliau world, where sanity means conforming to the common laws of nature. In the *Miller's Tale* 'fantasie' suggests Nicholas's wilful solitude: as far as John is concerned, Nicholas is

dangerously detached from reality. In fact, of course, it is John who is finally, and publicly, seen as mad; nevertheless, John's judgement has some validity. Like the other male characters in the tale, Nicholas is eventually brought to a humiliating awareness of the supremacy of reality over fantasy.

The rhyming of 'fantasie' with 'astrologye' at the beginning of the tale associates Nicholas's delusion with his scholarly learning (3190-3191). The theme of astrology is the most conspicuous of Chaucer's narrative additions to the fabliau as it exists in continental analogues. In fact, the detailed description of Nicholas's astrological equipment and other scholarly possessions is quite unprecedented in medieval literature; it is included in order to account not only for Nicholas's prediction of the flood, but also for the feigned madness which precedes it.

Chaucer's own interest in the subject of astrology no doubt made him sensitive to the suspicion in which it was often held. As we have already seen, those who attempted to restrict the majesty of God through the insolent art of astrology were necessarily mad. In John's eyes, the apparently deranged Nicholas recalls the man described contemptuously in the fourteenth-century *Northern Homily* as 'a mased man al out of minde, Pat vses for fantasy forto stare upward at þe scy'.²⁴ In a passage of the *Troy Book* which recalls the language of the *Miller's Tale*, John Lydgate also describes astrologers as insane:

Lat be, lat be! for no wi3t is so wood,
 Pat haþ his witte, to 3eue þer-to credence,
 Pat any man by crafte or by science,
 Pat mortel is, haþ konyng to devine
 Fortunys cours, or fatys to termyne.
 Swyche causis hid, conselid in secre,
 Reserued ben to goddis priuete.²⁵

Moreover, astrologers, as we have seen, were supposed to risk dire divine punishment, including blindness and madness. Little wonder, then, that the carpenter is easily duped by Nicholas's pretended madness, immediately interpreting it as the inevitable 'punishment of knowledge and its ignorant presumption'.²⁶ But although clerical proscriptions against astrology explain John's response here, the tale is not exclusively or even primarily concerned with the moral implications of madness; in this amoral fabliau, madness assumes its fullest significance on the social and political, rather than the theological level.

Nicholas's feigned insanity alerts the reader to the difficulty of identifying real madness in any circumstances. This difficulty proceeds not only from Nicholas's skill in counterfeiting the symptoms of melancholia, but also from the miscellaneous reactions of those who witness his pretence. When the carpenter's servant glimpses Nicholas 'capying upright / As he had kiked on the newe moone' (3444-3445), the implication is that the student's 'madness' is attributable to lunar influence. The idea that the phases of the moon affected human health negatively was accepted by even the most prestigious medical authorities; the superstitious belief invoked here, however, is that madness can be induced by simply looking at a full moon. The carpenter himself ventures some other causes of Nicholas's madness, suggesting that it results not from the malign influence of the stars, but from Nicholas's over-curious observation of them. 'This man is falle', he suggests, 'with his astomye, / In some woodness or in some agonye' (3451-3452). By explaining Nicholas's madness as the result of his scholarly endeavour, John displays the sort of cocky class antagonism to which he will fall victim at the end of the tale. John's opinion that Nicholas's madness is the result of over-study in intellectual matters is perfectly conventional; but it has a particularly powerful historical significance given the heightened anti-intellectual and, by extension, anti-clerical sentiments of the peasantry at the time of the Peasants' Revolt, when, according to the contemporary commentator Thomas Walsingham, 'it was dangerous to be seen with an inkhorn at one's side'.²⁷

The carpenter now determines to force the secluded Nicholas 'out of his studyng' (3467). John is arrogantly confident that scholarly activity is the cause of his lodger's distracted state:

I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!
 Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.
 Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man
 That noght but oonly his bileve kan! (3453-3456)

Nevertheless, he unaccountably revises his diagnosis when he sees Nicholas for himself:

This carpenter wende he were in despeir,
 And hente hym by the sholdres myghtily,
 And shook hym harde, and cride spitously,
 'What! Nicholay! What, how! What, looke adoun!
 Awak, and thenk on Cristes passioun!
 I crouche thee from elves and fro wightes. (3474-3479)

Now John is of the opinion that Nicholas is possessed. It has already been suggested that demonic possession was more often credited by the uneducated than by the learned. If the possibility of possession by demons was rejected by many educated people in the late Middle Ages, the near-obsolete belief in possession by elves must have seemed even more preposterous to Chaucer's sophisticated audience. By indicating a relationship between ideas about madness and level of education and social status, John's superstitious beliefs anticipate the circumstances of his own humiliation at the end of the tale.

The sheer variety of explanations of madness here also makes John appear ridiculous. Although multiple explanations of insanity were common in the Middle

Ages, John's suggestion of one conventional cause of madness after another is absurdly rapid and arbitrary. Nicholas's pretence of insanity, then, is more than a crude narrative device: it testifies to the Miller's self-consciousness about madness in this tale and solicits a critical wariness of accepting subsequent allegations of madness at face value.

Not only the causes, but also the attitudes towards insanity in the tale are various: John's supposed madness results in public mockery; but Nicholas's equally spurious insanity evokes the sympathy of the carpenter and his servant. This compassionate response to madness only highlights the decidedly insensitive attitude of the townsfolk towards John at the end of the tale. Madness, the Miller takes pains to show, is not a simple or self-evident phenomenon; it is attributable to no single cause and refuses simple explanations and responses. In short, the Miller draws attention to the constructedness of insanity.

Once he has been brought out of his supposed stupor, Nicholas proceeds to spin his fantastic yarn about the second flood and gives the carpenter his instructions for saving the company. He then threatens John with madness should he disclose his advice to anyone:

to no wight thou shalt this conseil wreye,
 For it is Cristes conseil that I seye,
 And if thou telle it man, thou art forlore;
 For this vengeance thou shalt han therefore,
 That if thou wreye me, thou shalt be wood. (3503-3507)

The final ominous line contains multiple ironies. First, by disbelieving God's promise not to send a Second Flood the carpenter already shows his lack of reason. Another irony becomes clear only in retrospect: although John follows Nicholas's directions to the letter he is nevertheless finally proclaimed mad. The implicit theological argument of the scholar's threat follows a conventional

pattern: betrayal of 'Cristes conseil' amounts to a rejection of God-given reason -- a sin punishable by madness. This traditional clerical explanation of madness as a divine chastisement is undermined at the end of the tale, where the imputation of insanity appears to be simply a crude form of social victimisation.

In lines 3559-3560 Nicholas reasserts that John should not question him, again on pain of madness:

Suffiseth thee, but if thy wittes madde,
To han as greet a grace as Noe hadde.

Nicholas requires John to be obedient to authority; to think for oneself -- to challenge apparently divine instruction -- is to court insanity. This line of argument -- and the pessimistic view of human reason it implies -- is commonplace in the late Middle Ages. But its introduction here is a shrewd ploy on Nicholas's part: by stressing the virtues of a passive intellect, Nicholas appeals to the carpenter's self-satisfied bias against learning and his naive belief that a man who acts out of simple faith cannot fall into insanity. Nicholas tells the peasant that he can only save the threatened company by renouncing his own rationality: 'werken after loore and reed', he advises John; 'Thou mayst nat werken after thyn owene heed' (3527-3528).

Nicholas, clearly, is directly responsible for the carpenter's ridiculous delusion or 'ymaginacioun' of the flood engulfing his cherished wife. Unlike Absolon, who willingly abandons all reason in his wooing of Alison, John is encouraged in his delusion by Nicholas, who plays on the carpenter's fears and presumably hopes to make easier the job of convincing him by plying him with ale (3498).

But the Miller himself is not entirely sympathetic towards the carpenter. If Nicholas endeavours to suppress John's rationality with threats and alcohol, the Miller distances us from the carpenter's consequent hallucination by describing it

in terms which parody Arcite's sorrow in the *Knight's Tale* (1219-1222). The most obvious stylistic feature of this passage, however, is its mocking use of scholastic vocabulary:

Lo, which a greet thyng is affeccioun!
 Men may dyen of ymaginacioun,
 So depe may impressioun be take.
 This sely carpenter bigynneth quake;
 Hym thynketh verraily that he may see
 Noees flood come walwyng as the see
 To drenchen Alisoun, his hony deere.
 He wepeth, weyleth, maketh sory cheere;
 He siketh with ful many a sory swogh; (3611-3619)

The passage recalls contemporary medical descriptions of the cataclysmic delusions suffered by melancholy madmen. John's hallucination is explained as a disorder of his 'ymaginacioun', the psychological faculty responsible for receiving impressions from the senses. The immediate cause of such derangement is the passion of sorrow. Indeed, John's reaction illustrates Avicenna's observation that

in the melancholy man, the strength of the imagination of sorrowful things makes them appear to him, so that the thing whose likeness is represented in his soul seems to be really there, and therefore he persists in his continual sorrow.²⁸

Psychologically, then, John, like Absolon and Nicholas at other points in the tale, loses contact with reality and, as Patrick Gallagher puts it, 'gives in to fantasy'.²⁹ The Miller ridicules John's experience by relating it in the conspicuously inappropriate technical language of philosophical and medical discourse --

'affeccioun', 'ymaginacioun', 'impressioun' -- which a 'lewed man' could not understand. The passage anticipates John's final public humiliation: in both cases, the carpenter's fantastic delusion is described in scholarly language and the madman becomes an object of ridicule.

In the last forty-one lines of the tale the word 'wood' occurs no fewer than five times. The first two of these occurrences are apparently commonplace tags used to describe Nicholas's frantic crying for water after the branding incident:

As he were wood, for wo he gan to crye,

'Help! Water! Water! Help, for Goddes herte!'

This carpenter out of his slomber sterte,

And herde oon crien 'water!' as he were wood, (3814-3817)

Along with a preponderance of active verbs, the repetition of 'wood' here gives the scene the necessary qualities of farce and exaggeration.³⁰ But the association of the word 'wood' with water twice within four lines also recalls Nicholas's earlier description of the 'wilde and wood' rain which he says will fall to create the flood (3517). This produces a subtle irony: at the very point when the carpenter supposes the flood to have arrived, the term 'wood' describes not the predicted ferocity of the imaginary deluge but the real agony of its too-clever inventor. This link between madness and flood prepares us for the irony of the following passage, in which the faithful carpenter -- prohibited from discussing the flood on pain of madness -- is held insane by the townsfolk despite his loyalty. Thus the comic justice meted out to both John and Nicholas is pointed up by the ironic use of the language of madness.

After John's humiliating fall, Nicholas again -- this time with Alison's help -- attempts to suppress the carpenter's rationality. Despite John's attempts to explain himself,

he was anon bore down

With hende Nicholas and Alisoun.

They tolden every man that he was wood;

He was agast so of Nowelis flood

Thurgh fantasie that of his vanytee

He hadde yboght hym knedyng tubbes thre

And hadde hem hanged in the roof above;

And that he preyed hem, for Goddes love,

To sitten in the roof, *par compaignye*. (3831-3839)

John Hines suggests that 'the pun on "wood" in its sole surviving modern sense makes the imputed insanity of the carpenter -- a would-be second Noah, the shipwright -- adhere to John the more firmly'.³¹ The word 'wood', then, links John's insanity with his lowly social status, preparing us for the class antagonism which ends the tale. By their supercilious attribution of the phrase *par compaignie* to a humble carpenter, Nicholas and Alison further underline John's 'lewednesse'.

Nicholas and Alison also employ technical terms to explain John's madness. The word 'fantasie', applied earlier in the tale to Nicholas, is common in medieval medical textbooks. According to the three-ventricle theory of classical and medieval psychological works, the foremost ventricle of the brain (the 'celle fantastik' of the *Knight's Tale*) runs amok if ungoverned by reason. By emphasising John's foolish 'fantasie', Nicholas and Alison follow philosophical authority. Avicenna, for example, asserts that in the melancholy man, 'the intellect is distracted from rational actions by sense and *phantasia*'.³² 'Vanytee', of course, is perhaps the most traditional and morally damning cause of madness. Nicholas and Alison, then, invoke conventional psychological and theological explanations of insanity to account for the carpenter's supposed madness. These explanations, of course, enjoyed greater prestige and credibility among the educated than John's outmoded and superstitious explanations of Nicholas's earlier

'madness'. For the second time in the tale, the technical terminology of medical and theological discourse estranges us from the experience of the 'sely carpenter'. The language of the passage, then, attests to the power of clerical reason over peasant credulity.

The constructed nature of John's madness is by this stage obvious to the reader. It is not, of course, acknowledged by Alison and Nicholas, nor is it recognized by the crowd which assembles to enjoy John's misfortune. Ironically, however, the scoffing mob unwittingly attests to the contingency of madness by itself behaving unreasonably:

The folk gan laughen at his fantasye;
 Into the roof they kiken and they cape,
 And turned al his harm unto a jape.
 For what so that this carpenter answerde,
 It was for noght; no man his reson herde.
 With othes grete he was so sworn adoun
 That he was holde wood in al the toun. (3840-3846)

John is now a ridiculous spectacle, as the verbs 'kiken', 'cape' and the earlier 'gauren' (3827) imply. His humiliation, unlike that of the equally unfortunate miller in the *Reeve's Tale*, is public. As we have already implied, madness, or 'woodness', is the concept through which this bourgeois society condemns the shameful excesses of individual desire. "'Woodness'", according to William Woods, 'is, in effect, the inevitable inversion of "privetee": the deeply motivated search for privacy develops as an ego-driven fantasy, extends itself above or across the boundaries of the private, and is recognised as "woodness" by the unerring judgment of the small-town public gaze'.³³

As many commentators have noted, medieval madmen were generally considered spectacles. In his *Madness and Civilisation* Michel Foucault says that

It was doubtless a very old custom of the Middle Ages to display the insane. In certain of the *Narrtürmer* in Germany, barred windows had been installed which permitted those outside to observe those chained within. They thus constituted a spectacle at the city gates [...]. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century [...] madmen remained monsters -- that is, etymologically, beings or things to be shown.³⁴

John is indeed objectified and denied a voice. The spectacular or visible nature of his madness recalls the circumstances of Nicholas's feigned insanity. The apparently study-crazed scholar is observed first by the carpenter's servant, who 'looked in ful depe' through the cat-flap in the lodger's door (3442). Moreover, the verbs 'kiken' and 'cape' -- used here to describe the neighbours' gleeful peering into the carpenter's roof -- are precisely those used to describe Nicholas's astrological vision. Thus 'the "folk" here align themselves with Nicholas -- and with Nicholas the trickster -- not Nicholas of the branded bum'.³⁵ Once again, through his careful choice of words, the Miller denaturalizes the concept of madness, inviting us to compare and contrast the different attitudes towards madness at different points in the tale.

In this final section of the poem we feel some sympathy for the carpenter. Now the Miller, who had previously mocked John's delusion of the flood, grants John what Nicholas has persistently and effectively denied him -- rationality or 'reson'. The primary meaning of 'reson' here is 'explanation' or 'speech' and not, strictly speaking, 'reason'. But the two senses are necessarily connected in the late Middle Ages. For the proto-rationalist Reginald Pecock, 'reson' denotes principally the psychological faculty of reason; but the workings of reason are obviously dependent on this faculty. Pecock draws attention to the close relation of the two meanings:

In an oþir maner "reson" is oft takun for þe worchingis and þe doingis of þe resoun now bifore in þe first manere takun: as ben argumentis, profis, skilis and evidences, which resoun, in þe first maner takun, fyndiþ, conceiueþ and formeþ, and in þis maner "resoun" is takun in commune speche.³⁶

The two senses of 'reson' as speech and as a psychological faculty were closely related in an age in which muteness was a symptom of insanity. More importantly, the emphasis on the theme of madness in the final section of the tale invites us to consider the full range of implications of the word 'reson'. In the context of John's humiliation as a madman, the term here becomes ambiguous, denoting the carpenter's latent intellectual faculties as well as his fruitless attempts to explain himself. The carpenter, in short, is simultaneously granted rationality and denied self-expression.

The gaping onlookers, on the other hand, conduct themselves in a most unreasonable manner. The logic of the couplet: 'With othes grete he was so sworne adoun / That he was holde wood in al the toun', points up their lack of reason and their gullibility. John is *held* or believed to be mad -- the sense of contingency is highlighted here -- *because* he is sworn down with oaths. Thus the leering mob, in the height of its mockery of John's madness, itself exhibits symptoms of irrationality.

All of the carpenter's neighbours -- 'bothe smale and grete' -- emerge from their houses to deride the injured carpenter. Thus John receives the kind of casual opprobrium customarily heaped upon fools and madmen by mischievous bourgeois throughout the Middle Ages: a long comparison may be drawn with the mad Lancelot or the French hero Amadas, who are mocked by entire towns. As we have seen, such abuse could inspire the compassion of some. The university students who mock John, however, are not moved to pity by his plight. Rather,

they provide a final, damning diagnosis of the carpenter and give the townsfolk's general derision a socio-historical twist:

For every clerk anonright heeld with oother.
 They seyde, 'The man is wood, my leeve brother';
 And every wight gan laughen at this stryf. (3847-3849)

This assertion of John's insanity is far more emphatic than the allegations of madness with which the tale began. Yet the Miller takes pains to show that the judgement of the clerks is just as spurious as John's earlier diagnoses of Nicholas. The immediacy of this judgement -- conveyed by 'anonright' -- and the phrase 'heeld with oother' imply consensus or agreement among the clerks rather than true conviction. Finally, the cosy tag 'my leeve brother' reinforces the sense of class solidarity, making the attribution of madness to John appear all the more contingent to social factors. As Lee Patterson observes, the carpenter's 'punishment, however merited, is nonetheless enacted in the distasteful form of class victimisation'.³⁷

The final irony of the mocking scene is only apparent if we compare John's 'madness' with Nicholas's earlier predictions. Nicholas had warned the carpenter that any disobedience to 'Cristes conseil' would bring upon him the divine punishment of madness. But by emphasising the contingency of the clerks' allegations of insanity at the end of the tale, the Miller undermines traditional theories of madness as a divine chastisement for sin. The scene is therefore the culmination of the Miller's attempts to show madness as a social construction rather than a divine chastisement.

The Miller's radicalism can only be properly understood in historical context. Neither the antagonism between townsfolk and scholars nor the association of the peasantry with the demonic and the insane is, as Lee Patterson's article might imply, unique to late fourteenth-century England. Throughout the

late Middle Ages in Europe, town-gown tension of the sort found in the *Miller's Tale* was part of daily life in university towns; but it became especially prominent at times of civil revolt. In his *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, Alexander Murray writes,

It may be asked, if education really did encourage élitism of the sort that rained abuse on rustics, and if the élite really did get into positions where rustics might feel the weight of this contempt, why the rustics should rarely be heard complaining. The answer is that medieval rustics are rarely heard saying anything. They generally had to revolt in order to be heard in their own time. It is only the greater of their revolts that can be heard by us at six centuries' distance. Nevertheless, if a historian listens carefully to these great medieval peasant revolts he will, in the appropriate milieux, hear an expressly anti-academic note.³⁸

Scholars were granted special privileges, the most significant of which was 'ecclesiastical immunity, or exemption from normal civil judicial processes'.³⁹ That whole communities were fined when a scholar met with injury or death indicates both the extensive protection enjoyed by clerks and the possibility of serious attacks on them. The multiple grievances often provoked townsfolk to open violence. As Sheila Delany writes,

The so-called "slaughters" at Oxford (1228 and 1354), Toulouse (1332) and Orleans (1387) are only a few of the best-known in a long series of raids, assaults and brawls. Some of these conflicts were provoked by specific trivial incidents, but the results are so disproportionately violent that most of them are only understandable as manifestations of a relation that was strained at best.⁴⁰

Murray also gives examples of town-gown conflicts in university towns in both England and France, ranging in seriousness from individual practical jokes to organized and outrageous acts of violence.⁴¹

However widespread they may have been, such tensions were felt nowhere more strongly than in England in 1381. The English peasantry had their own concerns about the universities. After the plague in mid-century, labour shortages were a frequent problem, and 'rural unease about the drain of farm-labour through the schools is in evidence in the years before and after the revolt'.⁴² The petty bourgeoisie, such as Chaucer's John, also had their grievances against the scholars. Of particular relevance to the *Miller's Tale* is the fact that 'rents and repairs in all houses letting to students were controlled by a University commission'.⁴³ In fact, the universities appear to have regulated many aspects of town life, and were even allowed to investigate the morals of the laity.⁴⁴ Little wonder, then, that

in the revolt of 1381 antipathy to the scholar was occasionally explicit. Some of the rebels in the eastern counties burned the privileges of Cambridge university. Nor was that entirely a matter of tenant fighting landlord: for at the bonfire an old woman cried 'Away with the learning of the clerks, away with it!'.⁴⁵

According to one historian, by the middle of the fifteenth century, Oxford 'had been crushed, and was almost entirely subjugated to the authority of the University. The burghers lived henceforth in their own town almost as the helots or subjects of a conquering people'.⁴⁶ The comparison is provocative; clearly, however, the actions and attitudes of the characters of the *Miller's Tale*, however traditional in the fabliau genre, reflect contemporary antagonisms between university and town.

More importantly, the language of insanity was ubiquitously employed in official accounts of peasant behaviour during the 1381 Revolt. Book I of Gower's *Vox Clamantis* is only the most dramatic example of such invective. Through his subtle yet constant undermining of clerical allegations of insanity, the Miller mounts a challenge to one of the most powerful pieces of anti-peasant ideology of the late Middle Ages.

The precariousness and contingency of allegations of madness is also apparent in another fabliau, or near-fabliau, by Chaucer. Like the *Miller's Tale*, the *Summoner's Tale* is 'permeated' by 'the image of sickness'.⁴⁷ The first part of the tale concerns a friar's attempts to wring a donation from a reluctant, bedridden peasant named Thomas. Thomas is presumably in mourning for his child, who has died less than two weeks previously (1852). If so, it is unlikely that we are intended to think of his apparent grief as excessive and therefore morally culpable. Rather, Thomas's illness links him with the pathetic old woman from whom the summoner tries to extort money in the preceding *Friar's Tale*.

Various analogues of the *Summoner's Tale* feature conflicts between avaricious friars and ailing peasants. In one of these, Rutebeuf's anti-fraternal poem *The Peasant's Fart*, the narrator's attitude towards peasants is couched in language similar to that of Chaucer's Friar John. For Rutebeuf's narrator,

People who are charitable have
 A great share in the spiritual paradise,
 But those who don't have charity in them
 Or sense or goodness or truth
 Fail to attain that joy.⁴⁸

Similar sentiments are evident in the *Summoner's Tale*, in which Friar John teaches his audiences -- and by implication Thomas -- 'to be charitable, / And spende hir good ther it is resonable' (1795-1796); thus John masks his selfish

desire for a donation with a veneer of reasonableness. Predictably, however, the language of reason is turned against the friar at the end of the tale.

In the opening interchanges among Thomas, his wife and the friar, Thomas is virtually ignored. Like the injured carpenter in the final scene of the *Miller's Tale*, he is treated as an object, a mere topic of conversation. The wife's use of animal similes to describe her husband undermines Thomas's status as a rational being: Thomas, she tells the friar, is 'as angry as a pissemyre' (1825) -- a word which anticipates the scatological humour of the end of the tale -- and 'groneth lyk oure boor' (1829).⁴⁹ Friar John relishes Thomas's passive state. Since Thomas has been unable to attend church, John offers to summarize the day's sermon for him:

I have to day been at youre chirche at messe,
 And seyde a sermon after my symple wit --
 Nat al after the text of hooly writ;
 For it is hard to yow, as I suppose,
 And therefore wol I teche yow al the glose. (1788-1792)

The passage recalls the episode in the *Miller's Tale* in which Nicholas warns the carpenter not to think for himself; it also prefigures the lord and lady's rejection of peasant rationality later in the *Summoner's Tale*.

The friar tells Thomas that anger is caused by the devil and he proceeds to deliver a prolix warning to Thomas on the dangers of ire. Within the frame of the *Canterbury Tales*, this discourse on anger-madness is clearly aimed by the Summoner -- who is himself presented as a choleric buffoon -- at his bitter enemy Friar Huberd. 'Upon this Frere his herte was so wood', says Chaucer in the *Summoner's Prologue*, 'That lyk an aspen leef he quook for ire' (1666-1667). But the theme of anger-madness also functions ironically within the tale itself. First, Friar John has chosen to lecture a peasant on a sin that pertains to himself, as the

many references to his angry demeanour indicate. Moreover, anger-madness is most commonly associated with the upper orders of society. The friar's warning to Thomas -- 'Withinne thyn hous ne be thou no leon; / To thy subgitz do noon oppression' (1989-1990) -- is a classic injunction against anger-madness; but it is flagrantly wrenched from its proper penitential context. As Penelope Doob says, it is not the lowly peasant, but 'the political leader, the proud king, who is prey to both temporary and permanent forms of anger-madness'.⁵⁰ Thus the friar's harangue is couched in terms that are entirely inappropriate to one of Thomas's social rank. Anger-madness is perhaps the most class-specific of all the medieval categories of madness, affecting principally men of 'heigh degree'. It is therefore fitting that Friar John -- who prides himself on his elevated social status -- should himself succumb to this form of insanity. As in the *Miller's Tale*, madness seems to be alleged by those who are most deluded.

The enraged Thomas now plays his trick on his tormentor. He agrees to give the friar 'swich thyng as is in [his] possessioun' on the condition that the friar share it equally among his fellows, and invites him to search his buttocks for the donation (2124). The predictable 'gift' of the fart can be seen as an act of madness. As Penelope Doob says, 'habitual anger *is* madness; it is not simply *like* madness'.⁵¹ The angry man, according to Chaucer's Parson, is 'out of alle juggement of resoun' (537). Friar John himself implies this connection between anger and madness when he ironically warns Thomas to 'be no felawe to an irous man, / Ne with no wood man walke by the weye' (2086-2087). As provocative as Thomas's 'probleme' of the division of the fart proves to be, then, the fart itself is an act of anger-madness.

Nevertheless, Thomas's madness is not immoral. In certain cases, anger-madness could be sanctioned. One such circumstance was sickness. Aquinas notes that 'if anyone through sickness or some such cause fall into such a passion as deprives him of the use of his reason, his act is rendered wholly involuntary, and he is entirely excused from sin'.⁵² Thomas's madness certainly seems to

proceed from his illness, as the Summoner implies by his remark: 'This sike man wax wel ny wood for ire' (2121). But Thomas's explosive retribution may be sanctioned on moral, as well as medical grounds. For Chaucer's Parson there are two types of ire, bad and good. 'The good Ire', he explains, 'is by jalousie of goodnesse, thurgh which a man is wrooth with wikkednesse and agayns wikkednesse; and therefore seith a wys man that Ire is bet than pley (538). Boccaccio also distinguishes between two sorts of anger, one which is 'unreasonable', another which 'may be reasonable, as is indignation about some injustice'.⁵³ Thomas's anger-madness, then, is entirely justified.

The Summoner emphasizes the ludicrousness of the friar's anger, on the other hand, by his use of comically inappropriate language. If Thomas was as 'angry as a pissemyre' and groaned like a domestic pig, Friar John rises up 'as dooth a wood leoun' (2152) and 'looked as it were a wilde boor' (2160). These animals, of course, have a courtly pedigree and are commonly invoked to illustrate the battle-rage of romance heroes. Thus the Summoner mockingly describes the friar's fury in terms normally reserved for the knights of chivalric romance.

Yet the friar seeks redress not in physical conflict but in an impassioned appeal to the lord of the local manor, where Thomas's 'probleme' of the division of the fart is met with a mixture of fascination and incomprehension. At first, the lord struggles to credit the peasant with intellectual ability:

'How hadde this cherl ymaginacioun

To shewe such a probleme to the frere? (2218-2219)

The word 'ymaginacioun' is particularly intriguing to the historian of madness, since it has associations with both madness and reason.

John Hines points out that 'it was a current supposition of some medieval socio-religious thought that churls were as brute beasts, possessed only of imagination rather than reason'. Thus he maintains that 'the general attitude' of the

lord and lady 'seems to be that the churl has stumbled upon this riposte to the friar blindly' rather than through any rational process.⁵⁴ The idea that peasants have only imagination can be explained with reference to medieval faculty psychology. According to the physicians, the faculty of *imaginatio*, situated at the front of the brain, receives sensory impressions. But the term 'ymaginacioun' in the *Summoner's Tale* clearly denotes not *imaginatio*, as Hines's comment might suggest, but the higher faculty of *imaginativa* or *cogitativa*. This faculty, housed in the middle ventricle of the brain, is responsible for combining sensory impressions in different ways to create new and sometimes impossible forms.⁵⁵ From the time of Avicenna onwards, this latter faculty is referred to as *cogitativa* in human beings and *imaginativa* when it is under the guidance of the rational soul. Thus the 'power which relates the sensible forms in *imaginatio* to each other is called imaginative in beasts, cogitative when controlled by the rational soul'.⁵⁶ In this sense, the lord's comment echoes Gower's equation of peasants and animals; Chaucer seems to be sending up contemporary anti-peasant rhetoric.

On the other hand, the association of the Middle English word 'ymaginacioun' with the middle rather than the anterior ventricle of the brain means that it also carries positive connotations. Far from implying a diminution of rationality, 'ymaginacioun' can also denote 'power of reasoning'.⁵⁷ Thus it seems that the lord is impressed, however reluctantly, by the peasant's ratiative powers. Furthermore, as Timothy O'Brien notes, the word 'imagination' had a particular scholarly application, appearing 'most commonly in the phrase *secundum imaginationem*, which describes the process of proving a solution *via rationis*, that is, according to a consistent line of logic without regard for the observable world'.⁵⁸ In this sense, the lord's comment prepares us for Jankyn's display of scholastic reasoning at the end of the tale.

'Ymaginacioun' also denotes innovation or originality.⁵⁹ The lord is repeatedly struck not only by the reasonableness of Thomas's problem, but also by its novelty:

'Nevere *erst er now* herde I of swich mateere' (2220)

'In ars-metrike shal ther no man fynde,
Biforn this day, of swich a question' (2222-2223)

'Who evere herde of swiche a thyng *er now?*' (2229)

Thomas's question shocks the lord because it shows the peasant's disturbing capacity to think independently of authority.

This display of inventiveness is simultaneously dismissed by the lord and lady as the product of a deranged, even possessed mind. The lady of the manor, who eventually comes to praise the peasant's powers of reasoning, initially regards Thomas as insane:

His sike heed is ful of vanytee;
I holde hym in a manere frenesye (2208-2209)

The lord, meanwhile, recalls the friar's sermon on the diabolical nature of madness, attributing Thomas's ingenuity to satanic influence:

I trowe the devel putte it in his mynde (2221)

I holde hym certeyn a demonyak! (2240)

These reactions are understandable given the high value the inhabitants of the manor later set on the ability to reason. As Vieda Skultans observes in a discussion of eighteenth-century attitudes towards imagination: 'excess of imagination is thought to constitute insanity at a time when reasonableness [is] highly valued'.⁶⁰

Yet the lord and lady's imputations of madness are undermined by the very language in which they are expressed: as in the *Miller's Tale*, their tenuousness is suggested by verbs of uncertainty such as 'trowe' and 'holde'. Even the lord's word 'certeyn' implies nothing so much as a lack of conviction. The most vehement allegations of madness succeed only in drawing attention to the rhetorical status of language and the constructed nature of madness.

The lord and lady's allegations of insanity and demonic possession take on their full significance in the context of contemporary anti-peasant ideology. Of course, 'demoniak' is used as a general term of abuse throughout the Middle Ages;⁶¹ but such language must be understood in the context of contemporary invectives such as the *Vox Clamantis*. Once again, it seems that Chaucer is satirizing -- although not necessarily criticizing -- the readiness of the upper classes to dismiss peasants as unreasoning brutes.

In the third and final movement of the poem the castigation of Thomas's supposed insanity gives way to general ridicule of the friar. The lord's squire, Jankyn, now offers a solution to Thomas's problem of the division of the fart among the friars. He suggests that thirteen friars, including Friar John himself, be summoned to the lord's hall and assemble around a cartwheel to take part in an extraordinary experiment:

Thanne shal they knele doun, by oon assent,
 And to every spokes ende, in this manere,
 Ful sadly leye his nose shal a frere.
 Youre noble confessour -- there God hym save! --
 Shal holde his nose upright under the nave.
 Thanne shal this cherl, with bely stif and toght
 As any tabour, hyder been ybrought;
 And sette hym on the wheel right of this cart,
 Upon the nave, and make hym lete a fart.

And ye shul seen, up peril of my lyf,
 By preeve which that is demonstratif,
 That equally the soun of it wol wende,
 And eke the stynk, unto the spokes ende,
 Save that this worthy man, youre confessour,
 By cause he is a man of greet honour,
 Shul have the firste fruyt, as resoun is. (2262-2277)

Jankyn's absurd solution is met with unqualified approval by the lord and lady, if not the friar. It is a triumph of imagination -- the faculty associated with both madness and reason. Jankyn's mockingly precious insistence on the language of scholastic reason -- 'By preeve which is demonstratif', 'By cause', 'as resoun is' -- parodies the friar's verbosity as well as his earlier instruction to Thomas to spend his money 'ther it is resonable' (1796).

The squire's shrewd solution to the problem of the fart's division shows how reason can be manipulated for selfish ends: if the Friar's 'reson' consisted in telling people where to 'spend hir good', Jankyn's casuistry is motivated by the lord's promise of a new 'gowne-clooth'. But the latter detail suggests a less obvious point. Jankyn's role is remarkably like that of a court fool, whose 'major office', as Rose Zimbardo puts it, 'was to engage in wit combat or dispute with his lord'.⁶² Like the court wits described in Enid Welsford's important study *Fool*, Jankyn is licensed to contradict his lord's judgement, to solve riddles and to flatter or ridicule freely with the promise of material remuneration; in this case the reward is a gown, the garment traditionally provided by a court for its fools.⁶³

Jankyn's satirical friar-baiting, in particular, aligns him with those 'artificial' fools who were permitted to denounce with impunity the hidden vices of the powerful.⁶⁴ Moreover, by punning on the words 'ars-metrik' and 'resoun' -- the latter of which suggests the 'resonance' of a fart -- Jankyn not only alludes to the scatological behaviour for which buffoons were renowned, but also draws

upon the fool's traditional rhetorical resources. His sophistry has the effect of defusing a highly-charged situation by substituting the manor's class-conscious imputations of madness with absurd and politically impotent fool-play.

Ostensibly at least, the Summoner has evaded the radical implications of Thomas's problem. Indeed, medieval fools characteristically satirize the abuses of individual figures, imaginary or real, but never the social structures or institutions to which they belong. If Heather Arden is right, for example, the popular sotties or 'fool plays' of the late Middle Ages are properly seen not as radical subversions of official culture, but rather as non-egalitarian and conservative works.⁶⁵ In the *Summoner's Tale* folly has an equally stabilizing rationale. The introduction of the fool is an attempt to dissolve, rather than point up the unpalatable political implications of Thomas's conundrum.

The tale has now moved into a traditional form of satire. In a sense, the historically specific allegations of peasant insanity have been 'translated', as Lee Patterson laments, 'back into the dehistoricizing language of antifraternality discourse' so that 'we retreat into a world of aesthetic appreciation, in which peasant energy, however potentially threatening, is reduced to a playful manipulation of the images of official culture that leaves the realities firmly in place'.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, to see the end of the *Summoner's Tale* as an escape from history is to overlook the extent to which the desire for such an escape is itself a feature of official commentaries on the Revolt. The most conservative of these, Walsingham's *Historia Anglicana*, also moves from the disturbing invective of peasant defamation to antifraternality. Walsingham, whose vitriolic description of the rebels has already been mentioned, ends his analysis of the rising with a conventional tract against the mendicant friars, whom he implausibly blames for neglecting their office and causing the commons to rebel.⁶⁷ The end of the *Summoner's Tale* therefore mirrors, rather than abandons contemporary anti-peasant discourse.

Other elements at the end of the tale preclude a comfortable closure or a total abdication of historically specific elements. The most obvious of these is the tale's fashionable concern with scholarly reason. If the end of the tale represents the victory of folly over madness, it also sees the triumph of science over demonology, a point neatly underscored by Jankyn's pun on 'demonstratif'. The household's excessive praise of Jankyn's cogitative powers recalls the bitter ending of the *Miller's Tale*: by comparing Jankyn's reasoning to that of Euclid and Ptolemy, the inhabitants of the manor salute the reasoning of clerks (2287-2289). But despite its supposed classical grandeur, Jankyn's reasoning is not far removed from the concerns of contemporary England. In fact, the solution to the problem of the fart's division recalls the scholarly controversies of the late fourteenth-century. As Timothy O'Brien points out, the debate over indivisibility

was a central issue of debate among scholars during the fourteenth century. According to John Murdoch, the debate was between, on the one hand, those such as Henry of Harclay, Walter Chatton and Nicholas Bonet, who argued that *continua* are composed of indivisibles, and, on the other hand, those Mertonians such as Thomas Bradwardine and William Heytesbury, who, with Aristotle in the *Physics*, argued that *continua* were composed only of divisibles. It is likely that the problem of division at the end of the *Summoner's Tale* refers to this debate over indivisibility.⁶⁸

The suggestion is plausible. Chaucer was, after all, a friend of the Oxford fellow and mathematician Ralph Strode, who tutored the poet's son Lewis; and elsewhere in his work Chaucer exhibits 'a clear understanding of the scholastic terminology used at Merton College'.⁶⁹

The end of the *Summoner's Tale* also reflects a more specific and directly relevant concern with division. In a recent article Phillip Pulsiano has convincingly

discussed Jankyn's thought-experiment in relation to another contemporary problem of natural science, that of the division of the winds according to their directions.⁷⁰ This suggestion, along with O'Brien's, indicates that Jankyn's satire has contemporary as well as traditional targets, sending up not only the friars, but also the concerns of university scholars.

Indeed, O'Brien shows how Jankyn's reasoning relates to fourteenth-century philosophical debates between the champions of a traditional sort of science which relied on authority and the advocates of the increasingly popular phenomenological science, which, following the example of Grosseteste and Roger Bacon in the previous century, depended for its conclusions on experience and demonstration.⁷¹ By relying on 'preeve which that is demonstratif', Jankyn's clearly endorses the latter scientific method which, as O'Brien notes, was particularly fashionable in the English universities in the fourteenth century. Finally, O'Brien shows that both the vocabulary and the structure of the argument in the final part of the tale conform to the conventions of contemporary scholastic discourse.⁷² Jankyn's solution therefore subtly re-invokes the antagonism between scholars and peasants that erupts so unpleasantly in the final scene of the *Miller's Tale*. At the end of the *Summoner's Tale*, then, the allegations of peasant madness are not entirely dissolved into traditional anti-fraternal satire, nor does the tale end with 'the reestablishment of a happy, stable society'.⁷³ On the contrary, Jankyn's mock pedagogy constitutes an ironic but insidious reassertion of class difference.

As far as Thomas himself is concerned, the endorsement of his reasoning by the lord and squire is a mixed blessing. Explicitly at least, Thomas is conceded rationality and relieved of the stigma of diabolism:

Touchynge the cherl, they seyde, subtiltee
 And heigh wit made hym speken as he spak;
 He nys no fool, ne no demonyak. (2290-2292)

Having dismissed the dangerous ideas of a mad peasant, the inhabitants of the manor jestingly recast Thomas as a champion of reason; if the *Miller's Tale* ended with the mockery of peasant madness, the *Summoner's Tale* ends with a tribute to the rationality of a churl.

This tribute, of course, is entirely spurious and ironic. In the *Summoner's Tale*, the peasant becomes an object of scientific study. Just as the squire places the rustic cartwheel at the centre of his thought-experiment, so the peasant Thomas is reduced, in O'Brien's austere words, to the status of a 'mechanical device' or the 'narrating Summoner's cooking pot'.⁷⁴ Thomas's predictable behaviour means that he may be regarded as an experimental constant, or even as a beast, according to Aquinas's observation that 'animals show regular and orderly behaviour and must therefore be regarded as machines, distinct from man who acts according to his rational soul'.⁷⁵ This latter idea recalls the lord's earlier reference to Thomas's 'ymaginacioun', insofar as that term calls into question Thomas's rationality. Chaucer's parody of scholastic reasoning here implies a traditional scepticism about a scientific methodology which, applied mechanically, acts as a distraction from moral values and reduces human beings to the level of objects or beasts.

Abstract scholastic language, like the language of folly, also causes the new scientists of the manor to lose sight of the radical political implications of Thomas's assertion of the possibility of dividing his donation equally among the friars. In the portentous words of Ernesto Grassi and Maristella Lorch:

Scientific, intellectual thought can only have a formal character, can take place only within the boundaries of a system. Any humanism that attempts to transcend formal thinking by taking into account the problems of life, of man in his real context, is excluded. [...]
Scientific, rational language must of inner necessity be an inhuman,

mathematical calculation [...]. Rationality becomes the terror of the human.⁷⁶

Unlike Thomas's problem, Jankyn's sophistry disregards the possibility of social change. In fact, Thomas is repeatedly referred to as a 'churl' in the final section of the tale, even after his riposte has been vindicated.

The *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales, we have seen, reflect the widespread and often violent antipathy between peasants and scholars which was conspicuous during the Peasants' Revolt. This antipathy -- frequently expressed in terms of insanity -- erupts spectacularly in the *Miller's Tale* and is presented more ambiguously in the *Summoner's Tale*. Chaucer does not simply record the prevalent attitudes of his day, but manipulates them impressively. In a statement typical of early Chaucer criticism, Thomas Warton long ago stated that 'we are surprised to find, in so gross and ignorant an age, such talents for satire, and for observation of life'.⁷⁷ This pronouncement, however patronizing and naive to twentieth-century ears, is not wholly untrue. The ludic nature of Chaucer's concern with madness is part of his more general reluctance to subjugate his writing to ideology. Moreover, by comparing one allegation of madness with another for ironic effect or by satirizing these allegations in various ways, Chaucer emphasizes the socially-constructed, rather than the natural or divine character of insanity. Thus he shows a self-consciousness about madness that is impossible for 'moral Gower', whose literary objective is vilification rather than exploration. However much Chaucer might have shared his friend's horror at the Peasants' Revolt, he nevertheless perceives the irony of a situation in which the English peasantry, whose radical rhetoric insisted on common human dignity and the necessity of 'prudent' rule based on egalitarian principles, were summarily dismissed as unreasoning beasts.

Notes to Chapter 4

- 1 Fisher, p.206.
- 2 Tuke, p.10.
- 3 Zimbardo, pp.329-330. The beginning of the *Book of the Duchess* closely resembles the melancholic openings of Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* and the Prologue to his *Complaint*.
- 4 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.168.
- 5 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, passim.
- 6 Michel, p.70. Michel often associates madness and immorality: pride is elsewhere described as a form of 'wodehede' (p.18).
- 7 *The Fabliau in English* (London: Longman, 1993), p.x.
- 8 For continental analogues to the tale see *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. by William F. Bryan and Germain Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp.106-123.
- 9 Lee W. Patterson, 'No Man His Reson Herde', passim.
- 10 The passage in question is *Nun's Priest's Tale*, 3393-3397:

So hydous was the noyse, a, benedicitee!
 Certes, he Jakke Straw and his meynee
 Ne made nevere shoutes half so shrille
 Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille,
 As thilke day was maad upon the fox.

As Derek Pearsall says, this passage suggests that the rebels are 'to be seen, as Gower saw them, as farmyard animals gone beserk'. *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.147. Unlike Gower, however, Chaucer's view of the Revolt is characterized by

- irony rather than apocalyptic despondency. For more discussion of the interplay between literature and history in Chaucer see Richard W. Fehrenbacher, '"A yeerd enclosed al aboute": Literature and History in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 29.2 (1994), 134-148. There are also possible references to the Revolt in the *Knight's Tale*, 2459, *Clerk's Tale*, 995-1001, and *Troilus*, iv. 183-184.
- 11 Donald W. Rowe, *Through Nature to Eternity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p.136.
- 12 Patterson, 'No Man His Reson Herde', pp.146-147.
- 13 Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926), pp.71-90.
- 14 Margaret Galway, 'The History of Chaucer's Miller', *Notes and Queries*, 195 (1950), 486-488 (pp.487-488).
- 15 Claudas has 'les iex gros & noirs, lun loig del autre. Il auoit le neis court & reskignie & le barbe rousse. & les cheueus ne bien noir ne bien rous. Mais entremeles dun & dautre. Si ot le col gros & le bouche grande'. [Eyes [...] large and black with a large space between them. He had a short and ugly nose, and his beard was red. His hair was neither all black nor all red; rather the two were intermingled. He had a large neck and a large mouth]. *Lancelot*, pp.26-27, trans. in Benson, p.83.
- 16 All quotations are from the *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). The irrationality of the Miller is also suggested by Alfred David, who notes that by interjecting before the Monk, the Miller is 'claiming no more than the privilege of the Boy Bishop, the Master of the Feast of Fools, and the Lord of Misrule'. *The Strumpet Muse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p.94.
- 17 Hines, pp.109-110.
- 18 David Williams, 'Radical Therapy in the *Miller's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 15 (1980-81), 227-235 (p.233).

- 19 See E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1975), p.19.
- 20 Patrick J. Gallagher, 'Perception and Reality in the *Miller's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 18 (1983-84), 38-48 (p.44). In the *Knight's Tale*, too, Arcite seems to suffer from a deranged imagination. See lines 1093-94 and especially 1372-1376.
- 21 David Williams, p.231.
- 22 *MED*, 'fantasie' 4(a), p.401.
- 23 *MED*, 'fantasie' 1(a), p.400.
- 24 *The Northern Homily Cycle*, ed. by Saara Nevanlinna, 3 vols (Helsinki: Société Neophilologique, 1972-1984), I, p.156.
- 25 John Lydgate, *Troy Book*, ed. by Henry Bergen (London: EETS es 97, 1906) I, 3036-3042, p.231.
- 26 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.26.
- 27 G.G. Coulton, *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919), p.56. Also in Dobson, p.364.
- 28 'Amplius in melancholico fortitudo imaginationis constrictantium rerum facit ei apparere, quod iam sit in actu res cuius similitudo animae representatur: et idcirco in continua perseverat tristitia'. Translated by Harvey, p.26.
- 29 Gallagher, p.43.
- 30 Compare Chaucer's use of the phrase 'he pryked as he were wood' for comic effect in *Sir Thopas* (774), where, as Benson (p.87) notes, it evokes the hero's 'aimless vigor'.
- 31 Hines, p.119.
- 32 'intellectus a sensu et phantasia distrahitur ab actionibus rationis'. Translated by Harvey, p.26.

- 33 William F. Woods, 'Private and Public in the *Miller's Tale*', *Chaucer Review* 29.2 (1994), 166-178 (p.173).
- 34 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.70.
- 35 Hines, p.120.
- 36 Reginald Pecock, *The Donet*, ed. by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock (London: EETS os 156, 1921), p.12.
- 37 Patterson, 'No Man His Reson Herde', p.144.
- 38 Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.244. On the clerical defamation of the uneducated see also R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp.138-140.
- 39 Delany, *Medieval literary politics*, p.106.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Murray, pp.244-246.
- 42 Murray, p.245.
- 43 Delany, *Medieval literary politics*, p.106.
- 44 Delany, *Medieval literary politics*, pp.106-107.
- 45 Murray, p.245.
- 46 Rashdall, quoted in Delany, *Medieval literary politics*, p.107.
- 47 David Williams, p.227.
- 48 'Le Pet au Villain', in *The French Fabliau*, ed. and trans. by Raymond Eichmann and John Duval, 2 vols (New York: Garland, 1984) (1943) II, p.243.
- 49 In at least one of the continental analogues of the *Summoner's Tale*, the victim of fraternal demands for money complains that he has been treated like an animal. 'Mais vos', complains the priest to two friars in the thirteenth-century *Li Dis de le vescie à prestre*, 'por beste me teneis'. *Sources and Analogues*, p.285. Bryan and Dempster conjecture that

Chaucer knew, perhaps through oral tradition, a tale similar to this one.

Sources and Analogues, p.277.

50 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.28.

51 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, 29.

52 Quoted in Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.35.

53 Translated by Nicholas R. Havely, *Chaucer's Boccaccio* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1980), p.127.

54 Hines, p.175.

55 Thus *cogitativa* might combine the concept of gold and the concept of a mountain to produce the composite form of a golden mountain. For this example (from Duns Scotus) see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 3 vols (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1962) II.2, 243.

56 Harvey, p.45.

57 *MED*, p.81.

58 Timothy D. O'Brien, "'Ars Metrik": Science, Satire and Chaucer's Summoner', *Mosaic*, 23.4 (1990), 1-22 (p.16). 'Ymaginacioun' is used in this sense in the discussion of the physics of sound in line 728 of the *House of Fame*.

59 *MED*, p.81.

60 Vieda Skultans, *English Madness: Ideas on Insanity, 1580-1890* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.140.

61 In Hoccleve's *Jereslaus's Wife*, for example, the Emperor calls his treacherous brother a 'demoniak'. See *Hoccleve's Works*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall and Israel Gollancz, (London: EETS es 61, 72-73, 1892-97), p.170, l.843.

62 Zimbardo, p.333. It is possible that Chaucer encountered court fools during his travels in Italy.

63 There can be no doubt that by the end of the fourteenth century fools were strongly connected with the garments they wore. Charles VI of France even

- had a fool named 'Haincelin', whose name is that of a long gown. See Welsford, pp.118-119; on the riddle-solving of fools see Welsford on the Solomon and Marchol tradition, pp.35-36.
- 64 See Ménard, p.458.
- 65 Heather Arden, *Fools' Plays: A study of satire in the sotties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.97.
- 66 Patterson, 'No Man His Reson Herde', p.155; p.153. For antifraternal elements at the end of the tale see Arnold Williams, 'Chaucer and the Friars', *Speculum*, 28 (1953), 499-513; John Fleming, 'The Antifraternalism of the *Summoner's Tale*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 65 (1966), 688-700; Penn R. Szittyá, 'The Friar as False Apostle: Antifraternal Exegesis and the *Summoner's Tale*', *Studies in Philology*, 71.1 (1974), 19-46.
- 67 Dobson, pp.368-369.
- 68 O'Brien, p.13.
- 69 Ibid. For Strode's tuition of Lewis see Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, 3 vols (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), II, p.165.
- 70 Phillip Pulsiano, 'The Twelve-Spoked Wheel of the *Summoner's Tale*', *Chaucer Review* 29.4 (1995), 382-389. Pulsiano makes no reference to O'Brien's work, despite the obvious similarity of their subjects.
- 71 O'Brien, p.13. On Bacon see also Copleston, II.2, pp.164-182.
- 72 O'Brien, pp.14-15.
- 73 O'Brien, p.1.
- 74 O'Brien, p.11; p.4.
- 75 Quoted in O'Brien, p.6.
- 76 *Folly and Insanity in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986), p.17.
- 77 Warton, II, p.199.

Chapter 5

'By cowntynaunce it is not wist': Thomas Hoccleve and the Subject of Madness¹

No sicknesse suche, as is the griefe of minde - Nicholas Breton

In many of the literary works discussed so far, madness is both a moral abomination and a threat to social and political order. Moreover, these works often present the observation of madness from a third-person perspective. By contrast, the major, apparently autobiographical poems of the fifteenth-century civil servant Thomas Hoccleve present the experience of madness from the viewpoint of the sufferer. As Michael MacDonald observes, madness, although 'the most social of maladies to those who observe its effects' is also 'the most solitary of afflictions to the people who experience it'.² In Hoccleve's works insanity is not merely a spectacular moral emblem, but a distressing personal experience.

That Hoccleve both suffered and wrote about madness should not surprise us. Hoccleve seems not to have had any knowledge of his madness while he suffered from it; rather, he gleans the details of his madness from his friends after the event.³ Nevertheless, his description of his madness, especially in the *Complaint*, attests to the medieval madman's awareness of the stigma of madness and to his acute sense of social alienation. The last few of Hoccleve's major works, however, have a different tone, as Hoccleve abandons his autobiographical exploration of his insanity in favour of a more public-spirited poetry in which he denounces the unruliness of others.

Early critics tended to value the autobiographical content of the poems above all else. This is the element of Hoccleve's work that most excited the poet's first editor Frederick Furnivall, whose long introduction to the *Minor Poems* is rife

with groundless speculations about the poet's life.⁴ Some years later, H.S. Bennett observed that 'we are always in touch with the poet: we do not feel that his poems are mechanical exercises, but the reflection of the poet's own ideas and personality', referring to Hoccleve's egotism and what he rather disparagingly terms his 'crude immediacy'.⁵ Eleanor Prescott Hammond also calls Hoccleve a 'natural egoist' who 'turns more naturally toward himself than toward literature'.⁶ Hammond implies that in writing about himself Hoccleve managed to escape the influences of literary convention, freeing himself to express a natural autobiographical impulse. All of these critics see Hoccleve as a proto-humanist, an often dull yet historically precocious champion of an individualism completely undetermined by social conditions. Indeed, Hammond implies that Hoccleve was isolated from his society, that there was 'a poet here and a public world there'.⁷

Absolute distinctions between individual and society or between the 'immediate' and the conventional cannot, of course, be made. We can agree with Bennett that Hoccleve's poetry is 'immediate', so long as we remember that for the artist, directness is a literary affectation.⁸ We can also agree with Hammond that Hoccleve 'turned towards himself', so long as we do not suppose that in doing so he was able either to escape the public sphere or to express himself without the aid of literary conventions.

Almost all of the rapidly growing scholarship on Hoccleve's major works has been concerned to some extent with the question of autobiography. Nevertheless, it is still impossible to say precisely how much of what the narrator tells us in the poems corresponds with actual events in the life of Hoccleve. Furnivall took for granted the historical veracity of the longer poems. The 'chief authorities' for Hoccleve's life, he remarks, are not only historical documents, but also his 'Male Regle [...] his Dialog with the old Beggar in his Regement of Princes, his Complaint and Dialogue with a friend'.⁹ Furnivall naturally concluded that the details Hoccleve describes, including a period of madness, are autobiographical.

More recently, New Critical and Deconstructive movements in literary theory have encouraged a general distrust of autobiographical interpretations of texts. Since the 1960s a number of critics have undermined Furnivall's confident identification of Hoccleve with his mad narrator. The most influential of these, Penelope Doob, is willing to concede that Hoccleve may have been insane.¹⁰ She is quick, however, to point out that Hoccleve's descriptions of madness are steeped in literary and medical conventions. As Albert Friedman notes, Doob implies that those who have taken Hoccleve at his word when he says that he is mad have simply been 'taken in'.¹¹ Thus Doob effectively reverses Hammond's observation that Hoccleve turned 'more naturally toward himself than toward literature'. One eminent critic has gone even further, claiming confidently that 'no-one could mistake' Hoccleve's work 'for anything other than a fiction'.¹²

It is clearly fallacious, however, to suppose that the conventionality of an experience precludes its veracity. As John Burrow points out, 'it is not safe to assume that a real experience will not be described (or indeed experienced) in conventional terms'.¹³ The psychosis which afflicts the narrator at the start of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, for example, is described in conventional fashion; yet no reader can rule out the possibility that Kempe really was insane. The same might be said of the Elizabethan Nicholas Breton, who is in many ways Hoccleve's literary successor. Breton lived near Bethlem hospital and seems to have been familiar with its insane inmates. His poems are saturated with references to madness and madmen, leading Basil Clarke to speculate that the poet 'had chronic depressive troubles of his own'.¹⁴ Whatever the truth of these cases, literary convention is not the opposite of real life; on the contrary, it can determine not only how, but also which experiences are described in an autobiography. In an autobiography of the twelfth century, the French abbot Guibert de Nogent tells of the beatings he received as a child from his tutor, a detail which recalls the early experiences of Augustine.¹⁵ Despite this awesome precedent, the possibility that Guibert was indeed thrashed cannot be discounted.

Clearly, a strong distinction between conventional and real textual details cannot be upheld. It does not follow, however, that the two categories should be regarded either as co-extensive or as indistinguishable; rather, we should posit a weak distinction between them. As we have already seen, during the Middle Ages details of real and fictional descriptions of madness often overlapped. The experience of madness -- like any other experience which may be related in an autobiography -- is closely, but not inextricably, bound up with convention.

The poetic and documentary evidence for Hoccleve's madness cannot simply be ignored. The major poems are so strewn with verifiable details from Hoccleve's life that there is no reason to suppose that they have any less truth-value than the autobiographies of, say, Tolstoy or Woolf, even if Hoccleve's motivations for self-revelation are typically medieval. Gordon Claridge, Ruth Pryor and Gwen Watkins advance another reason for believing that 'Hoccleve is describing his own experience', pointing out that

it would have been professional suicide for a civil servant to describe the indignities of derangement and to represent himself as having been mad, unless the facts were as well known to his colleagues and masters as he says they were; while to try, on the other hand, to put his known condition in a better light, as Hoccleve does, is sensible only if the fact of his illness was well known but his recovery less well recognised, which is what he claims.¹⁶

Whether or not Hoccleve would indeed have undermined his position as a civil servant by identifying himself with an insane narrator, he would hardly have jeopardized his considerable opportunities for professional advancement by doing so.

Given the likelihood of Hoccleve's insanity and the fact that his poetry 'was as autobiographical as any writing can be, given that we are always

controlled by the conventions of our age', the narrator of these poems is referred to in this chapter as Hoccleve rather than Thomas, as some critics prefer.¹⁷ Not everyone will agree that Hoccleve's major works are as autobiographical as is claimed here; but this need not invalidate the arguments of this chapter. Few of the points made here are dependent on an acceptance of Hoccleve as an autobiographer. Stephen Medcalf's forthright caveat to his readers must suffice to allay any remaining doubts:

I shall proceed on the assumption that the proportion of genuine experience to the conventions which articulate and enable Hoccleve to explore it is very large. You must make your own adjustment to what I have to say if you are less convinced than I am of the veridicalness of Hoccleve's story.¹⁸

While the issue of authenticity has a significance for literary history, it has been said that it does not matter 'from a literary point of view' whether or not we can establish Hoccleve's apparent autobiographies as historical facts.¹⁹ The most important point to take from the discussion about autobiography in Hoccleve is that the poet wishes us to understand the madness of his narrator as his own personal experience.

Hoccleve has not escaped the attentions of twentieth-century physicians. From the evidence of the poems, Dr Anthony Ryle diagnoses him as suffering

from a bi-polar manic-depressive illness, having experienced a minor depressive episode in 1406 (*Mâle Règle*) and a worse and more prolonged one starting in 1411 (*Regement*) terminating in an attack of mania or hypomania which cleared in 1416 (*Complaint and Dialogue with a Friend*), after which time he was but mildly depressed.²⁰

There is documentary evidence that Hoccleve, who worked as a scribe at the Privy Seal office in Westminster, was incapacitated for some reason in the period preceding his first poetic reference to his madness. The Pells Issue Roll for 18 July 1416 shows that Hoccleve's half-yearly annuity was paid not to Hoccleve but to his three colleagues.²¹ In fact, as the historian A.L. Brown states, Hoccleve 'did not come to the Exchequer personally between May 1414 and March 1417 to collect payments due to him'.²² The poet's first reference to his madness occurs, significantly, in the *Complaint* of 1422, in which he claims to have recovered his memory some five years previously (50-56).²³ Indeed, what little we know about Hoccleve's career is consistent with what he tells us in his poems. 'What he wrote', says Brown of Hoccleve, 'was apparently in essence true. His service in the Privy Seal, his annuity, his hostel, even to some extent his breakdown, can be substantiated from the records'.²⁴

The best source of information about conditions at the Privy Seal office during the early fifteenth century is still the fifth volume of Thomas F. Tout's colossal *Chapters in Medieval Administrative History*.²⁵ A consideration of Hoccleve's poems alongside Tout's evidence yields a consistent, albeit sketchy, picture of the life of the Privy Seal clerk and of the professional and economic stresses and grievances which may have contributed to his breakdown.

Tout notes that the Privy Seal office was understaffed, and this situation seems to have worsened during Hoccleve's term of employment.²⁶ The clerks were paid irregularly to put it mildly: one of Hoccleve's predecessors at the office, Dighton, received no wages for an astonishing six years and forty-three days; Tirrington's arrears were comparable. Their supposedly fixed income was very little. And yet, as Tout notes, 'low as were their wages and irregular as was their payment, as time went on the privy seal clerks tended to be treated with less rather than more liberality'.²⁷ Hoccleve complains in considerable detail about all of these pressures throughout the major poetry.

Other hazards tested the poet's sanity. In the prologue to his *Regement of Princes* Hoccleve describes the financial chicanery practised by some of those with whom the Seal office had dealings. Many of the wealthier clients employed servants as go-betweens in their transactions with the office. These servants often refused to pay the clerks. If the clerks demurred, the servants would simply return to their lords complaining of the extortions of the clerks.²⁸ Thus the clerks, like the customs controllers in Chaucer's day, were regularly humiliated.

Not all critics have been moved to pity by Hoccleve's plight. In a severe attack on Hoccleve's professional career and personality, Malcolm Richardson describes the Privy Seal clerk as 'a conspicuous under-achiever, a man who did not or could not avail himself of the opportunities available to him'.²⁹ Richardson argues that the blockish Hoccleve had only himself to blame for the hardship he complains of and upbraids the poet for his lack of self-provision and initiative. Hoccleve, it is true, effectively debarred himself from ecclesiastical preferment by marrying and there is no evidence that he showed much ambition in his business affairs. Compared with the shrewd and confident Chaucer and his own more professionally vigorous colleagues, Hoccleve certainly appears inept. In what DuBoulay has called 'an age of ambition', it is little wonder that the hapless poet became depressed; as Thomas Elyot writes in his discussion of melancholy madness, 'oftentymes the repulse frome promotion is cause of discomfort'.³⁰

As well as professional worries, Hoccleve and his fellow clerks endured considerable physical stresses. Writing, Hoccleve reminds us in the *Regement*, is hard work. Twenty-three years of tedious scribal work has given the clerk pains in his stomach and back and ruined his eyesight (1016-1029). Moreover, whereas workmen can 'make game and play' as they work, a scribe must keep his words to himself, devoting 'al his wittes' to his work (1002-1015). Here Hoccleve comes close to attributing his melancholy to the conventional cause of over-study, a theme to which he returns in his later poetry.

Penelope Doob has argued that Hoccleve writes about madness because it accords with a penitential impulse running throughout his work. Madness, she says, is simply 'the best metaphor' for the narrator's sinfulness, a view reinforced by Eva Thornley's comparison of Hoccleve's works with medieval penitential lyrics.³¹ Interesting as this argument is, it is not the only way of accounting for Hoccleve's concern with madness. It has already been argued that a number of specific social, economic and physical factors play their part in the onset of Hoccleve's insanity. Such a claim is hardly far-fetched: after all, most critics would acknowledge that Margery Kempe's madness can be seen not only as part of a theological pattern of sin, punishment and regeneration, but also as the result of the oppressive conditions of her life. Similarly, in stressing the implicit moral significance of Hoccleve's madness, there is a danger of overlooking Hoccleve's explicit attribution of his insanity to his working conditions and his thwarted desire for social advancement.

The theme of madness runs through the major poetry, which includes the *Male Regle* (1406), *The Regement of Princes* (1411) and the sequence of poems now known as the *Series* (1422). Hoccleve's interest in the connection between sin and disease has already been well explored by Doob, who argues that madness is seen primarily as a token of spiritual sickness in all of Hoccleve's works.³² Many of the minor poems, such as 'Ad Spiritum Sanctum' and 'The epistle of grace sent to the seek man', present illness as a result of spiritual negligence; confession and repentance are the only effective curative measures. There is, to be sure, an awareness of medical practices in these poems. 'The epistle of grace', for example, refers to a humoral imbalance which 'wil aske sothly a fleobotomye' (28). Nevertheless, the causes and cures of disease here are always framed ultimately in religious terms.

This common religious interpretation of disease helps give the minor poems the appearance of a unified body of work. Nevertheless, we should not, as Doob does, assume that madness is interpreted identically in Hoccleve's other works. If

other medieval authors can express several views about a single subject, there is no reason to think any differently of Hoccleve. In the *Male Regle*, the *Regement* and the *Series*, various perspectives on madness are explored in diverse styles and genres. Hoccleve in places regards his madness as a punishment for his sins; but madness is elsewhere seen, more prosaically, as the product of unfortunate but unavoidable professional and economic circumstances. Clearly, Hoccleve's treatment of madness is not unchanging. In the major poems -- especially in the *Series* -- the emphasis is as much on the social and psychological, as the moral dynamics of the poet's 'sycknesse'.

The ironic begging poem known as the *Male Regle* -- the earliest work referring to Hoccleve's ill-health -- illustrates this point well. Here Hoccleve is a melancholic 'only because working conditions have worn him out and his salary is inadequate'.³³ The poet begins with a lament for his poor state of health. This 'seekly heuynesse' (15), he implies, is a divine punishment for the dissolute living of his youth, and he goes on to confess the riotous behaviour that led to his illness. Some of the detail here is conventional and familiar: Hoccleve's drinking activities, for example, would not seem out of place among the confessions of Langland's *Deadly Sins*. There are also similarities between Hoccleve's description of his youthful revels and the penitential lyric 'In my youth fulle wylde I was'.³⁴

Other details are too specific to be conventional. Hoccleve tells us, for example, precisely where he drank: at the 'Poules heed' tavern (143). The intrusion of everyday detail into conventional works is typically late-medieval: we see it in the mystery plays, in medieval art, and in many devotional books of the period. In the *Male Regle*, however, the apparently unmotivated detail is derived from personal experience. Just as the Langland of the C-Text *Piers Plowman* presents 'a world of specific places, Cornhulle and London', Hoccleve describes his debauched London life in merciless detail.³⁵ He even describes his shyness regarding sexual matters:

Had I a kus I was content ful weel,
 Bette than I wolde han be with the deede:
 Ther-on can I but smal; it is no dreede:
 Whan þat man speke of it in my presence,
 For shame I wexe as reed as is the gleede. (155-159)

We are reminded here of Chaucer's seemingly autobiographical passages in the *House of Fame*. Hoccleve repeatedly adopts a personal tone in the major works so that 'a real human personality emerges from the pages of *La Male Regle* -- a personality which we can watch develop and observe in different circumstances in the Prologue to the *Regement*, the *Complaint*, and the *Dialogue*'.³⁶

Clearly, while he does not present anything like a modern autobiography, Hoccleve studs his conventional passages of poetry with autobiographical details. This point is noted by Stephan Kohl, who implies that Hoccleve's apparently candid confession of his bashfulness in the company of women may not be entirely serious:

By referring to his continence in unlikely circumstances, [Hoccleve] exempts himself from having to give a moralizing account of his behaviour and, as if shocked by this deviation from the moral framework of his *La Male Regle*, he concludes this episode with the line:

Now wol I turne ageyn to my sentence. (l.160).³⁷

The sudden shift from autobiography to traditional 'sentence' prefigures the stylistic fluctuations of the other major poems. As Burrow puts it, 'Hoccleve's various confessions of personal inadequacy cast fitful shadows across the adjacent

passages of moral and prudential counsel'.³⁸ Ethan Knapp has recently argued that Hoccleve's 'poetics of selfhood' is paralleled in his professional output as a civil servant. Knapp convincingly compares Hoccleve's petitionary verse with the early sections of his formulary, suggesting that all of these works present a generic bifurcation, for 'the lowly clerk must simultaneously assert the particularities of desire, and yet, for the sake of propriety, take shelter in the bureaucratic nature of the document'.³⁹ From our point of view, Hoccleve's candour in his poems shifts our attention from the moral to the personal significance of madness. In this way, Hoccleve creates an interpretative context for the theme of sickness that is quite distinct from that of the shorter religious poems.

Hoccleve continues with his queasy confession of his youthful follies after the fashion of medieval penitential handbooks. He describes his physical cowardice (170), refers to his work at the Privy Seal office (188) and his vanity and pretentiousness in his dealings with the London boatmen (201-208). The most telling of these autobiographical vignettes concerns Hoccleve's fellow clerks 'Prentys and Arondel' (321), who, like the poet, led riotous lives, drinking all night and lying in bed until mid-morning instead of working. Neither of these men, complains Hoccleve, has been punished with ill-health as he has been for his bohemian lifestyle. Prentys and Arondel's freedom from physical suffering despite their sloth does not constitute a reprieve from punishment: Penelope Doob points out that 'the absence of disease does not [...] indicate absence of sin', which could be punished either on earth or in the afterlife.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the absence of a visible divine justice is a cause of frustration for Hoccleve.

Hoccleve's recognition that divine chastisement is visited unequally upon the living signals a departure from the depictions of immediate moral justice in the minor poems. In 'The epistle of grace sent to the seek man', Grace tells the eponymous invalid that his malady has been caused directly by that favourite sin of the late Middle Ages, sloth:⁴¹

Also I see, þat ful art thu withinne
of corrupte humour al a-bowt[e] spred,
That rennyth ay betwyn [þi] flesch and skynne,
That causith þat thu kepist now thi bedde:
Than ydilnesse and slouthe hath this bred. (29-33)

In the *Male Regle*, however, such divine justice is postponed. Hoccleve is thus forced to recognize the complexity of the relationship between sin and its punishment. His annoyance that men who are as dissolute as he is enjoy perfect health adumbrates his insistence in the later *Complaint* on the discrepancy between inward states and outward appearances.

The uncomplicated moral interpretation of disease in the shorter religious poems now gives way to a more personal response to affliction. One indication of this is Hoccleve's implication of his colleagues Prentys and Arondel in his confession. As a medieval audience would immediately recognize, this is strikingly at odds with the explicit injunctions in penitential manuals against the revelation of names in confession.⁴² Once again, Hoccleve cannot resist introducing personal details into the conventional framework of his poem, however inappropriate they may seem. Similar autobiographical intrusions occur later in the poem when Hoccleve includes, among his conventional requests for money, two specific references to his financial condition: his rents (fixed incomes) are low (361-362) and he is owed ten pounds for the year, waiving his arrears (417-424). One is inclined to agree with Stephen Medcalf's observation that 'for Chaucer, as for Langland, the needs of the poem are the cause of the person in the poem: for Hoccleve it seems [...] that the poem is being led off to manifest the character'.⁴³ In the *Male Regle*, then, Hoccleve's troubles, whatever their literary precedents, are presented in the context of the poet's daily life.

Hoccleve's next major poem, the *Regement of Princes*, has been described as 'a strangely schizophrenic work'.⁴⁴ At over 2000 lines, the massive,

autobiographical prologue rivals the *Regement* in length. Here, as in the *Male Regle*, Hoccleve spends much of his time discussing the causes and nature of his bodily decrepitude; indeed, recent criticism has emphasized Hoccleve's concern with the sick body in both the prologue and the *Regement* proper.⁴⁵

The prologue begins with Hoccleve unable to sleep and oppressed by 'thought':

Mvsyng vpon the restles bisynesse
 Which that this trouby world hath ay on honde,
 That othir thyng than fruyt of byttirnesse
 Ne yeldeth nought, as I can vndirstonde,
 At Chestre ynne, right fast be the stronde,
 As I lay in my bed vp-on a nyght,
 Thought me bereft of sleep with force and myght.

And many a day and nyght that wykked hyne
 Hadde beforv vexid my poore goost
 So grevously, that of anguysh and pyne
 No richere man was nougher in no coost;
 This dar I seyn, may no wight make his boost
 That he with thought was bettir than I aqveynted,
 For to the deth it wel nigh hath me feynted. (1-14)

This melancholic brooding recalls the opening of the *Male Regle* and the distracted lamentation which begins the *Book of the Duchess*, although it has a greater metaphorical richness and contains fewer redundant phrases than Chaucer's poem.

Hoccleve now encounters an old beggar, who attempts to restore the poet to his right wits. The beggar instructs Hoccleve to make a full confession and to avoid solitariness and thought. Drawing on Ecclesiastes, he warns that the man

who is alone is likely 'to bere a dotyd heed' (200). Here the beggar is uttering the wisdom that will be urged again in the *Series*: too much brooding leads to madness. 'Besy þoght' may also lead to error, he warns, ominously invoking the case of John Badby, a Lollard burnt at the stake for heresy in March 1410.⁴⁶ This leads the beggar to denounce human reason as 'surquidrie' (331). Those who meddle in scripture, in particular, are madly presumptuous:

Pat oure lord god seiþ in holy scripture
 May not be fals; þis knawit euery whi3t,
 But he be mad. (337-339)

Presumpcioun, a! benedicite!
 Why vexist þou folk with þi franesie? (358-359)

These splenetic outbursts against the potentially heretical exercise of human reason anticipate Hoccleve's diatribe against heresy in one of his more directly political poems, *To Sir John Oldcastle* (1414). For the beggar, as for the Hoccleve of *Oldcastle*, insanity is associated with the presumption and error of heresy. This vitriolic use of the language of insanity is strikingly different from Hoccleve's own pathetic first-person account of his madness at the beginning of the poem. The *Regement* prologue reminds us, then, of the diverse significances of madness.

Hoccleve goes on to discuss the causes of his melancholia in autobiographical terms. He describes in detail the nature and duration of his arduous work at the the Privy Seal office (801-805) and gives particulars, as in the *Male Regle*, of his dire financial circumstances (820-840). Thus he illustrates his statement in the *Male Regle* that 'poore purs and peynes stronge' have caused him to 'raue' (395-396). Hoccleve characteristically turns from these personal musings to reflect on the proper behaviour for nobles and knights (862-924). But he cannot desist from talking about his own circumstances for long. The impoverished state

of England's soldiery reminds him that he himself may soon suffer want; and he gives further details of his personal finances (932-935). He tells of the physical hardships and mental stresses of life as a clerk (988-1029). His complaint that writing spoils the eyes carries special autobiographical weight since Hoccleve complains of impaired vision in *To the Duke of Bedford* and admits in the *Balade to the Duke of York* that he is too proud to wear spectacles. The impression created by this accumulation of details is of an anguished and self-conscious man, a characterization which Hoccleve develops considerably in his later works.

The poet and the beggar represent two distinct attitudes towards madness, the first positive, the second condemnatory. At one level, these attitudes correspond to Hoccleve's moral dilemma: the tension which remains at the end of the prologue is, as Penelope Doob says, between 'the Christian injunction to be mad to the world and the secular desire for prosperity which entails the madness of sin. [...] It is this tension which may indeed have driven Hoccleve mad a few years after writing the *Regement*'.⁴⁷ This is no doubt true; yet in reducing Hoccleve's dilemma to Christian terms we should not forget the secular pathos of Hoccleve's description of his madness or the specific economic and physical pressures which underlie it.

Hoccleve's final work is the string of poems now known collectively as the *Series* (1422), which comprises a prologue to the *Complaint*, the *Complaint* itself, the *Dialogue with a Friend*, *Lerne to Die*, *The Tale of Jereslaus's Wife* and *The Tale of Jonathas*. The first three parts of this sequence, in particular, are concerned with what A.G. Rigg has called the 'social consequences of madness'.⁴⁸ Four centuries after Hoccleve's death, Lord Shaftesbury remarked:

What an awful condition that of a lunatic! His words are generally disbelieved, and his most innocent particularities perverted; it is natural that it should be so; and we place ourselves on guard -- that is, give to every word, look, gesture a value and meaning which

oftentimes it cannot bear, and which it would not bear in ordinary life.⁴⁹

Such public hypersensitivity to madness and its effect on the madman were quite familiar in the Middle Ages. Indeed, these are the subjects of Hoccleve's *Complaint*.

The *Complaint* prologue is remarkably similar to that of the *Regement*. Again, Hoccleve laments his melancholic state:

and in the ende of novembar, vpon a nyght,
 syghenge sore as I in my bed lay,
 for this and othar thowghts whiche many a day
 before I toke, sleape cam none in myne eye,
 so vexyd me the thowghtfull maladye.

I see well, sythen I with sycknes last
 was scourged, cloudy hath bene the favoure
 that shone [on] me full bright in tymes past;
 the sonne abatid and the derke showre
 hildyd downe right on me and in langour
 he made [me] swyme, so that my wite
 to lyve no lust hadd, ne [no] delyte.

The grefe abowte my harte so [sore] swal
 and bolned evar to and to so sore,
 that nedes out I must[e] there-with-all;
 I thowght I nolde it kepe cloos no more,
 ne lett it in me for to olde and hore;
 and for to preve I cam of a woman,

I brast oute on the morowe and thus began. (17-34)

The final stanza indicates that Hoccleve's immediate purpose in writing his *Complaint* is to exorcize his madness. Madness, we have already said, was a source of poetic inspiration for classical and Renaissance poets. Although this particular relationship between madness and authorship was unknown in the Middle Ages, Hoccleve nevertheless presents his insanity as his reason for writing. Indeed, as Julia Kristeva writes, 'for those who are racked with melancholia, writing about it would have meaning only if writing sprang out of that very melancholia'.⁵⁰

Hoccleve begins the *Complaint* itself by relating an apparently genuine experience of madness:

Allmyghty god as lykethe his goodnes,
 visytethe folks alday as men may se,
 with lose of good and bodily sikenese,
 and amonge othar he forgat not me;
 witnes vppon the wyld infirmytie
 which that I had, as many a man well knewe,
 and whiche me out of my selfe cast and threw. (36-42)

Hoccleve clearly states that his madness was divinely ordained. But it could be argued that the focus of the *Complaint* is on the social and psychological, rather than the moral dynamics of Hoccleve's madness. Certainly, the phrases 'as men may se' and 'as many a man well knewe' foreshadow Hoccleve's almost paranoid concern throughout the *Complaint* with other people's responses to his madness. The following stanza, moreover, describes the reactions of Hoccleve's friends to his insanity. His affliction was well-known and became the talk of the town -- 'how it with me stode was in every mans mowthe' -- and his friends undertook

pilgrimages for his cure (46-49). Thankfully, continues Hoccleve, God restored his memory five years ago, a detail that is consistent with the documentary evidence for the poet's incapacity and recovery.

Despite Hoccleve's assurances, the poet's friends are not convinced that Hoccleve is fully recovered from his insanity:

for thowgh that my wit were hoom come again,
 men wolde it not so vnderstond or take;
 with me to deale hadden they dysdayne;
 a ryotows person I was and forsake;
 myn olde ffrindshipe was all ovarshake;
 no wyte withe me lyst make daliance;
 the worlde me made a straunge continance. (64-70)

Hoccleve's obsessive repetition of the word 'continance', which occurs no fewer than six times in the *Complaint*, indicates a heightened self-consciousness. The poet's Westminster colleagues react to him with suspicion, shying away from him, 'as they not me sye' (77) or simply fleeing from him: 'they that me sye fledden a-wey fro me' (79).⁵¹ Feelings of shame and embarrassment, of course, figure prominently in many medieval cases of madness. For Hoccleve, the taint of insanity is a private torment as well as a public disgrace.

Hoccleve now relates his friends' reports of his behaviour during his insanity. These testimonies are extremely conventional, in both literary and medical terms. Hoccleve's observers compared him to an ox, a buck and a deer, images which, as John Burrow points out, 'suggest Hoccleve's degradation (like Nebuchadnezzar) to a bestial state'.⁵² Hoccleve's eyes, these friends observed, 'sowghten every halke' (133), a phrase which recalls Bartholomeus Anglicus's description of the madman's 'meuyng and castinge about the y3en'.⁵³ During his insanity Hoccleve also ran about 'here and there', another traditional indication of

insanity. Such symptoms were, of course, handed down from classical writers and codified in medieval medical works. It does not follow, however, that Hoccleve was not really insane or that his friends' reports were not based on observation. During the fifteenth century 'works in the vernacular on medicine and surgery of every description were in circulation in some numbers'; the ideas contained within them may well have influenced Hoccleve's contemporaries.⁵⁴ As Bennett Simon remarks in his study of madness in ancient Greece, 'there is a good deal of evidence, both cross cultural and historical, that culturally defined categories shape both the patient's vision of his inner experience and others' reports of his behavior'.⁵⁵

As well as describing the poet's conduct while insane, Hoccleve's friends offer their prognoses of his condition. They say that madness endures and that even if Hoccleve is temporarily recovered, a relapse is inevitable given his age. As Penelope Doob notes, these are both medical conventions.⁵⁶ The latter prediction, however, also has a ring of plausibility: Hoccleve was fifty-three years old when he wrote the *Complaint*, a ripe age by medieval standards. Finally, the friends opine, again conventionally, that the arrival of the hot weather will precipitate another bout of madness (92-93). It may be that Hoccleve added or embellished some of these details in order to inspire sympathy. Whatever the case, Hoccleve presents the interpretation of his madness as the central problem in his struggle for identity. A principal question raised by the *Complaint* is one which has been, and continues to be, vigorously disputed in the twentieth century: who has the authority to identify madness?

Whatever the status of his friends' gloomy clinical forecasts, Hoccleve points out that they were proved wrong: 'thanked be god', says the relieved poet, 'it shoop nought as they seide' (98). As if to discredit further his friends' medical speculations, he spends the next three stanzas explaining the cause of his quondam madness as he understands it, in Christian terms. 'It is a lew[e]dnesse', he warns, to pretend to know what will happen in the future (101-105). Sickness, he reminds

us, is sent by God; therefore only He can predict the onset of disease. But this reflection ends with characteristic abruptness -- 'To my mater streit wol I me dresse' (119) -- and we are returned in the next stanza to the things 'men seyden' about Hoccleve's illness (120). Through such shifts of perspective our attention is directed to the controversial nature of explanations of madness. Hoccleve counters his friends' purely physiological theories about his insanity with his own supernatural explanation. We are reminded here of the diverse theories about the probable causes and outcomes of madness in the cases of Charles VI of France and the painter Hugo van der Goes, whose temporary madness was considered a natural disease by some and a divine chastisement by others.

It is worth noting that despite all the speculation about Hoccleve's madness, demonic possession is not once suggested as a cause of it, a fact that must confound the many psychiatric historians who continue to regard possession as the cornerstone of medieval approaches to madness. Moreover, despite their avoidance of him, Hoccleve's friends are sympathetic towards the man they believe to be mad. Their responses parallel courtly responses to the insane knights of the romances, showing that a compassionate attitude towards insanity was possible long before the sentimental fiction of the post-romantic period:

but some dele had I reioysynge amonge,
 and gladnese also in my spirit,
 that thowghe the people toke hem mis & wronge,
 me demynge of my syck[e]nesse not quite,
 yet for they compleyned the hevy plit
 that they had sene me in with tendernesse
 of hertes cherte, my grefe was the lesse. (281-287)

This lessens Hoccleve's discomfort and goes some way towards dispelling the widespread view that the medieval insane were regarded only with disgust. But

however well-intentioned Hoccleve's friends may be, their gossip has profoundly humiliating effects of the self-conscious man. In fact, Hoccleve's public behaviour is consistent with what might now be called a phobic disorder or agoraphobia with distinct features of paranoia:

My sprites laboryd [euere] bysyly
 to peinte countinaunce chere and loke,
 for that men spake of me so wonderingly,
 and for the very shame and fere I qwoke;
 thowghe myne herte had be dypped in the broke,
 It wete and moyste I-now was of my swot,
 whiche was nowe frostye colde, now firy hoot. (148-154)

Hoccleve's fluctuating physical sensations recall the tortured Boethian meditation on instability with which the *Complaint* began. The poet's shame, self-consciousness and anxiety at this point are far greater than Michel Foucault's history of madness might lead us to expect in a medieval text.

Indeed, Hoccleve's is not, to recall Foucault's phrase, an 'easy wandering existence'. The poet begins to eschew company for fear of uttering some solecism which might convict him of insanity (134-140). His madness is not simply a spectacular or visible phenomenon, but a lurking menace which is at any moment liable to betray its presence. To avoid this danger, Hoccleve retreats from public view altogether into the privacy of his home. It has already been seen that the insane in the late Middle Ages were generally cared for by friends or relatives; Furnivall's conjecture that Hoccleve was tended during his illness by his wife is therefore plausible, albeit unsubstantiated.⁵⁷ But Hoccleve's isolation from daily life has deleterious effects on his state of mind. His self-imposed exile ominously recalls the beggar's warning to Hoccleve in the prologue to the *Regement*:

O þing seye I, if þou go feerlees
 Al solytarie, & counsel lakke, & rede,
 As me þinkeþ, þi gyse is doutelees,
 Þou likly art to bere a dotyd heed.
 Whil þou art soule, þoght is wastyng seed,
 Swich in þe, & þat in grete foysoun,
 And þou redeles, nat canst voyde his poysoun. (197-203)

Indeed, Hoccleve is once again assailed by 'besy þoght'. Moreover, as James Simpson writes of Hoccleve's home, 'paradoxically, this place of privacy is registered as being no defence against public scrutiny'.⁵⁸ In fact, Hoccleve's self-consciousness is felt most acutely at exactly this point in the poem, in the extraordinary 'mirror scene'.

The melancholic heroes of romance are given to self-reflection in mirrors and wells, gaining insight into their identities from their external appearances. In the *Complaint*, Hoccleve describes a rather different sort of mirror gazing. Here the poet practices looking sane before his 'glas' and once again determines to correct any irregularities he might detect:

And in my chamber at home when I was
 my selfe alone I in this wyse wrowght:
 I streite vnto my myrrowr and my glas,
 to loke how that me of my chere thought[e],
 yf any [other] were it than it owght[e];
 for fayne wolde I yf it had not be right,
 amendyd it to my kunynge and myght.

Many a sawte made I to this myrrowre,
 thinkynge, 'yf that I loke in this manere

amonge folke as I now do, none errowr
of suspecte loke may in my face appere,
this countenance, I am svre, and this chere,
If I forth vse, is no thinge reprevable
to them that have conseytes resonable.' (155-168)

Initially, then, Hoccleve is satisfied that his face betrays no marks of insanity, at least to those who have 'conseytes resonable', or 'reliable perceptions'.

But of course, this comfortable conclusion presupposes the reliability of his own perceptions, a fact which Hoccleve suddenly realizes with a characteristic *volte-face*. He now perceives the folly of regarding himself as entirely other, of failing to take into account his subjectivity. What if, he begins to wonder, he is unable to perceive his real state after all?

And there-with-all I thowght[e] thus anon:
'men in theyr owne case bene blynd alday,
as I haue hard say many a day agon,
and in that [same] plyght I stonde may;
how shall I doo which is the best[e] way,
my trowbled spirit for to bringe at rest[e]?
yf I wist howe, fayne wolde I do the best[e].' (169-175)

The implication of this is that Hoccleve's own senses may be untrustworthy. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, of course, sight was often considered to be the sense most prone to error.⁵⁹ But given the context of Hoccleve's doubt, we may infer that Hoccleve attributes the unreliability of his perceptions to the possibility of his enduring madness. Perhaps his apparent sanity, he thinks, is merely an insane delusion. Once this suspicion has entered his mind, his attempt to see himself as others see him is doomed. Hoccleve had begun his self-scrutiny in the

hope that his mirror image would return to him an unmediated reflection of his true condition and therefore vouchsafe his sanity. The awful realisation of the fallibility of his perceptions, however, undermines any such confidence.

The mirror scene has important implications for anyone interested in the histories of madness and subjectivities. In particular, it shows that madness, far from being spectacular or visible, could be seen in the Middle Ages as a hidden and subjective affliction. Hoccleve's presentation of madness in the *Complaint* is certainly difficult to reconcile with certain widespread ideas about the medieval view of insanity and the psychology of medieval people. Chief among these, perhaps, is the view that madness in the Middle Ages was always conceived as a spectacle. Michel Foucault, for example, says that madmen were then regarded as 'monsters -- that is, etymologically, beings or things to be shown'.⁶⁰ Roy Porter takes this point much further. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, he argues, 'it was the essence of madness to be visible, and known by its appearance'.⁶¹ Before the nineteenth century, men 'trusted to Nature's legibility'; 'outward signs', continues Porter, 'encoded inner realities. Hence madness gave itself away'.⁶² According to the literary critic Duncan Salkeld, madmen, until at least the time of Descartes, 'presented a spectacular physical image, and bore their illness in the flesh and matter of their bodies'.⁶³

It has already be shown that in medical texts madness was regarded principally, although not exclusively, as a somatic affliction, the result of a malfunctioning of one of the ventricles of the brain or an imbalance of the humours. The symptoms of madness were easily detectable. The maniac screamed and tore both his flesh and his clothes; the melancholic had a surplus of black bile and was therefore recognisable by his swarthy complexion. In short, a man's mental and physical condition were discernible at a single glance. As Roy Porter says, it was only in the wake of Cartesian dualism that physicians started to think seriously about madness as a disorder of the mind rather than the body. In England, he argues, it was not until the publication of Locke's *Essay on Human*

Understanding (1690) that the concept of madness as a purely mental affliction began to gain anything like widespread academic respectability.⁶⁴ In the early nineteenth century, mentalistic explanations of madness -- although highly contentious -- gained increasing popularity.⁶⁵ By the time of Freud, of course, madness had become the 'enemy within', whose secret workings could be brought to light and analyzed only through the specialized skill of the psychiatrist.

Historians of psychiatry, then, have charted a gradual shift from the medieval understanding of madness as a spectacular disease to the modern interiorization of madness. Michel Foucault, for example, talks of the 'psychologization' of madness in the nineteenth century, when madness became 'inscribed within the dimension of interiority'.⁶⁶ Art historians have noted the same historical trend. In an article on the early nineteenth-century painter Géricault, for example, Margaret Miller discusses how shifting paradigms of mental illness affected artistic representations of the insane. Before the nineteenth century, says Miller, the madman in art was often represented in terms of demonic possession or witchcraft and was identified by his spectacular appearance or behaviour. In his portraits of the mentally ill, however, Géricault

interprets insanity not in terms of behaviour, but as a state of mind.

[...] Hidden in the "likeness," in the colour of the skin, the eyes, the veins, are the pathological "emblems" of their malady which are only there for the psychiatrist to read.⁶⁷

For Miller, the demonic representation of the mad in medieval art obliterated their individual features; Géricault's paintings of madmen, however, established the insane as 'understandable individuals', an achievement which was dependent less on the painter's individual insight than on what Miller calls 'the conceptions of his time'.⁶⁸ Miller's comments about the artistic representation of madness in history are consistent with many historian's and critic's pronouncements on medieval

madness. The *Complaint* shows that these ideas constitute a caricature of medieval depictions of madness which cannot be applied to all works of medieval literature.

As the treatment of the carpenter in the *Miller's Tale* suggests, madness in literature is often spectacular. In the romances, for example, madness is instantly identifiable by appearance. Medieval drama offers an even more blatant example of the spectacular medieval madman in the figure of Herod, whose raving madness and eventual death constitute a spectacular warning to shun the sin of pride. The stage directions for the *Coventry Pageant of Shearmen and Taylors* even require Herod to rant in the streets as well as on stage.⁶⁹

In the *Complaint*, however, the identification of madness is more problematic, as Hoccleve continually draws attention to the discrepancy between inner, subjective impressions and outer appearances. As Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid* (1402), a translation of Christine de Pisan's *Epistre Au Dieu D'Amours*, has it:

fful herd yt is to know a manys hert;
for outwarde may no man the trouthe deme; (36-37)

In fact, the madman's interiority is stressed in all of the major poems. Throughout the *Male Regle*, the *Regement of Princes* and the *Complaint*, the madman is presented not so much as a stock figure or a featureless demoniac as a unique human subject. In this way these poems highlight the discrepancy between artistic stereotypes and everyday experiences of madness.

Hoccleve's sense of a disjunction between inner and outer is made explicit in a sententious admonition later in the *Complaint*:

Vpon a looke is harde, men them to grownde
what a man is there-by the sothe is hid;
whither his wittes seke bene or sounde,

by cowntynaunce it is not wist ne kyd. (211-214)

The only reliable method of discovering the truth about a man's mental condition, says Hoccleve, is by conversing or 'comunynge' with him (217), a conclusion that might be endorsed by a modern psychiatrist. Far from being spectacular, madness is seen by Hoccleve as a secret, hidden affliction.

The point is reinforced a little later in the *Complaint* when Hoccleve writes angrily:

Now let this passe god wott, many a man
 semythe full wise by cowntenaunce and chere,
 whiche, and he tastyd were what he can,
 men myghten licken hym to a fooles pere;
 and some man lokethe in foltyshe maner[e]
 as to the outward dome and Iudgement,
 that at the prese discrete is and prudent. (239-245)

The wordplay on 'taste' here indicates that 'pere' is also to be understood as a pun. Since pears, as Burrow says, 'often seem good when they are rotten', the image cleverly suggests the discrepancy between appearances and reality.⁷⁰ 'God wott', meanwhile, is not merely a simple expression of exasperation or a metrical filler: it reinforces Hoccleve's insistence throughout the *Complaint* that only God can tell the mad from the sane. For man, on the other hand, madness is inherently subjective and undetectable.⁷¹

This conclusion has implications for cultural, as well as psychiatric history. Many historians are still reluctant to accept the existence of expressions and experiences of subjectivity in medieval literature. In his controversial book *The Tremulous Private Body*, Francis Barker argues that experiences of inwardness or interiority were simply not possible in the Middle Ages. 'Pre-bourgeois

subjection', writes Barker, 'does not properly involve subjectivity at all, but a condition of dependent membership in which place and articulation are defined not by an interiorised self-recognition [...] but by incorporation in the body politic'.⁷² For Barker, any talk about the inwardness of medieval people would be inappropriate. As David Aers exasperatedly notes, interest in medieval subjectivities has often been dismissed as a sign of 'one's benighted "humanism", one's incorrigible "anachronism"'. Yet this position has no historical foundation. 'There is no reason', continues Aers, 'to think that languages and experiences of inwardness, of interiority, of divided selves, of splits between outer realities and inner forms of being, were unknown before the seventeenth century, before capitalism, before the "bourgeoisie", before Descartes'.⁷³

Many medievalists nevertheless remain unwilling to acknowledge expressions of subjectivity in literature. In his study of the psychology of late-medieval writers, Stephen Medcalf argues that medieval people perceived no significant difference between reality and their interpretations of it. In his discussion of Hoccleve's poetry, Medcalf notes that 'body is close to spirit: this world to the supernatural: appearance is straightforwardly related, in truth and falsehood, to reality'. The medieval world, as he memorably puts it, 'was more single'.⁷⁴ Medieval philosophers, he explains elsewhere, were 'less bothered than later philosophers by any gap between subjectivity and the external world'; consequently, for literary authors, 'the division between inner and outer does not run deep'.⁷⁵ Pre-modern perception, Medcalf argues, was based on Aristotelian principles which permitted no distinction between the knower and the known. 'In Aristotelian theory', he writes,

what men perceive is an actual aspect of the thing perceived, not any interpretation or decoding of impressions received from it. [...]

It was not until toward Descartes' time that ancient sceptical doubts

were raised again about whether our perceptions correspond to external reality.⁷⁶

While there can be no doubt that such doubts became keener in the seventeenth century, they are already apparent in Hoccleve's *Complaint*; in fact, the mirror scene foreshadows Descartes's philosophical concern with madness in the *Meditations* in a number of ways.

First, Hoccleve anticipates Descartes's double awareness of himself as both subject and object, observer and observed. Also like Descartes, although for very different reasons, Hoccleve entertains the idea that his perception of reality might be distorted by madness.⁷⁷ In the latter respect Hoccleve goes even further than the philosopher. For Descartes madness strikes first of all the foundation of knowledge, the senses; but rather than pursue the possibility of his insanity, Descartes simply excludes it by fiat. 'These are madmen', he writes of the melancholics who believe their bodies to be made of glass, 'and I would hardly be less extravagant if I were to follow their example'.⁷⁸ As Harry Frankfurt comments, Descartes

simply dismisses the possibility of his madness with the remark that it would not be reasonable to entertain it. [...] The fact that error may arise out of madness suggests that he should be suspicious of all his opinions until he can establish that he is not insane. He does not, however, attempt to establish his sanity, or even to establish a procedure for doing so.⁷⁹

Hoccleve's apparently objective procedure for establishing his sanity -- and its predictably subjective result -- points forward to Renaissance imagery. In his discussion of the iconography of madness at the end of the Middle Ages, Michel Foucault writes:

The symbol of madness will henceforth be the mirror which, without reflecting anything real, will secretly offer the man who observes himself in it the dream of his own presumption. Madness deals not so much with truth and the world, as with man and whatever truth about himself he is able to perceive.⁸⁰

This experience of madness is encapsulated in one of Holbein's illustrations for Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, in which a man observes his mirror-image sticking out its tongue at him, ridiculing his vanity.⁸¹ Hoccleve's search for truth in the mirror results in a similar sort of self-mockery, as the poet loses all grounds for certainty. Hoccleve's text illustrates perfectly Max Pensky's perceptive statement that 'melancholia is a discourse about the necessity and impossibility of the discovery and possession of "objective" meaning by the subjective investigator'.⁸²

Like Descartes after him, Hoccleve takes refuge in dogma rather than pursue his insights so far as to threaten a relapse of madness or to achieve a truly modern existential awareness of self. The only bearable option open to him now is to abandon his 'busy' investigation into his mental condition and return to the security of faith. Stephan Kohl remarks of the mirror experiment that 'if ever there was a program of self-education not rooted in ethical maxims, then this is one'.⁸³ As the *Series* progresses it becomes clear that only an act of faith -- a commitment to 'ethical maxims' -- can deliver Hoccleve from solipsism into truth.

Hoccleve's alternating thoughts as he gazes into his mirror suggest the sorts of pathological self-consciousness described in R.D. Laing's seminal book *The Divided Self*. 'The schizoid individual', writes Laing, 'is frequently tormented by the compulsive nature of his own processes, and also by the equally compulsive nature of his sense of his body as an object in the world of others'.⁸⁴ For Hoccleve, such fears are renewed in a public setting when he returns one day from Westminster, 'vexid full grevously withe thoughtfull hete' (184). This association

between mental torment and body temperature recalls the disturbing alternations in Hoccleve's physical state between 'froste colde' and 'firy hoot' in the earlier street scene.

There are also echoes of the poet's mental vacillation before his mirror. Hoccleve now reflects dejectedly that he is a 'great fole' to show himself in public when he stands 'out of all favour and grace' (189). But this thought is immediately followed another consideration, namely, that to remain indoors would only fuel gossip:

And then thowght I on that othar syde:
 'If that I not be sene amonge the prees,
 men deme wele that I myne heade hyde,
 and am werse than I am it is no lees.' (190-193)

Concern about the opinions of others now gives way to stubbornness and frustration. Hoccleve cannot, he says, prevent people from speculating about his condition -

I may not lette a man to ymagine
 ferre above the mone, yf that hym lyst (197-198)

- but the poet will not heed their talk. 'Of suche ymaginyng I not ne reche', he says emphatically, 'for evar sythen set haue I the lesse / by the peoples ymagination' (307; 379-380). In the dispute over his sanity, Hoccleve's reiteration of the word 'ymagination' is a significant counter-tactic. As the lord in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale* asserts, excess of imagination implies detachment from reality and even madness. Thus Hoccleve not only attempts to escape the stigma of insanity but turns the tables on the rumour-mongers, implying that the truly deluded are those who think him still mad.

In order to stress the temporary nature of his madness, Hoccleve invokes the conventional analogy between madness and drunkenness:

If a man ones fall in dronkenesse,
 shall he contynewe there-in evar mo?
 nay, thowghe a man doo in drinkynge excesse
 so ferforthe that not speake he ne can, ne go,
 and his wittes welny ben reft him froo,
 and buryed in the Cuppe he aftarward
 Comythe to hym selfe agayne, ellis were it hard.

Right so thowghe my witt were a pilgrime,
 and went[e] fer fro home he cam agayne. (225-233)

Indeed, by the end of the *Complaint* Hoccleve apparently sounds a new note of self-confidence:

This troubyly lyfe hathe all to longe enduryd,
 not have I wyst how in my skynne to turne;
 but now my selfe to my selfe have ensured,
 for no suche wondrynge aftar this to morne. (302-305)

Moreover, Hoccleve now appeals to the conventional figure of Reason for consolation:

This othar day a lamentacion
 of a wofull man in a boke I sye,
 to whome word[e]s of consolation
 Reason gave spekyng[e] effectually;

and well easyd myn herte was ther-by;
 for when I had a while in the boke red,
 with the speche of Reason was I well fed. (309-315)

As Stephen Medcalf writes, Hoccleve 'takes refuge, after such painful and surely personally reminiscent details such as the mirror, in a convention like the 'wofull man' consoled by Reason whom he took from Isidore of Seville'.⁸⁵ By the end of the *Complaint*, then, Hoccleve is beginning to reject autobiography in favour of more conventional modes of expression. Rather than relying on his own resources to guarantee his sanity as he does in the mirror episode, Hoccleve finally seeks the support of moral authority.

In the *Dialogue with a Friend*, however, Hoccleve is still ghoulishly self-conscious about public opinion. Here he returns, 'as if compelled' to the subject of his supposed insanity.⁸⁶ He wishes to publish his *Complaint*, against his friend's advice, to prove that he is not ashamed of his previous 'wildhede' (52) and to give praise to God for restoring his sanity (80-84). The cathartic value of the act of writing in the prologue to the *Complaint* has already been noted. Now Hoccleve determines to use his writing to prove his sanity to others. In his study of autobiographies by the insane, Roy Porter remarks that 'for people judged insane but trying to prove their sanity, the very act of putting pen to paper, "composing" a testament, was clearly significant in itself -- evidence, surely, of "composure"'.⁸⁷ In this sense, Hoccleve stands at the beginning of an English tradition of unstable writers including Carkesse, Smart and Cowper, who 'clearly resorted to authorship to maintain their sanity'.⁸⁸

The excessive length and repetitiveness of the *Dialogue* suggest the poet's exasperation at having to prove his mental stability. Clearly, Hoccleve's aim in the *Dialogue* is to reconcile himself with his friend and to conform to his expectations. But the *Dialogue* may also be read as a sort of inner drama. Stephan Kohl regards the friend as Hoccleve's unconscious mind.⁸⁹ Similarly, Lillian Feder has

suggested that the friend is the externalisation of a 'threat within', suggesting that madness is a 'perennial determinant of human nature'.⁹⁰ But the extent to which Hoccleve's dialogue is oriented towards social reintegration should not be underestimated: Hoccleve's lengthy and apparently spurious invective against the abominable practice of coin-clipping may be accounted for as an attempt to find more respectable poetic material.⁹¹

In the following section of the *Dialogue* the friend alleges that Hoccleve has become insane again due to overstudy in literary matters and recommends that Hoccleve postpone his plans to write:

Thy bisy studie aboute swich mateere
 Hath causid thee to stirte in-to the plyt
 That thow were in as fer as I can heere;
 And thogh thow deeme thow be there-of qwyt
 Abyde and thy purpos putte in respyt
 Til þat right wel stablisshid be thy brayn;
 And ther-to thanne I wole assente fayn. (302-308)

The friend represents conspicuously conventional beliefs: 'thyng of thoughtful studie kaght, / Perillous is, *as þat hath me been taght*' (398-399, my italics). This is the view of Ecclesiastes -- 'of making many books there is no end; and much study is weariness of the flesh' (Ecclesiastes 12:12) -- and of Hoccleve's master Chaucer in the *House of Fame* (29-30). Indeed, we have already seen that negative attitudes towards scholarly work were widespread in the late Middle Ages; the friend's comments therefore have behind them a weight of tradition.

Nevertheless, Hoccleve bravely meets the repeated charges of overstudy with equally solid protestations of sanity. As if to emphasize his philosophical wisdom he quotes Solomon and Cicero. He also repeatedly uses the words 'reson' and 'reasonable' to describe both his mental state and his literary aspirations. As

Lillian Feder says, 'the Reason that led to acceptance of the very experience of madness in the *Complaint* is now the inner faculty that provides confidence in his own judgement'.⁹²

Hoccleve's recovery from madness, then, is presented as an inner transformation. His 'fear of madness', Feder claims, has 'yielded to his individual observation and his effort to rediscover restorative powers within his being'.⁹³ This comment is consistent with the trend in liberal literary criticism which sees Hoccleve as a bold pioneer of individualism. It also brings Hoccleve's cure into line with certain contemporary liberal ideas about psychiatric healing, according to which, as Roger Scruton sceptically observes, 'not only the process of recovery, but its end result, are described in terms that are internal to the individual. He must simply "actualize" his "possibilities"'.⁹⁴ Obviously, such a desocializing explanation of the cure of madness is not entirely appropriate here. The mirror experiment has already shown Hoccleve the dangers of self-reliance; in the *Dialogue*, by contrast, Hoccleve assimilates the advice of Reason and the wisdom of authority. Nevertheless, Hoccleve does present his madness and his recovery from it in individual and psychological terms, even if, as Feder grudgingly notes, his self-examination is 'blocked by a prescribed moral conclusion'.⁹⁵

As James Simpson has argued, Hoccleve's successful defence of his sanity derives from his confidence in his uniqueness as an individual. 'The turning point in the *Dialogue*', says Simpson, 'when the friend is persuaded of Thomas's stability, comes when Thomas puts it to his friend that the friend should not presume to judge another completely':⁹⁶

'ffreend, as to þat, he lyueth nat þat can
 Knowe how it standith with an othir wight
 So wel as him self; al-thogh many a man
 Take on him more than lyth in his might
 To knowe þat man is nat ruled right

Pat so presumeth in his iugement:

Beorn the doom good were auisament.' (477-483)

This passage recalls and reinforces Hoccleve's insistence in the *Complaint* that a man's mental condition is hidden and unknowable to any mortal other than himself. As Simpson observes, 'here Thomas is not seeing himself simply as 'other', through the eyes of other people. Instead, he is defending his intimacy and integrity'.⁹⁷

Now that Hoccleve has relinquished the sickly self-consciousness of the mirror scene, the friend reveals that he has been merely testing Hoccleve's sanity (484-490) and at last endorses the frustrated poet's plans to write, so long as Hoccleve promises not to work too hard:

'I preye thee in al maneere way

Thy wittes to conserue in hir fresshnesse;

Whan thow ther-to goost take of hem the lesse;

To muse longe in an harde mateere,

The wit of man abieth it ful deere.' (493-497)

With this conditional endorsement, Hoccleve can begin a process of social reintegration.

In order to prove his public spiritedness, Hoccleve now praises the Duke of Gloucester in a fitting display of piety. Next he tells the friend that since he has often chided women in the past -- an allusion to his adaptation of Christine de Pisan's *Letter of Cupid* -- he will write a piece in praise of women. This turns out to be a translation of the *Gesta Romanorum* story of *Jereslaus's Wife*. The conventionality of this choice indicates that Hoccleve has now abandoned the autobiographical mode; the public poet now takes over from the poet of private complaint.

The view of physical suffering in *Jereslaus's Wife* is similar to that in the shorter religious poems. Sickness is once again seen 'from the outside', as it were, as spectacular phenomena; moreover, it is presented as the consequence of sin, not of poverty or poor working conditions, as both the *Male Regle* and the prologue to the *Regement* implied. The Shipman in *Jereslaus's Wife*, for example, is punished for his lechery with madness:

The Shipman had also the franesie,
 That with this Emperice hadde ment
 ffulfillid his foul lust of aduoutrie,
 Which was in him ful hoot and ful feruent:
 See how all hem that to this Innocent,
 This noble lady had y-doon greuance,
 Our lord god qwitte with strooke of vengeance. (715-721)

As this didactic conclusion shows, Hoccleve is now the moralistic observer of madness rather than its pathetic victim.

Hoccleve also now deflects attention from the irregularities of his own life which he described in the earlier long poems by focussing on the theme of female unruliness. In a recent article on *Jereslaus's Wife* and *Tale of Jonathas*, Karen Winstead argues that 'taken together' the two poems 'form an artfully constructed anti-feminist joke, which mocks disorderly women'.⁹⁸ *Jereslaus's Wife* concerns the wife of an emperor who is left to manage her husband's realm in his absence. The emperor's brother, the steward of the land, takes advantage of the emperor's absence by oppressing the poor, robbing the rich and attempting to rape the emperor's wife. For these crimes the empress has him jailed. Pitying the steward's appeals for mercy and believing his promises to reform, she eventually releases him. Inevitably, the steward repays her kindness by renewing his advances towards her and, when she refuses, hanging her by the hair in an oak tree. By

ridiculing the empress's passivity and general incompetence Hoccleve, argues Winstead, disparages women's capacity to keep order. The arguably autobiographical nature of the earlier parts of the *Series* suggests that this 'baiting of fractious women' also has a personal significance for Hoccleve. Whatever the case, by upholding the claim of the friend in the *Dialogue* that women are unfitted for 'rule and governance' (718), Hoccleve diverts attention from the unruliness of his own early life.

The *Series* ends, at the friend's instigation, with the grim *Tale of Jonathas*. Like *Jereslaus's Wife*, this tale is a translation of the Anglo-Latin version of the tale in the *Gesta Romanorum*. It too emphasizes the importance of order and reason, transgression of which leads to appalling and graphically described physical punishment. John Burrow comments on Hoccleve's choice of tale:

To produce a moral tale for the benefit of his friend's erring son is a comfortable sort of commission. The poet, at last, has the advantage of his worried friend, and it is now Hoccleve who speaks for society, uttering the common wisdom of the elders of the tribe. It is a very different sort of utterance from the solitary grieving with which the *Series* began; and it seems intended to mark the poet's struggle to rehabilitate himself.⁹⁹

However comfortable this process of rehabilitation is for the poet, it nevertheless involves the unpleasant anti-feminism which was built into the 'common wisdom' of Hoccleve's age.

The *Tale of Jereslaus's Wife* and the *Tale of Jonathas* are not, of course, the only anti-feminist pieces in Hoccleve's works. Hoccleve reproaches unruly women in his poem *To Sir John Oldcastle* of 1414:

Some wommen eeke, thogh hir wit be thynne,

Wele argumentes make in holy writ!
 Lewde calates! sitteth down and spynne,
 And kakele of sumwhat elles, for your wit
 Is al to feeble to despute of it! (145-149)

This, of course, is a standard anti-feminist and anti-Lollard piece. It is possible, however, that it is written with a particular target in mind -- the unruly and potentially heretical Margery Kempe.

It is possible that Hoccleve is again thinking of Kempe when he presents the duplicitous Fellicula in the *Tale of Jonathas*: the patron to whom *Jonathas* is dedicated -- Lady Westmoreland -- was a known acquaintance of Kempe. Fellicula, pretending to have lost the magical brooch which Jonathas has given her, feigns insanity:

Shee mente it nat, but as shee had be mad,
 hir clothes hath shee al to-rent & tore,
 And cryde, 'allas, the brooch away is bore!
 For which I wole anon right, with my knyf
 My self slee, I am weery of my lyfe. (332-336)

Fellicula's madness is a devious ploy which, like the boisterous behaviour for which Margery Kempe became notorious, is treated with suspicion by others. The advice of Jonathas's mother to her son -- 'The compaignie of wommen riotous / Thow flee' (353-354) -- is possibly intended by Hoccleve as a veiled warning to Lady Westmoreland to avoid the disruptive influence of Kempe. As Chaucer's Melibee understands from Solomon, "'it were bettre to dwelle in desert than with a womman that is riotous"'.¹⁰⁰

Whether or not Kempe is the intended target here, Hoccleve's condemnation of female 'riot' -- the term Hoccleve uses in the *Complaint* for his

own youthful dissolution -- establishes him as a sober and responsible member of society who, by condemning female wiles, is finally 'uttering the common wisdom of the elders of the tribe'. Hoccleve has rehabilitated himself not by carrying out his avowed purpose of pleasing women, but by denouncing their unruliness.

It is unsurprising that the *Complaint*, which is so different from the minor poems in other respects, also registers a very different attitude towards sickness. We may regard Hoccleve, as Eva Thornley does, primarily as a didactic poet; and we may, like Penelope Doob, regard the principal function of madness in medieval literature as didactic. We may also feel that 'the immediate interest of medieval poetry for us [...] is as poetry, products of literary art, not as documents of individual psychology'.¹⁰¹ But Hoccleve's poetry shows the danger of generalizing about either literary or psychiatric history. As we have seen, the major works are stylistically diverse; always alongside the conventional moralizing there is the relation of personal experience; and Hoccleve describes his madness in a personal and exploratory, rather than a didactic manner. One of the dominant features of Hoccleve's major poetry is a frequent insistence on a personal experience inaccessible to public scrutiny and therefore beyond the purview of conventional explanations.

Although Hoccleve's friends describe the poet's madness in terms of medical and literary conventions, Hoccleve presents his madness in individual rather than diabolical or stereotypical terms; moreover, he insists that madness is an essentially private experience. This is consistent with other aspects of the *Complaint*, such as its anachronistic insistence on its textuality, a feature usually associated with private rather than public poetry.¹⁰² At all events, Hoccleve's personal description of madness brings into question many entrenched assumptions of psychiatric and cultural history; as Hoccleve says regarding his friends' clinical speculations: 'it shoop nat as thei seide'.

Hoccleve not only conceives of madness in subjective terms, but also reestablishes himself as a man of reason by stressing his uniqueness and

unknowability as a man. Having regained his self-confidence, however, he reintegrates himself into his society by very different means. If Hoccleve's public-spiritedness extends to a willingness 'to make amends for his own faults by burning Oldcastle and heretics, and uttering moral precepts', we should not be surprised that his autobiographical account of insanity eventually gives way to more didactic uses of the theme of madness.¹⁰³ By the end of the *Series*, insanity is no longer the pitiable affliction of the overworked and underpaid, but the spectacular punishment and token of sin.

Notes to Chapter 5

- 1 A brief treatment of some of the ideas in this chapter is given in my forthcoming article in *History of Psychiatry*: '"By cowntynaunce it is not wist": Hoccleve's *Complaint* and the Subject of Madness'.
- 2 MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p.1.
- 3 The degree of insight possessed by the insane is still a matter of controversy. 'In the first place', writes Gregory Zilboorg, 'the mentally ill patient was not even aware that he was ill. If he had "lost his mind," he truly had no mind to appreciate the fact that it was lost'. Zilboorg, p.22. The opposite view is espoused by Michel Foucault. In his early phenomenologically-oriented work, Foucault insists that 'nothing could be more false than the myth of madness as an illness that is unaware of itself as such. [...] The patient recognizes his anomaly and it gives him, at least, the sense of an irreducible difference separating him from the world and the consciousness of others'. Foucault, *Mental Illness*, pp.46-47.
- 4 'There is so little evidence to the contrary', says Furnivall, 'that he was no doubt a cockney. I see no evidence that he had ever crost a horse; and he was too much of a coward to play football or any other rough game. Meant to be a priest, he was no doubt brought up at some Monastery School, perhaps livd altogether with the monks as an acolyte. He was probably driven and lunged with a sharp curb, and kept on the dumb-jockey all day'. Introduction to *Hoccleve's Works*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall and Israel Gollancz, (London: EETS es 61, 72-73, 1892-97), p.xxxv. Faced with such conjectures we must agree with George Kane that 'the process of free biographical inference contains within itself no element to control its accuracy, and therefore no means by which its logical necessity or even its probability can be checked. It has no rationale. It is essentially imaginative,

- affective, subjective, pure speculation'. *The Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies* (London: H.K. Lewis, 1965), p.8.
- 5 *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), p.149.
- 6 *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p.56.
- 7 David Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *English Literary History*, 54 (1987), 761-799 (p.775).
- 8 In Jacques Derrida's succinct phrase, 'immediacy is derived'. *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1976), p.157. On the 'experiential' bias of English literary criticism from the Victorian period onwards see Eagleton, pp.26-27.
- 9 Furnivall, Introduction to Hoccleve, p.viii.
- 10 See, for example, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.215 note 13 and p.220.
- 11 Friedman, p.136.
- 12 A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.144.
- 13 John A. Burrow, 'Hoccleve's *Series*: Experience and Books', in *Fifteenth Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. by Robert Yeager (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1984), pp.259-273 (p.271 note 5). Elsewhere Burrow suggests that Doob falls prey to what he calls the 'conventional fallacy'. 'The speculative excesses of the older criticism', he concludes, 'has left a distinct, though unacknowledged bias against any recognition of autobiographical reference at all in medieval literature'. 'Autobiographical Poetry in the Middle Ages: The Case of Thomas Hoccleve', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68 (1982), 389-412 (p.393). On the overlap between literary convention and authenticity see also Lawton, p.773.
- 14 Clarke, pp.246-247. See *The Works in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton*, ed. by Alexander B. Grosart, 2 vols (Blackburn: Constable, 1875-79).

- 15 *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*, ed. by John F. Benton, trans. by C.C. Swinton Bland (New York: Harper, 1970), p.47.
- 16 *Sounds from the Bell Jar*, pp.62-63. In recent years, it has been the psychiatric historians and those whose main interest is in Hoccleve's madness who have most emphasized the autobiographical aspects of Hoccleve's major works. Literary critics, predictably enough, have been more inclined to regard this poetry as fictional.
- 17 Stephen Medcalf, 'Medieval Psychology and Medieval Mystics', in *The Mystical Tradition in England: Papers read at the Exeter Symposium, July 1980*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1980), pp.120-155 (p.134).
- 18 Medcalf, 'Medieval Psychology', p.135.
- 19 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, passim; compare Kohl, 'More than Virtues and Vices: Self-Analysis in Hoccleve's "Autobiographies"', *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 14 (1988), 115-127.
- 20 Medcalf, 'Medieval Psychology', p.129.
- 21 M.C. Seymour, Review of Mitchell's *Thomas Hoccleve*, *Review of English Studies*, ns 20 (1969), 482-485.
- 22 A.L. Brown, 'The Privy Seal Clerks in the Early Fifteenth Century', in *The Study of Medieval Records: Essays in Honour of Kathleen Major*, ed. by D.A. Bullough and R.L. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.260-281 (p.271). I am grateful to Professor Brown for his interest in my dissertation and for kindly supplying an offprint of his article.
- 23 All quotations from Hoccleve refer to Thomas Hoccleve, *Hoccleve's Works*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall and Israel Gollancz, (London: EETS es 61, 72-73, 1892-97). A substantial modernized extract of the *Complaint* is included in John Burrow's *English Verse 1350-1500* (London: Longman, 1977), pp.265-280.

- 24 Brown, p.271.
- 25 Thomas F. Tout, *Chapters in the Medieval Administrative History: The Wardrobe, the Chamber and the Small Seals*, 6 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1930) V.
- 26 Tout, V, p.81.
- 27 Tout, V, p.91.
- 28 *Regement of Princes*, 1499-1547; Tout, V, pp.90-91.
- 29 Malcolm Richardson, 'Hoccleve in his Social Context', *Chaucer Review*, 20 (1985-86), 313-322 (p.313).
- 30 Quoted in Hunter and Macalpine, p.9. For Chaucer's comparatively successful career see Paul Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer in the 1380s', in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1540*, ed. by Lee W. Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp.83-112 (pp.90-97). Perhaps Hoccleve showed some acumen in allowing himself to be used by Henry V as a royal propagandist. Derek Pearsall has recently noted that Hoccleve's annuities 'began to be paid more regularly' after he had written the *Regement of Princes*. 'Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*: The Poetics of Royal Representation', *Speculum*, 69.2 (1994), p.410.
- 31 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.231; Eva V. Thornley, 'The English Penitential Lyric and Hoccleve's Autobiographical Poetry', *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, 86 (1967), 295-321.
- 32 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, pp.211-213.
- 33 Kohl, p.121.
- 34 Thornley, p.302.
- 35 Denise L. Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late Medieval Literature* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1989), pp.122-127.
- 36 Jerome Mitchell, *Thomas Hoccleve: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Poetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p.12.

- 37 Kohl, p.119.
- 38 Burrow, 'Autobiographical Poetry', p.404.
- 39 Ethan E.H. Knapp, *Thomas Hoccleve: Bureaucracy and the Poetics of Selfhood in the Post-Chaucerian Tradition* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1996), p.54. This work came to my attention as my dissertation was about to be submitted. Knapp also emphasises the presence of subjective expression in Hoccleve's work; see especially pp.164-189.
- 40 Doob, *Ego Nabugodonosor*, p.34.
- 41 Sloth is an element of the cardinal sin of *acedia* in the Middle Ages. In penitential handbooks this sin 'came to include many faults of neglect and dereliction'. Stanley Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression from Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.69. See also Bloomfield, pp.91-92, 97-99.
- 42 See Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.214.
- 43 Medcalf, *The late Middle Ages*, pp.131-132.
- 44 Derek C. Greetham, 'Self-Referential Artifacts: Hoccleve's Persona as a Literary Device', *Modern Philology*, 86 (1989), 242-251 (p.245).
- 45 See for example Anthony J. Hasler, 'Hoccleve's unregimented body', *Paragraph*, 13.2 (1990), 164-183.
- 46 A.C. Reeves notes that 'Hoccleve's description of the Smithfield drama is sufficiently vivid to suggest that he was there as a witness'. Reeves, 'The World of Thomas Hoccleve', *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 2 (1979), 187-201 (p.188).
- 47 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.220.
- 48 A.G. Rigg, 'Hoccleve's *Complaint* and Isidore of Seville', *Speculum*, 45 (1970), 564-574 (p.574).

- 49 Quoted in Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain 1700-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.xv.
- 50 Quoted in Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: Massachussets, 1993), p.4. Here I disagree with George MacLennan, who correctly points out that Hoccleve's poetry has nothing to do with inspired Aristotelian *furor*, but goes a good deal further in asserting (p.19) that for Hoccleve, there is 'no suggestion that madness or melancholy might be related to the practice of poetry'.
- 51 The phrase alludes to Psalm 31:11: 'they that did see me without fled from me'. This does not, of course, preclude the authenticity of Hoccleve's experience. Hoccleve's stanza is apparently reworked by Ashby in his *A Prisoner's Lament*; see *George Ashby's Poems*, ed. by Mary Bateson (London: EETS es 76, 1899). For a discussion of the similarities between the two passages see Lawton, p.772.
- 52 Burrow, *English Verse*, p.272.
- 53 Bartholomeus Anglicus, I, 7.5, p.348.
- 54 Bennett, p.196.
- 55 Bennett Simon, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp.33-34.
- 56 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.221.
- 57 Furnivall, Introduction to Hoccleve, p.xxxvii.
- 58 James Simpson, 'Madness and Texts: Hoccleve's *Series*', in *Chaucer and Fifteenth Century Poetry*, ed. by Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1991), pp.15-29 (p.240).
- 59 J.M. Bamborough, *The Little World of Man* (London: Longman, 1952), p.34.
- 60 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.70.

- 61 Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness from the Reformation to the Regency* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), p.35.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Salkeld, p.76.
- 64 On Locke as a pioneer of mentalistic approaches to madness see Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, pp.187-228.
- 65 Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, pp.193-194. In the late eighteenth century Andrew Harper claimed that it was 'an unquestionable axiom, that the cause of [insanity] must depend upon some specific alteration in the essential operations and movements of the mind, independent and exclusive of every corporal, sympathetic, direct, or indirect excitement, or irritation whatever'. Quoted in Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p.193).
- 66 Foucault, *Mental Illness*, p.72.
- 67 Margaret Miller, 'Géricault's Paintings of the Insane', *J. Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 4 (1940-42), 151-163 (p.153). Thus Roy Porter observes that 'the psychiatrist's skill proved remarkably akin to that other art of identification emergent in the nineteenth century, that of the detective'. Porter, *The Faber Book of Madness* (London: Faber, 1991), pp.92-93.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 See Roscoe E. Parker, 'The Reputation of Herod in Early English Literature', *Speculum*, 8 (1933), 59-67 (p.61).
- 70 Burrow, *English Verse*, p.277.
- 71 This view sharply contradicts the view of George MacLennan, who argues that since 'physical signs and symptoms were regarded as direct proof of madness in the medieval period', Hoccleve could not experience madness subjectively. MacLennan, pp.20-21. MacLennan is certainly right to discount the notion that 'madness is necessarily manifested in inward or psychological terms' (5).

- 72 Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London: Methuen, 1984), p.31.
- 73 David Aers, *Culture and History 1350-1600* (London: Harvester Press, 1992), pp.181 and 186. Aers's comments are directed against a number of prominent and influential critics, including Francis Barker, Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore, Stephen Greenblatt and Terry Eagleton. For a similar discussion of medieval subjectivity see Lee W. Patterson, 'On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History and Medieval Studies', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 87-108. Some support for the position of Aers and Patterson is offered by the sociologist Norbert Elias, who detects in the late Middle Ages an increase in self-consciousness. See Elias, pp.99-100.
- 74 Medcalf, *The Later Middle Ages*, p.127.
- 75 Medcalf, *The Later Middle Ages*, p.109.
- 76 Medcalf, 'Medieval Psychology', p.123.
- 77 The passage in which Descartes considers, and quickly rejects, the possibility of his madness occurs in the First Meditation. 'And how could I deny that these hands and this body belongs to me, unless perhaps I were to assimilate myself to those insane persons whose minds are so troubled and clouded by the black vapours of the bile that they constantly assert that they are kings, when they are very poor; that they are wearing gold and purple, when they are quite naked; or who imagine that they are pitchers or that they have a body of glass'. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. by F.E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968), p.96.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Harry G. Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes's Meditations* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), p.37. Frankfurt goes on to give a philosophical defence of Descartes's hasty dismissal of the possibility of his insanity.

- 80 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.27. An interesting discussion of the relationship between madness and mirrors in post-medieval literature is Jean Starobinski's *La Mélancholie au Mirour: Trois lectures de Baudelaire* (Paris: Juillard, 1989).
- 81 William Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre: A Study of Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p.35.
- 82 Pensky, p.22.
- 83 Kohl, p.122.
- 84 R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p.124.
- 85 Medcalf, *The Later Middle Ages*, p.132. For Hoccleve's debt to Isidore see Rigg, *passim*.
- 86 Feder, p.107.
- 87 Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p.261. On the curative power of writing for Hoccleve see Kohl, p.65 and Greetham, p.246. For a general discussion of the relationship between literature and health see Angela Belli, 'The Impact of Literature upon Health: Some Varieties of Cathartic Response', *Literature and Medicine* 5 (1986), 90-108.
- 88 Porter, *The Faber Book of Madness*, p.490.
- 89 Kohl, p.65.
- 90 Feder, p.109.
- 91 Compare John Burrow, 'Hoccleve's *Series*', pp.259-273. Kohl (p.64) notes that it is typical of Hoccleve to switch from anger at his own treatment to a discussion of social problems.
- 92 Feder, p.108.
- 93 Feder, p.106.
- 94 Roger Scruton, 'Radical Therapy', in *The Politics of Culture and Other Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), pp.183-190, (p.189).
- 95 Feder, p.109.
- 96 Simpson, p.25.

- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Winstead, 'I am al oother than ye weene', *Philological Quarterly*, 2.2 (1993), 143-155 (p.145).
- 99 John Burrow, 'Hoccleve's *Series*', p.270.
- 100 *The Tale of Melibee*, 1087.
- 101 Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge, 1970), p.256.
- 102 On the self-conscious textuality of the *Complaint* see Burrow, 'Hoccleve's *Series*', passim.
- 103 Furnivall, Introduction to Hoccleve, p.xxxviii.

Chapter 6

'So euyl to rewlyn': Madness and Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*¹

The Book of Margery Kempe is the work of an illiterate housewife born in the year 1373 in the Norfolk town of King's Lynn (then known as Bishop's Lynn or simply Lynn). It was transcribed by an unknown amanuensis after Kempe's dictation and was later rewritten and expanded by a second scribe, a priest of Kempe's acquaintance. The only surviving manuscript, the Butler-Bowden manuscript, was copied around 1450 and was for many years in the possession of the Carthusians of Mount Grace Priory in Yorkshire. The *Book* is remarkable not least for its sophisticated presentation of the significance of madness in the life of an uneducated late-medieval laywoman.

The extent to which the *Book* is Kempe's personal testimony is unclear. Certain passages appear to have been authored or rewritten by the priest-scribe; it is even conceivable that although Kempe wrote the *Book* she invented the scribe. In either case, however, it is likely that she had complete control over and knowledge of the *Book's* contents.² There is still no scholarly consensus, either, on the *Book's* generic status. Some commentators, including many of those interested in the theme of madness, regard the *Book* as an autobiography. Other scholars have been more cautious, pointing out the lack of documentary evidence for some of the most significant events in Margery's life.³ It seems likely that the *Book* is, amongst other things, an early attempt at self-presentation; Kempe would hardly have undermined her narrator's spiritual credibility by noting that she is considered an epileptic if this were not indeed the case. It is unnecessary, however, to decide finally whether the *Book* is autobiographical or fictional. As in

the case of Hoccleve's *Series*, what is important is that the *Book* gives the impression or illusion of autobiography.

'Madness', says Douglas Gray simply, 'is an important strand in the *Book*'.⁴ As well as suffering from a lengthy psychosis at the age of twenty-one, Kempe endures allegations of insanity throughout her life. Her early madness, like that of the romance heroes Gowther and Beryn, is presented as a moral turning point; indeed, madness has a spiritual significance throughout the *Book*. We need not, however, consider Kempe's madness solely in relation to theological ideas.⁵ On the contrary, madness in the *Book* must be seen in the context of the social and psychological pressures which bear on Kempe as she pursues her controversial career as a housewife-saint, torn between the active and the contemplative lives. This chapter attempts to explain Kempe's psychosis, her spectacular religious ecstasies, and the allegations of madness levelled at her in relation to her lifelong search for a degree of autonomy and spiritual respectability in the face of domestic stress, public obloquy and ferocious clerical opposition.

In his anthology of autobiographies by madmen, Roy Porter concludes that 'if the copious writings of the mad are about one thing, it is above all the desire to cease to be misunderstood'.⁶ Like Hoccleve, Kempe is defensive about her boisterous behaviour and continually solicits the understanding and respect of others. She wishes to be seen as a Fool for Christ, suffering patiently the reproofs of a sinful world for the greater glory of God. Nevertheless, her own frank analysis of her early worldly ambitions -- 'Alle hir desyr was for to be worshepd of the pepul' (9) -- aptly summarizes her motivation for writing.⁷ As various critics have noted, Kempe is 'almost obsessively concerned with the reactions of others' and is 'tirelessly absorbed in what she conceives as setting the record straight about herself'.⁸ This is hardly surprising, as Kempe's 'cryings' or 'roarings' are interpreted as evidence of insanity by many in her community. In this climate of opposition and controversy Kempe uses the theme of madness both to vindicate her own actions and to criticize the behaviour of others.

The *Book* begins with a dramatic event. Soon after the birth of her first child, Kempe becomes seriously ill. Until this sickness, she had gone to confession, but had avoided confessing one particular sin which is left intriguingly unspecified. 'Sche had a thyng in conscyens', we are told, 'whech sche had neuyr schewyd be-forn þat tyme in alle hyr lyfe' (6-7). For this sin Kempe had hitherto done penance 'be hir-self a-loone' on the grounds that 'God is mercyful j-now' (7). Illness, however, sharpens her sense of duty. Fearing for her life and taunted by the devil with threats of damnation, she eventually calls for a priest; yet she is deterred from revealing her sin by the severity of her confessor and becomes mad:

whan sche cam to þe poynt for to seyn þat þing whech sche had so long conselyd, hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye & gan scharply to vndyrnemyn hir er þan sche had fully seyde hir entent, & so sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he mygth do. And a-noon, for dredde sche had of dampnacyon on þe to syde & hys scharp repreuyng on þat oper syde, þis creatur went owt of hir mende & was wondyrlye vexid & labowryd wyth spyritys half 3er viij wekys & odde days.

(7)

The mania which ensues has attracted the attentions of numerous professional and amateur psychiatrists, who have variously labelled it a case of 'postpartum psychosis, postpartum hysteria, postpartum depression at its manic phase, hysteria, and postpartum depressive psychosis with features of agitation'.⁹ Postpartum or puerperal psychosis is a severe but usually self-limiting alienation which sets in shortly after childbirth and can last from between a day and several months.¹⁰ Its onset is sudden, and its symptoms include 'confusion, disorientation, hallucinations, delusional elements, and profound changes in mood'.¹¹ It occurs most commonly after first deliveries. These features are consistent with the timing, circumstances and symptoms of Kempe's illness.

The cause of Kempe's condition is harder to determine. As the psychiatric historians Hunter and Macalpine note, our knowledge of the precipitating event of postpartum psychosis brings into focus the question of whether the condition 'is due to the physical or to the psychological circumstances associated with childbearing'.¹² Unfortunately, the answer to this question remains a matter of debate among physicians. The lack of consensus about the etiology of postpartum psychosis raises the further question of whether or not the condition is a proper subject for sociological analysis. Indeed, one historian who usually insists on setting madness in its social context excludes postpartum psychosis from such consideration because of its apparently 'physiological basis'.¹³ It is fruitless, however, to proceed with such caution in the interpretation of Kempe's psychosis. As Sarah Beckwith says, to regard Kempe's madness as entirely organic in origin is to isolate her 'in the society of her own madness'.¹⁴ In any case, such an approach is invalid on literary, if not medical grounds. Kempe does not allow us to foreclose speculation about her madness by sidestepping its social dimensions; on the contrary, she encourages us to consider her mania in the light of her own testimony and to regard madness as a social construction.

The immediate causes of Kempe's insanity are her fear of damnation and her humiliation after her tactless confessor's 'scharp repreuyng' -- terms which Kempe uses in connection with her detractors at several points in the *Book*.¹⁵ In this sense, religious convention and experience go hand in hand. Like the pious but peevish Hoccleve, Kempe combines a deep understanding of the supernatural significance of madness with bitter expressions of personal grievance against the world.

Guilt obviously plays a major part in the onset of the psychosis. Kempe evidently bears the guilty memory of her unspoken sin.¹⁶ Less obviously, perhaps, her confession to a priest after a long period of solitary penance is also a source of guilt and confusion. Late-medieval handbooks frequently stressed the necessity of full confession. *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry* contains a

cautionary tale about a woman who is damned for failing to confess a sexual sin.

The grim moral is delivered in the woman's own words:

beware by me, for whanne y was yonge, for the lust of my flesshe, y laye with a monke; & y durste neuer tell it to my confessour, for drede of encursinge, dredinge shame and the bobauce of the worlde, more thanne spirituel uengeaunce of myn synne. And yet y sende and gaue my good for Goddes sake, herde masses, and saide my seruice diligently, wenyng that the good and the abstinence that y dede shulde haue censed the synne that y durste not tell the preest, and therein y am deseiued, and lost; for y saie you all, who that dothe a dedly synne and confessith hym not therof, and deith so, he is dampned perpetuelly.¹⁷

The woman's circumstances are uncannily reminiscent of Kempe's. Her story illustrates the unconfessed sinner's real fear of damnation and suggests the severity of the orthodox condemnation of headstrong women.

Confessional negligence could also earn dire punishment on earth. The first autobiographer of the Western Middle Ages, the German monk Otloh of Saint Emmeram, became mad after failing to confess fully his sins. 'Although I had done penance in the abbots's presence', says Otloh, 'yet, because I had failed to do it before God, against whom alone I had sinned, after a few days I fell into a sickness'.¹⁸ Such precedent lends credibility to Denise Despres's assertion that

it is Margery's lack of faith in the cleansing power of confession, her fear that her sin is too great a burden even for the cross to bear, that leads her to the despair and madness that signify both spiritual and physical sickness.¹⁹

Kempe's anxiety about these issues is understandable given the peculiar conditions of the late-medieval laywoman's confession. A late twelfth-century penitential gives the following advice to confessors:

The priest shall have a lowly countenance in confession, and he shall not look at the face of the confessant, especially of a woman, on account of the obligation of honour; and he shall patiently hear what she says in a spirit of mildness and to the best of his ability persuade her by various methods to make an integral confession, for otherwise he shall say that it is of no value to her.²⁰

The need for advice of this sort suggests that priests were not renowned for their sensitivity during confession, particularly towards female penitents.

Later in the Middle Ages the possibilities for the abuse of penitents increased. By this time 'repentance and the call to penance were among the most popular sermon topics of the day' and penitents were subject to increasingly close scrutiny.²¹ From the second half of the thirteenth-century onwards,

the sacrament of penance consisted, for every member of medieval English society, of enforced regular confession to the parish priest. This was one of the several ways in which thirteenth-century church reforms, designed initially to improve pastoral care, exercised increasing control over people's daily lives. The rule which obliged every layman to confess his intimate misdeeds regularly and in minute detail to his parish priest was a considerable intrusion of the institutional church into a relationship which had hitherto been a private matter between God and the individual.²²

This new intrusive spirit is reflected in confessional manuals which 'elaborated a rhetoric of sin and censure; intended to instruct, the rhetoric could also be deployed by individual confessors to constrict the spirits in their care'.²³ That confessors were under considerable pressure to extract complete confessions from their parishioners is clear from the frequent warnings against confessional laxity in the late Middle Ages.

The discrepancy between Kempe's confessional practices and clerical expectations is clearly another source of anguish for Kempe. Kempe's emphasis on her personal relationship with God is not necessarily heretical: it can be seen as part of an orthodox movement, encouraged by such works as *The Imitation of Christ*, towards more personal forms of religious devotion. Nevertheless, as David Aers remarks, 'unlike Lollards, Margery had not rejected the sacrament of confession, but she had sought a potentially Lollard-like autonomy of her "souereynes" and the institution'.²⁴ Moreover, Kempe's unmentioned sin has been interpreted biographically as her known association with William Sawtre, a priest of Lynn until 1399 and the first Lollard to be burnt for his beliefs under the *De heretico comburendo* statute of 1401.²⁵ That Sawtre is not mentioned in Kempe's account of the confession episode may be due to the prohibition against the disclosure of names during confession.²⁶ Whatever the case, Sawtre's name is conspicuously absent from the *Book*: perhaps Kempe, who was acquitted of the charge of heresy on several occasions, did not wish to provoke the church authorities too far. In this connection, it is significant that the late-medieval Church insisted on regular confession partly so that a pastor 'could know his sheep and thus not fail to detect heresy'.²⁷

Whether or not Kempe is under suspicion of heresy at this point, her tart comments about her confessor's attitude suggest a barely muffled animosity. The confessor is 'a lytyl to hastye' in rebuking her: an ironically understated phrase considering that he is partly responsible for the onset of a terrifying psychosis. Whatever other factors played their part, Kempe's madness is related to her

confusion about the validity of her pursuit of religious autonomy and to her resentment towards an unsympathetic clerical authority.

Kempe's famous description of her eight-month madness is one of the fullest accounts in English literature of a psychotic experience. Unlike Hoccleve, who reconstructs his psychosis from the reports of his friends, Kempe appears to recall the details of her madness. Internalising her conflict with those around her, she substitutes the rebukes of her aggressive confessor with the tormenting promptings of devils. These encourage her to speak 'repreuows' words to her family and friends, just as her confessor had done to her:

And in þis tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, deuelys opyn her mowthys
 al inflaumed wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as þei schuld a swalwyd
 hyr in, sum-tyme rampyng at hyr, sum-tyme thretyng her, sum-tym
 pullyng hyr & halyng hir boþe nyghth & day duryng þe forseyd
 tyme. And also þe deuelys cryed up-on hir wyth greet thretyngys &
 bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam hir feyth, and denyin
 hir God, hys Modyr, & alle þe seyntys in Heuyn, hyr goode werkys
 & alle good vertues, hir fadyr, hyr modyr, & alle hire frendys. And
 so sche dede. Sche slawndred hir husbond, hir frendys, and her
 owyn self; sche spak many a repreuows worde and many a
 schrewyd worde; sche knew no vertu ne goodnesse; sche desyryd
 all wykkydnesse; lych as þe spyrytys temptyd hir to sey & do so
 sche seyde & dede. Sche wold a for-done hir-self many a tym at her
 steryngys & a ben damnyd wyth hem in Helle, & in-to wytnesse
 þerof sche bot hir owen hand so vyolently þat it was seen al hir lyfe
 aftyr. And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body a-3en hir hert wyth
 hir nayles spetowsly, for sche had noon oper instrumentys, & wers
 sche wold a don saf sche was bowndyn & kept wyth strength boþe
 day & nyghth þat sche mygth not haue hir wylle. (7-8)

Compared to Hoccleve's account of mania, this passage is striking for its violence; Kempe's madness, unlike Hoccleve's, takes the form of an explicit confrontation with those around her.

The supernatural colouring of Kempe's experience of madness is also remarkable. Discussing Kempe's account of her insanity, Charlotte Garrett remarks that

we who read Margery's *Book* are separated from her account and the depths of her experience through time and an acculturation that may appear to raise insurmountable barriers. The paradigmatic shift from medieval theology to modern scientificism leaves a gap in credibility, especially if one looks through a Cartesian or Freudian lens.²⁸

Nevertheless, Kempe's experience of madness recalls much later cases of religious mania. A number of eighteenth-century women confined in a Montélimar hospital became affected by similar thoughts of despair and punishment after a mission held in the city. One of these women 'absolutely refused to undergo any cure, convinced that she was in Hell and that nothing could extinguish the fire she believed was devouring her'.²⁹ The nineteenth-century French physician Esquirol describes the case of another madwoman who exhibits behaviour like Kempe's, including sexual anxiety and 'extreme ardor in religious devotion'; also, like Kempe throughout her life, she makes vows of chastity, has visions of Christ, and suffers delirium and diabolical torments.³⁰ These examples, like Kempe's experience with her confessor, show the potentially ruinous effects of over-zealous religious rhetoric on the minds of pious women.

Kempe's psychotic behaviour also follows the conventions surrounding literary madwomen. In particular, her self-mutilation recalls the psychotic outburst of the grief-stricken Heurodis in the romance *Sir Orfeo*:

Sche crid, & lopli bere gan make:
 Sche froted hir honden & hir fet,
 & crached hir visage -- it bled wete;
 Hir riche robe hye al to-rett,
 & was reueyd out of hir witt.³¹

Such self-destructive forms of maniacal behaviour are associated chiefly with women. Ladies in medieval romances, of course, are idealized in terms of their physical appearances; in the patriarchal society of medieval England, female beauty is perhaps a woman's only widely acknowledged asset of value. By disfiguring themselves, therefore, women implicitly reject the value-system that reduces them to the condition of passive objects of admiration.

With the exception of its demonic elements, Kempe's behaviour also resembles that of Clerimond in the romance *Valentine and Orson*, who pretends to be 'mad and out of her wytte' in order to escape a forced marriage to an Indian king:

In thys wyse dyd the lady abyde longe tyme, and she made it so well that wythin fyftene dayes she semed more lykely a [b]eest than a resonable woman. She was of so cruell and folysshe maners that all the seruauntes lytle and greate, ladyes and damoysselles habandoned her, and abode wythout companye. Wyth her teth and nayles she bote and scratched all them that wolde approche nere her. And by her greate crudelyte she was locked all alone in her chambre, and by a wyndowe they gaue her meat and drynke as to a

beest. On the daye she made the semblaunt that her maladye increased, and al to rente her clothes.³²

Clerimond's madness, albeit feigned, resembles Kempe's in its causes as well as its symptoms: in both cases madness is a desperate response to unwelcome male demands. On a sociological level, Kempe's madness constitutes an individual's struggle for autonomy and her rejection of her social role. But insanity is never simply a matter of the individual casting off the burdens of social expectation; rather, it involves the internalisation of social pressures. Thus Kempe's torments

are presented not simply as external impositions on an integrated, homogenous self but the guilty product of her own struggles for an identity which would enable a relative autonomy in relation to priest, husband, and others. The cost of this individual struggle is a terrifying isolation combined with immense aggression against her husband, her community, and the self formed by conflicting tendencies within it.³³

The anti-social aggression which Kempe shows during her madness is typical of medieval madpeople in very different social circumstances. Nevertheless, Kempe's psychosis may reasonably be seen as a rejection of her role. Her anxiety about her unspoken sin and her resentment of her confessor's hastiness is compounded by her confusion about her new obligations as a new wife and mother.³⁴

Kempe, unlike Clerimond, is not empowered by her experience. Indeed, real madness may be more a 'manifestation of cultural impotence and of political castration' than an effective strategy of opposition to authority.³⁵ Nor is Kempe 'liberated' by her insanity. As Julia Long says, 'if her madness is a sign of her rebellion against her role (as indicated by its nature -- revealing violent feelings towards herself, her beliefs, her family), it leads her to being even more

constrained -- forcefully and literally'.³⁶ Kempe's experience of mania is clearly very different from Thomas Hoccleve's, taking the form of aggressive confrontation with those around her and being dealt with by the sternest measures.

This is unsurprising given the sensational nature of postpartum psychosis which, more than any other form of insanity, constitutes a total rejection of all socially acceptable ways of behaving. The condition has always been treated by physicians with barely concealed astonishment and deep suspicion. Writing three centuries after Kempe, the physician John Woodward describes a puerperal maniac in the following terms:

Amongst others, she had Thoughts of the Devil, as tempting and vehemently urging her to ill; particularly to fling her Child into the fire, beat its Brains out, and the like; to which she had the utmost Horror and Aversion; being naturally mild, good natured, and very virtuous. But she found herself so much out of her own Power and Guidance [...] that she was in perpetual fear of doing something very ill. [...] She had frequently Temptations to lay violent Hands on herself.³⁷

This language, minus its demonic components, is echoed by later physicians. For the Victorian alienists Bucknill and Tuke, the puerpally insane woman evinces

a total negligence of, and often very strong aversion to, her child and husband [...] explosions of anger occur, with vociferations and violent gesticulations; and, although the patient may have been remarkable previously for her correct, modest demeanor, and attention to her religious duties, most awful oaths and imprecations are uttered, and language used which astonishes her friends.³⁸

There are obvious similarities between Kempe's description of her insanity and these much later descriptions of postpartum psychoses in terms of both style and content.³⁹ In each case the madwoman is exempted from blame for her behaviour; but there is also a common sense of the madwoman's profound degeneration from a virtuous life to one of complete degradation.

Given the stigma of postpartum psychosis, we may wonder why Kempe confesses to her insanity, especially since it apparently involves possession by demons -- the most wretched and morally degraded form of madness. And once Kempe had decided to include the account of her psychosis in her *Book*, why did she choose to characterize it so bleakly? If she had wished to elicit sympathy she might have described her suffering as a pitiable affliction, as Hoccleve does in his roughly contemporary *Complaint*. Alternatively, she might have presented her madness as a superior sort of wisdom, like the insanity of a woman cured by Kempe's visits and conversation later in the *Book*. Instead, her madness is a moral and social catastrophe. Part of Kempe's purpose in describing her madness is in shaming her confessor, as has already been suggested. Kempe also, however, presents her insanity negatively, as a temporary aberration from the way of Christ.

This impulse is elucidated by an observation of Jean Starobinski -- a formidable commentator on both the history of psychiatry and the history of consciousness -- on the enabling conditions of autobiography:

one would hardly have sufficient motive to write an autobiography had not some radical change occurred in his life -- conversion, entry into a new life, the operation of Grace. If such a change had not affected the life of the narrator, he could merely depict himself once and for all, and new developments would be treated as external (historical) events: we would then be in the presence of the conditions of what Benveniste has named *history*, and a narrator in the first person would hardly continue to be necessary. It is the

internal transformation of the individual -- and the exemplary character of this transformation -- which furnishes a subject for a narrative discourse in which "I" is both subject and object.

Thus we discover an important fact: it is because the past "I" is different from the present "I" that the latter may really be confirmed in all his prerogatives. The narrator describes not only what happened to him at a different time in his life, but above all how he became -- out of what he was -- what he presently is.⁴⁰

According to Starobinski, then, the search for identity through autobiography is only necessary after some radical crisis of identity. Kempe -- like her contemporary Thomas Hoccleve -- experiences just such a crisis in the form of a spectacular mania. Her frankly admitted psychosis, coming at the beginning of her *Book*, marks both her greatest alienation from friends and family and her deepest moral abjection, since her madness is clearly bound up with the sins of her early life -- in particular the 'fleshly lusts' with which she continually battles.

In the latter regard Kempe resembles other medieval autobiographers from the French abbot Guibert de Nogent to François Villon and Thomas Hoccleve, all of whom describe the lechery and unruliness of their younger years. Kempe's subsequent behaviour, however, is carefully distinguished from the youthful follies that preceded and contributed to her madness. Like the period of insanity described by Augustine in Book VII of the *Confessions*, Kempe's diabolical mania is the cardinal point in both her life and her work; it functions as a moral touchstone against which the divinely-inspired cryings and roarings of the rest of the *Book* may be tested and vindicated and by which the author, in Starobinski's words, may be 'confirmed in all [her] prerogatives'.⁴¹

Kempe regains her reason following her first vision of Christ:

whan sche had long ben labowred in þes & many oþer temptacyons þat men wend sche schuld neuyr a skapyd ne levyd, þan on a tym, as sche lay a-loone and hir kepars wer fro hir, owyr mercyful Lord Crist Ihesu, euyr to be trostyd, worshypd be hys name, neuyr forsakyng hys seruawnt in tyme of nede, aperyd to hys creatur whych had forsakyn hym in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most bewtyuows, & most amyable þat euyr mygth be seen wyth mannys eye, clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke, syttyng up-on hir beddys syde, lokyng vp-on hir wyth so blyssyd a chere þat sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys, seyde to hir þes wordys: 'Dowtyr, why hast þow forsakyn me, and I forsoke neuyr þe?' [...] And a-noon þe creature was stablyd in hir wyttys & in hir reson as wel as euyr sche was be-forn. (8)

Kempe is now restored to her previous domestic role, a rehabilitation marked with mundane ceremony when the keys to the buttery are returned to her. But Kempe's madness is now recognized as a moral, as well as a social aberration. Christ's gently admonishing words in the passage above confirm that her madness is a punishment for sin, presumably the unspoken sin which she felt unable to reveal to her insensitive confessor.

In the following chapter, Kempe presents herself in a social setting. Despite her husband's reproofs and the obloquies of other townsfolk, she is unable to leave her sinful pride in her 'pompows aray', insisting on wearing extravagant clothing on the pretext that she is born of 'worthy kenred' (9). This concern with clothes is, of course, extremely conventional.⁴² Kempe also succumbs to avarice, trying her hand first at brewing and then at milling 'for pure coveytyse & for to maynten hir pride' (9). Both of these improvident business enterprises end in humiliating failure. It is at this point that she finally recognizes her worldly losses as

þe skowrges of owyr Lord þat wold chastyse hir for hir synne. Þan sche askyd God mercy & forsoke hir pride, hir coueytyse, & desyr þat sche had of þe worshepys of þe world, & dede grett bodyly penawnce, & gan to entyr þe wey of euyr-lestyng lyfe, as schal be seyde aftyr. (11)

The vision of Christ is the first of Kempe's many spiritual revelations. After the year 1413 these revelations are usually accompanied by the crying, shouting and wild gestures which modern readers have variously interpreted as signs of psychosis, epilepsy or hysteria. The reactions of Kempe's contemporaries to this disruptive behaviour indicate that many of them also believe her to be mad.

While on a visit to Calvary in 1413 Kempe has a vision of Christ's Passion. Her epileptiform behaviour during this vision sets the pattern for future ecstasies. Writhing on the ground with outstretched arms, Kempe

cryed wyth a lowde voys as þow hir herte xulde a brostyn a-sundyr, for in þe cite of hir sowle sche saw veryly & freschly how owyr Lord was crucifyed. Beforn hir face sche herd and saw in hir gostly sygth þe mornynge of owyr Lady, of Ser Iohn & Mary Mawdelyn, and of many oþer þat louyd owyr Lord. & sche had so gret compassyon and so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn þat sche myt not kepe hir-self fro kryng & roryng þow sche xuld a be ded therfor. (68)

Kempe adopts the conventional behaviour of the sorrowing mother or *mater dolorosa*, typified by Our Lady's display of sorrow in the increasingly emotional crucifixion scenes of the late Middle Ages.⁴³ Thus Kempe identifies throughout her life with an exclusively female behavioural pattern.

This behaviour, if not properly controlled, could come dangerously close to madness. Highly-charged emotional scenes, of course, were common at pilgrimage sites in the late Middle Ages; but they were nevertheless regarded with grave suspicion by some contemporaries. Fabri, a fifteenth-century German pilgrim, disparagingly describes the behaviour of some of his companions at the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem:

I saw there some pilgrims lying powerless on the ground, forsaken by their strength, and as it were forgetful of their own being by reason of their excessive feeling of devotion. Others I saw who wandered hither and thither, from one corner to another, beating their breasts, as though they were driven by an evil spirit. Some knelt on the earth with their bare knees, and prayed with tears, holding their arms out in the form of a cross. Others were shaken with such violent sobs that they could not hold themselves up, and were forced to sit down and hold their heads with their hands, that they might endure their thick-coming sobs. Some lay prostrate so long without motion, that they seemed as though they were dead. Above all our companions and sisters the women pilgrims shrieked as though in labour, cried aloud and wept. Some pilgrims, out of excess of devotion, lost all command of themselves, forgot how they should behave, and out of excessive zeal to please God, made strange and childish gestures.⁴⁴

This description recalls the clerical condemnations of dancing frenzies mentioned in Chapter 3. But this passage is concerned in particular with the unacceptability of certain forms of female behaviour. Fabri's observation that women are particularly susceptible to 'excessive feeling of devotion' is consistent with the widespread medieval idea that women are governed by their emotions rather than reason.⁴⁵ It

is hardly surprising that women were held to be more liable than men to diabolical seduction or that, as we shall see later, holy laywomen who became too enthusiastic were often chastised in the same terms as madwomen.⁴⁶

The variability of the public perception of religious ecstasy is a major concern of the *Book*. Those who witness Kempe's cryings at Calvary and many other less sanctified places are astonished, and each advances his own explanation of her conduct:

For summe seyde it was a wikkyd spiryte vexid hir; sum seyde it was a sekene; sum seyde sche had dronkyn to mech wyn; sum bannyd hir; sum wisshed sche had ben in þe hauyn; sum wolde sche had ben in þe se in a bottumles boyt; and so ich man as hym thowte. (69)

This ragbag of explanations for Kempe's behaviour illustrates the diversity of interpretations of irrational behaviour in the late Middle Ages. Like Hoccleve, however, Kempe gives short shrift to public opinion, firmly rejecting the welter of speculation about her behaviour and asserting her identity in personal and spiritual terms.

Kempe finds supporters among all sorts of people, especially the 'gostly men' who realize that Kempe is not mad, but blessed. The opinions of these churchmen are frequently registered by Kempe, who is, as Sarah Beckwith says, constantly 'incorporating the voice of others' into her texts.⁴⁷ A particularly striking example of this occurs in Chapter 28. Here the passage describing the public reaction to Kempe's behaviour at Calvary is followed by a defence of her conduct. Kempe makes explicit the negative significance of madness, comparing her ecstatic behaviour favourably with the sinful excesses of madmen and -women:

It is nowt to be merueyled 3yf þis creatur cryed and made wondirful cher & cuntenawns, whan we may se eche day at eye bope men and

women, summe for los of werdly good, sum for affecyon of her kynred er for werdly frenshypys thorw ouyr fele stody & erdly affecyon, & most of alle for inordinat lofe & fleschly affecyon 3yf her frendys er partyn fro hem, þei wyl cryen & roryn and wryngyn her handys as 3yf þei had no wytte ne non mende, & yet wetyn þei wel j-now þat þei displesyn God. &, 3yf a man cownsel hem to leevyn er seesyn of her wepyng er crying, þei wyl seyn that þei may not; þei louyd her frend so meche & he was so gentyl & so kende to hem þat þei may be no wey for3etyn hym. How meche mor myth þei wepyn, cryen, & roryn 3yf her most belouyd frendys wer wyth vyolens takyn in her sygth & wyth al maner of reprefe browt be-for þe juge, wrongfully condemnyd to þe deth, & namely so spyteful a deth as owr mercyful Lord suffyrd for owyr sake. How schuld þei suf[fyr y]t? No dowt but þei xulde boþe cry & rore & wrekyng hem 3yf þei myth, & ellys men wold sey þei wer no frendys. Alas, alas, for sorwe, þat þe deth of a creatur whch hat oftyn synned & trespasyd a-geyn her Maker xal be so vnmesurably mornyd & sorwyd. & it is offens to God & hyndryng to þe sowlys on eche syde. (70-71)

We have already seen that grief-madness was held in moral suspicion by the churchmen. John Hirsch's observation that this passage 'reads like' the priest-scribe's interpolation rather than Kempe's own explanation is therefore plausible.⁴⁸ There are also stylistic reasons for thinking that this passage was not written by Kempe. First, the orderly catalogue of causes and the questioning style are quite untypical of the *Book*. More significantly, the passage is unique in the *Book* in that it does not refer explicitly to Kempe or her actions; as the large number of conditional subordinating conjunctions indicates, it is a lengthy and

theoretical narrative digression. We may tentatively conclude that this justificatory passage was either written or significantly reinterpreted by the priest-scribe.

This was not done, of course, without Kempe's knowledge. Indeed, it is possible that Kempe invented the priest-scribe and that in this passage she is merely ventriloquising a clerical voice. Whatever the case, Kempe had complete control over the contents of her *Book*. We must therefore see her as prudently defending her suspiciously female form of devotion by invoking an ecclesiastical condemnation of madness. Kempe's allegiances have temporarily shifted: if her madness was precipitated by a Church representative, it is precisely by means of such authority that she now establishes her sanity.

Kempe's remark that those who suffer from grief- or study-induced madness 'displeyn God' recalls Fabri's condemnation of the behaviour of Jerusalem pilgrims, as does her reference to the madmen's 'inordinat lofe & fleschly affeccyon'. The latter phrase also echoes the expression Kempe uses to describe the sinful pleasures of her early married life, the guilty memory of which may have contributed to her madness. We are therefore encouraged to make a qualitative distinction between Kempe's divinely-inspired cryings -- and by extension her other religious gifts such as the power of prophecy -- and the sort of sinful madness from which she suffers at the beginning of the *Book*.

Kempe's need to emphasize the separateness of her devotional tears and her earlier psychosis is best understood in the context of the medieval Church's ideas about religious ecstasy. The difficulty of distinguishing between experiences of madness and true religious ecstasy has bedevilled the Christian tradition. Both conditions involve a loss of identity: the madman loses his memory; the ecstatic, etymologically, is 'displaced' or 'beside himself'. Furthermore, both madness and mystical experience are more or less inaccessible to rational investigation: students of mysticism frequently comment on what William James called the 'ineffability' or incommunicability of the experience of religious ecstasy, just as philosophers point to the paradox involved in reasoning about madness. Such considerations did

not, however, deter medieval writers from discussing madness or divine ecstasy, or from distinguishing carefully between them.

Despite their occasional toleration of ecstatic behaviour, the Church Fathers agreed that divine inspiration and insanity were incompatible. The psychiatric historian Gregory Zilboorg recounts the famous story of Tertullian's association with two female ecstasies. Although the episode predates the *Book* by some twelve centuries, the conduct of these women resembles not only Kempe's, but also that of the 'holy madwoman' who appears later in the *Book*:

He [Tertullian] wrote of a certain Montanus, who, although a heretic, claimed to bring a new light to the Christian world. Montanus knew two women, Prisca and Maximilla, and all three were apparently somnambulistic and suffered from attacks of grande hystérie. Two bishops in succession, St. Zephyrinus and St. Victor, were convinced of the prophetic powers of these three sick people, and they were accorded 'letters of peace'. Tertullian at first thought that Montanus and his two friends were 'in error,' but he soon felt convinced that when in ecstasy they really possessed prophetic powers. 'There is now among us,' he relates, 'a sister who is favored with the gift of revelations. These come to her in church in the midst of the consecration of sacraments, when she enters the state of ecstasy. While in this state, she converses with angels and at times even with our Lord Jesus Christ. In her rapture she sees and hears the celestial secrets, she knows what is concealed in the hearts of some people and she gives information about salutary remedies'.

Zilboorg concludes from this passage that Tertullian considered 'mental diseases with religious ecstatic trends as coming from the Lord and his angels'.⁴⁹ Of course, the claim that these three supposed mystics were in any sense sick or

hysterical is Zilboorg's, not Tertullian's. For the Church Fathers, true insanity could not be divine in origin. In fact, as David Knowles says, the reduction of all mystical phenomena to the category of hysteria is 'against all the traditional teaching of the Church on the development of the spiritual life'.⁵⁰ A man or woman claiming to be a mystic might therefore be either insane or touched by God, but surely not both. 'The patristic tradition', says William Ober, 'held that a prophet must be conscious and in full command of his faculties'.⁵¹ This point is made clear in Ronald Knox's study *Enthusiasm*. 'The spokesmen of orthodoxy', writes Knox, 'were inclined to view with suspicion any kind of enthusiasm which was accompanied by alienation of the senses'.⁵²

The same view is ubiquitous in the writings of late-medieval mystics. Walter Hilton emphasizes that true mystical experiences cannot occur without the exercise of the faculty of reason:

For wyte þou wele þat a nakyd mynde or a nakyd ymaginacion of Ihesu or of any gastly thyng, with-outyn swetenes of lufe in affeccyon, or with-outyn ly3te of knowynge in resone, it is bot a blyndenes, & a way to disceyte, if a man halde it in hys awen sy3te mare þan it is. Perfor I halde it sekyr þat he be meke in his awen felynge, and hald þis mynde in regarde nou3t til he may by custome & vsynge of þis mynde fele þe fyre of lufe in hys affeccion, & þe li3t of knawynge in hys resone.⁵³

The abandonment of reason leaves the aspiring mystic open to satanic suggestion or madness. 'No writers', says Ronald Knox, 'have insisted more strongly than the mystics themselves on the fact that ecstasy can be counterfeited by diabolic influence, or even by hysteria. One of the privileges of sanctity, it is not necessarily a mark of sanctity'.⁵⁴ Thus the English mystic Richard Rolle, with whose *Incendium Amoris* Kempe elsewhere claims familiarity, describes how the

over-eager mystic can fall into error through physical infirmity or the workings of the devil:

are he be callede of Godd, he gedys his wittys by violence to seke and to be-halde heuenly thynges, are his eghe be made gastely by grace, and ouertrauells by ymaginaciouns his wittes, and by undiscrete trauelynge turnes þe braynes in his heuede, and for-brekes þe myghtes and þe wittes of þe soule and of þe body; and þan, for febilnes of þe brayne, hym thynkes þat he heres woundirfull sownes and sanges, and þat is no thyng ellis bot a fantasie caused of trubbling of þe brayne, as a man þat es in a fransye, hym thynkes þat he herys or sese þat na noþer man duse, and all es bot vanyte and fantasie of þe heued; or elles by wyrkyng of þe enemy þat fenys swylke sowune in his herynge.⁵⁵

Rolle's terms constitute a familiar rhetoric of moral censure: 'fantasie', 'vanyte' and 'fransye' are precisely those words used to ridicule the 'madmen' in Chaucer's *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales.

In the light of such disapproving invectives, Kempe's fear of being regarded as insane is understandable. When she meets Julian of Norwich in Chapter 18, she is advised to obey the will of God in whatever way she pleases, so long as 'it wer not a-geyn þe worshep of God & profyte of hir euyncristen, for, yf it wer, þan it wer nowt þe mevyng of a good spyryte but rapar of an euyl spyrit' (42). Julian does not doubt the pedigree of Kempe's ecstasies; she simply recognizes that madness and the devil lie always in wait for the unwary mystic.

There are indeed many who believe Kempe to be possessed. As a young monk of Lincoln says to her, 'Eyþyr þow hast þe Holy Gost or ellys þow hast a devyl wyth-in þe, for þat þu spekyst her to vs it is Holy Wrytte, and þat hast þu not of þiself' (28). Similarly, a steward of Leicester who sexually molests her

demands to know, on pain of imprisonment, whether her 'speche' comes 'of God er of þe Devyl' (113). Kempe is sensitive to these doubts and frequently expresses her 'drede for illusyons & deceytys of hyr gostly enmys' (3). That the first book should end with a warning about the proper interpretation of divine revelations also shows that authenticity is a major concern.

The real issue here, of course, is not whether Kempe's religious experiences were real, but to what extent others believed their veracity. In the late Middle Ages prophecy was always a dangerous business associated with deception: that other fifteenth-century resident of Lynn, John Capgrave, records the attempted assassination of Henry III at Woodstock by 'a clerk, which feyned him a prophete, and sumtyme feyned him frentik'.⁵⁶ Kempe was not exempt from suspicion. In fact, 'concerning Margery Kempe's status as saintly or mad, authentic or hypocritical, public opinion, as reported in her *Book*, is more divided and fragile than it is of any other English or continental mystic'.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, many critics have tended to blur Kempe's careful distinctions between insanity and religious ecstasy by seeing her as both saintly and mad. This view, we have already suggested, is based on twentieth-century scientific assumptions which had little currency in the Middle Ages. As Carolly Erickson remarks, 'our lexicon associates visions with mysticism, irrationality, occultism, impracticality, and madness. From our point of view the visionary is a person who sees what isn't there'.⁵⁸ In our culture, then, mystical experience is continuous with delusion and insanity. This may explain the tendency of literary critics and psychiatric historians to regard madness and religious ecstasy as compatible in the medieval mind. Donald R. Howard avers that Kempe is 'quite mad, an incurable hysteric with a large paranoid trend'; but, he continues, 'to the medieval way of thinking this was not incompatible with real visions'. This leads Howard to speculate that Kempe 'may after all have been the real thing, a holy madwoman'.⁵⁹ Derek Pearsall even regards the idea that '"real" fools and madmen have a special access to God and God's truth' as 'a common belief in the

Middle Ages'.⁶⁰ The psychiatric historian Roy Porter also asserts that madness was often divine. Basing his argument on Michael Screech's provocative contention that 'madness and Christianity go hand in hand', Porter states that madness, as well as being seen as a sign of moral turpitude, 'can also be holy, either as the innocent otherworldliness of the Pauline fool or as the ecstasy of the Old Testament prophet'.⁶¹ But these assertions of what constituted madness in the Middle Ages are oversimplified, if not entirely misleading.

The theme of Pauline folly or the 'Folly of the Cross' is important in the *Book*. Roland Maisonneuve has convincingly demonstrated that Kempe presents herself as a 'Fool for Christ'.⁶² Throughout her life she suffers with humility the scorn of her friends and companions. Indeed, she was 'mery whan sche was repreuyd, skornyd, or japyd for ower Lordys lofe, & mych mor mery þan sche was be-for-tyme in þe worshepys of þe world' (13). Moreover, Christ tells her that by enduring worldly humiliation she is assured of his grace: '"Dowtyr, þis plesith me rith wel, for þe mor schame & mor despite þat þu hast for my lofe, þe mor joy schalt þou haue wyth me in Heuyn, and it is rithful þat it be so"' (185).

On one occasion during Kempe's visit to the Holy Land, the theme of holy folly becomes explicit. Kempe's fellow pilgrims become so exasperated by her weeping that they humiliate her by forcing her to wear the white gown of a fool, a form of clothing that Kempe elsewhere adopts by choice despite its associations with the suspect Flagellant sect:

They cuttyd hir gown so schort þat it come but lytil be-nethyn hir kne & dedyn hir don on a whyte canvas in maner of a sekkyn gelle, for sche xuld ben holdyn a fool & þe pepyl xuld noy makyn of hiy ne han hir in reputacyon. Pei madyn hir to syttyn at þe tabelys ende be-nethyn alle oþer þat sche durst ful euyl spekyn a word. (62)

It has been suggested that 'gelle' is 'an extension of *gill* or *jill*, a familiar or contemptuous term applied to a woman'.⁶³ At all events, this episode fulfills Christ's graphic warning to Kempe that she would be 'etyn & knawyn of the pepul of the world as any raton knawyth the stokfysch' (17). 'Holy folly', as Karma Lochrie observes, 'clearly carries none of the protection or allowances made for the court fool'.⁶⁴

Kempe's humiliation here recalls her earlier encounter with the 'hastye' confessor: in both instances she is forced into the role of madwoman and is reduced to silence -- a conventional token of insanity -- by unsympathetic members of her community. Clearly, however, the imputations of madness here are spurious. Michael Screech argues that, for Erasmus, St Paul himself was seen -- and even regarded himself -- as truly insane. But Screech's retention of inverted commas when referring to St Paul, Christ and other men and women as 'mad' suggests a degree of circumspection.⁶⁵ In fact, as Screech's quotations from the *Praise of Folly* make clear, Erasmus noted only the similarity, not the identity, of madness and religious rapture. Christian ecstasy, he writes in the *Praise of Folly*, is 'a kind of madness' (*insaniam quandam*) 'very like dementedness' (*dementiae simillimum*).⁶⁶ Kempe's white gown resembles that of Christ as he is represented in late-medieval portrayals of the Mocking of Christ, an identification which implies both her sanctity and her sanity.⁶⁷ The Fool for Christ is not truly insane; he is merely held mad by others.

Nor were the Old Testament prophets considered mad according to conventional theology. On the contrary, the Bible 'made it virtually impossible for a theologian to admit of any connection between true prophecy and insanity'.⁶⁸ As Ronald Knox concludes in his discussion of Tertullian's involvement in the so-called Montanist heresy, 'it seems quite clear that the orthodox of the second century [...] distinguished sharply between prophecy and alienation of the senses'. Later, St Jerome expends much energy 'assuring us that the Old Testament prophets had all their wits about them' and Albert the Great insists that true

prophets, unlike the insane, have control over the onsets of their trances.⁶⁹ It is therefore all the more significant that it is Jerome who endorses Kempe's tears when he appears to her at his tomb in the church of St Maria Maggiore in Rome (99).⁷⁰ For the Church Fathers, neither the Pauline fool nor the Old Testament prophet could be described, from a Christian perspective, as truly mad.

Medieval medical authorities bolstered the Church's views by stressing that madness could produce only the *delusion* of true prophecy. The seventh-century Byzantine author Paul of Aegina, for example, notes that some melancholics appear to 'fortell what is to come, as if under divine influence; and these are, therefore, properly called demoniacs, or possessed persons'. Paul's 'demoniacs' probably refers to the Greek tradition of divine inspiration; nevertheless, Paul clearly disbelieves that prophecies in such circumstances are true. In this he follows his sixth-century predecessor Alexander of Tralles.⁷¹

Roy Porter stresses the very different origins of madness and mystical ecstasy in Christian theology. 'Satan's voice', he writes, 'mimicked God's, and when such diabolical ventriloquism happened, "divine ecstasy" imploded into raving madness'.⁷² Hence the Church's requirement that visionaries, for example, undergo rigorous testing (*probatio*) to determine the truth of their experiences and to rule out the possibility of delusion through mental infirmity.⁷³ However difficult they may have been to disentangle in practice, 'raving madness' and 'divine ecstasy' were carefully distinguished in medieval theology and medicine; orthodoxy permitted no overlap between them. It is true that 'at no time since the first century has it been possible to draw a sharp line between several kinds of Christian other-worldliness and diabolical or organic madness'.⁷⁴ The fifteenth-century *Alphabet of Tales*, for example, relates Jacques de Vitry's description of 'devote wommen, þat was so hugelie ravissid with thought of holy liffyng, þat of all þe day þer was no witt in þaim vnto none oute-ward thyng'.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Christian writers attempted to draw a line between madness and religious ecstasy and were extremely anxious that it should not be crossed.

The point is neatly illustrated in the autobiography of the thirteenth-century Flemish mystic Beatrice of Nazareth, who, like Kempe, longed so ardently for Christ that 'very often, destitute of the obedience of her corporeal senses, she was not able to discern by their services what was outside her'.⁷⁶ Despite this apparently insane behaviour, Beatrice was regarded by her biographer as saintly; but when she consulted her confessor about the possibility of 'molding herself to the way of [...] madness or foolishness' she was advised against it.⁷⁷ The confessor's reluctance to endorse her project implies that Beatrice had not yet, in his estimation, become insane, and that such a development would be undesirable.

Clearly, then, madness did not intersect with mystical rapture. 'In Christian theology, as in Christian medicine', says Judith Neaman simply, 'true madness was never divine'.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, to be mistakenly held mad by others is the lot of the mystic. In the thirteenth-century prose legend of St Christina, for example, the saint's family and friends suppose her to be possessed on account of her bizarre behaviour:

Therefore after þis whan Cristyn fledde þe presens of folke wip a wonder loþing into wildernesse and in to trees, into þe coppys of tourys or chirches or of oþere hye thinges: hir frendys, supposynge hir wode and ful of fendes, atte laste with grete laboure toke hir and bonde hir with chaynes of yren. And whan sche so bounden hadde soffred many pennuryes and peynes, but moost in sauour of men: vpon a nighte sche was holpen of oure lorde, and hir bondys and fettirs vndone she skaped aweye and fledde ferre into deserte to wodes, and þere she lyued as bryddes don, in trees. [...] þe mene-tyme she was soghte, founden and taken of hir freendys, and tyed with yren chaynes, as she was byfore.⁷⁹

Christina's friends and family are ashamed of the saint's behaviour. They bind her and feed her like a dog with bread and water, a detail which recalls the treatment of those heroes and heroines of romance who either become or pretend to be mad. Both Robert of Sicily and Clerimond in *Valentine and Orson*, for example, are forced to live as hounds. Most significantly, Christina's treatment allies her with Christ, whose family try to restrain him as a madman.⁸⁰

Other female ascetics exhibit mad behaviour. The self-mutilation of St Elizabeth of Spalbeck, so reminiscent of Kempe's behaviour during her psychosis, appears maniacal to others: 'sche takip her owne cheekys, þe whiche byfore sche hadde smyten wip many strokes, now with þe platte hande now wip þe fiste, and opere-while wip her fingers, drawen to-gedir, as sche wolde pulle oute her chaules'.⁸¹ The *Alphabet of Tales* relates the story of a holy nun whose asceticism causes her to be considered mad by the other sisters of her order. Only the visiting St Patrick, himself a wilderness-dwelling ascetic, recognizes her sanctity: 'sho is wise, & ye er bod fules; ffor sho is bettyr þan owder ye or I'.⁸²

Like these holy women, Kempe is held mad by many in her society. Moreover, she appears to encourage allegations of insanity by likening her cryings to the ravings of madmen and drunkards. Alcoholic intoxication, we have seen, was inextricably linked with madness in the Middle Ages; but it was also widely used as a metaphor for mystical experience. 'The drunken consciousness', as William James recognized, 'is one part of the mystic consciousness'.⁸³ In Chapter 41 Kempe becomes

so delectably fed wyth þe swet dalyawns of owr Lorde & so fulfilled of hys lofe þat as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir fyrst on þe o syde & sithyn on þe oper wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, vn-mythy to kepyn hir-selfe in stabilnes for þe vnqwenchabyll fyer of lofe wech brent ful sor in hir sowle. Pan meche pepyl wonderyd up-on hir, askyng hir what sche eyed, to whom sche as a creatur al

wowndyd wyth lofe & as reson had fayled, cryed wyth lowde voys,
'þe Passyon of Crist sleth me'. (98)

Similarly, when her mind is 'raueschyd' in church at Candlemas, Kempe is unable to bear her candle to the priest with the rest of the congregation and instead 'went waueryng on eche syde as it had ben a dronkyn woman' (198). Unlike Hoccleve in his *Complaint*, then, Kempe uses drunkenness as an analogy not for madness, but for religious ecstasy. This is risky, for Kempe must beware undermining her status as a holy woman by allowing her metaphors to be taken literally. As the ever-wary marginal annotator of the Butler-Bowden manuscript insists, Kempe's 'drunkenness' should be interpreted as a case of *ebrietas sancta* (98).

Kempe is well aware of the dangerous potential of her metaphors. A passage she quotes from the fourteenth-century compilation *Stimulus Amoris* recognizes the similarity between mystical devotion and insanity or drunkenness at the same time as it distinguishes between them:

'A, Lord, what xal I mor noysen er cryen? Þu lettyst & þu comyst not, & I, wery & ouyrcome thorw desyr, begynne for to maddyn, for lofe gouernyth me & not reson. I renne wyth hasty cowrs wher-þat-euyr thu wylte. I bowe, Lord, þei þat se me irkyn and rewyn, not knowyng me dronkyn wyth þi lofe. Lord, þei seyn "Lo, 3en wood man cryeth in þe stretys," but how meche is þe desyr of myn hert þei parceyue not.' (154)

As in the passage justifying Kempe's tears at Calvary, Kempe stresses that the difference between drunkenness or madness and divine ecstasy is not simply one of degree. Madness here is spectacular and public; mystical rapture, although apparently similar, is in truth the 'desire' of the 'heart', inherently private, incommunicable and invisible. In Sarah Beckwith's phrase, mysticism involves a

'drive towards interiority'.⁸⁴ As in Hoccleve's *Complaint*, Kempe's unease about the public perception of her unusual behaviour entails a deep sense of division between inner and outer.

So far we have seen that Kempe, after her initial psychosis, takes pains to emphasize her sanity and to show madness as a token of sinfulness. Towards the end of the *Book*, however, Kempe presents madness in a very different light; moreover, she herself shows symptoms of a variety of mental and physical illnesses. As has already been suggested, retrospective clinical diagnoses are of limited value and are in any case often bedevilled by a lack of reliable data; what is important here is Kempe's description of her behaviour and the contemporary response to it.

Kempe's freakish behaviour is often attributed to organic diseases other than madness. It certainly occurs to both lay and clerical observers that she is suffering from a 'sekenes'. One suggested cause is epilepsy, a condition often identified with insanity in the Middle Ages. Many people think that Kempe has the 'fallyng euyl' and spit at her in abhorrence of the disease (105). That Kempe's face turns blue during her ecstasies certainly suggests epilepsy, although Trudi Drucker prefers a diagnosis of 'convulsive hysteria'.⁸⁵ And although it is dangerous to apply clinical descriptions to historical cases, Kempe also arguably demonstrates the chief personality changes associated with epilepsy.⁸⁶ The hostile reactions of others towards Kempe's 'sekenes' may therefore be attributable to the fact that of all illnesses in the Middle Ages, epilepsy was the 'slowest to find a plausible pathology of a rational kind'.⁸⁷

Not all diseases, however, were treated with such revulsion. A friar who disbelieves that Kempe's crying is a gift from God courteously asks her to acknowledge that her behaviour is caused by a physical illness, a 'cardiakyl er sum oþer sekenesse' (151). In return he promises to tolerate her cryings and to encourage the people to pray for her. Kempe, of course, refuses the bargain. Thus she rejects not only the morally stigmatising allegations of possession and

drunkenness, but also any suggestion that her behaviour is attributable to organic causes. Eluned Bremner speculates that Kempe's acceptance of a natural cause of her tears would have aroused suspicions of demonic possession.⁸⁸ This is possible, since Kempe's contemporaries tend to see her either as a holy woman or as possessed by the devil. But as we have seen, illness could be regarded as entirely organic in origin. More plausible, therefore, is Drucker's suggestion that if Kempe had attributed her cryings to a 'kendly seknes', 'she would have had to forfeit the unique attention she attracted and become only another uninteresting sick woman'.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Kempe does present herself as sick and even insane. She is frequently afraid that mental illness will follow from her many physical infirmities.⁹⁰ Moreover, she displays the symptoms of mania and melancholia long after her psychosis of 1394. Indeed, in assessing Kempe's mental condition, we must be careful to distinguish her early postpartum psychosis -- usually a self-limiting condition -- from her behaviour in the rest of the *Book*. As Freeman *et al.* rightly complain, too many critics have 'extended their pronouncements' on the initial psychotic episode 'to the whole of *The Book*'.⁹¹

Despite the fact that Kempe suffers a 'puerperal breakdown following her first child, which seems to have been psychotic in nature', Dr Anthony Ryle finds in the rest of the *Book* no evidence of a 'continuing psychotic process'.⁹² Most commentators, however, have regarded Kempe's behaviour after her first bout of madness as hysterical. Freeman, Bogorad and Sholomskas summarize some of their opinions:

Howard calls Margery Kempe 'an incurable hysteric with a large paranoid trend.' McCann labels her as manifesting 'violent hysteria.' Ryle writes of 'hysterical personality organisation.' Tuma calls her 'hysterical and undoubtedly mentally unbalanced,' and

Ober applies Carter's 1853 classification to Kempe of 'tertiary hysteria'.⁹³

Despite the popularity of such speculation, there are good reasons for eschewing it here. First, the term hysteria has accumulated such a stigma that the responsible critic must seriously consider the wisdom of using it as a diagnostic category.⁹⁴ More importantly, the diagnosis of hysteria, however interesting to modern physicians, is ultimately anachronistic; it does nothing to further our understanding of the *Book*, Kempe's condition, or medieval reactions to it. Indeed, it seems most unlikely that either psychiatry or modern medicine, as Marion Glasscoe claims, provides the 'most helpful perspective' in understanding Kempe's symptoms.⁹⁵

A far more promising and relevant approach is taken in Freeman, Bogorad and Sholomskas's recent attempt to diagnose Kempe's pathology in terms of medieval medical nosology. Freeman *et al.* argue that Kempe, after her initial postpartum psychosis, suffered 'cyclical episodes of mania and melancholia'.⁹⁶ With the exception of her initial psychosis, it is open to question whether a medieval physician would have found much in Kempe's behaviour that accorded with the traditional definition of mania. As we have seen, the maniac -- according to the textbooks -- made insulting or nonsensical remarks and attempted to harm himself and others so that he had to be restrained. These are the core behavioural symptoms of mania, and they apply only imperfectly to Kempe.

Nevertheless, Kempe does display some distinctly manic-depressive traits. Freeman, Bogorad and Sholomskas point to the pride that she takes in her 'showy manner of dressing' as evidence of her mania, quoting Aretaeus of Cappadocia, a second-century physician who believed the classic form of mania to be the bipolar form. 'The patient who previously was gay, euphoric, inspired and hyperactive', says Aretaeus, 'suddenly has a tendency to melancholy; he becomes at the end of the attack languid, sad, taciturn, he complains that he is worried about his future, he feels ashamed'. After the depressive phase is over, the madmen 'show off in

public with crowned heads as if they were returning victorious from the games'.⁹⁷ Freeman compares this latter observation with Kempe's behaviour shortly after her postpartum psychosis:

sche wold not leeuyn hir pride ne hir pompows aray þat sche had vsyd be-for-tym, neipyr for hyr husbond ne for noon oþer mannys cownsel. And 3et sche wyst ful wel þat men seyden hir ful mech velany, for sche weryd gold pypys on hir hevyd & hir hodys wyth þe typettys were daggyd. Hir clokys also wer daggyd & leyd wyth dyuers colowrs be-twen þe daggys þat it schuld be þe mor staryng to mennys sygth and hir-self þe mor ben worshepyd. (9)

This detail may be interpreted in at least two, not necessarily incompatible ways. On the one hand, Kempe's 'pompows aray' can be seen, like the Wife of Bath's similar gaudy apparel, as a near-statutory assertion of wealth and status in an aggressively competitive capitalist society.⁹⁸ But the suggestion that Kempe's display is a symptom of mania remains a possibility; sartorial ostentation was interpreted as a symptom of mania in women until at least the early twentieth century.⁹⁹

Freeman also points out that Kempe suffers from regular bouts of melancholia. Kempe never exhibits the morbid desire for death, the intense fearfulness, the sense of bodily fragility or the delusions of catastrophe which attend melancholics in medical works like Bartholomeus Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. Nevertheless, she does return compulsively to her feelings of depression and despair throughout the *Book*, rather as Hoccleve does in his *Complaint*.

Perhaps her profoundest and most prolonged melancholic episode occurs near the beginning of the *Book*, in Chapter 4. Here she describes her guilt for

consenting to sexual intercourse with a man who, it transpires, is merely toying with her:

Pan fel sche half in dyspeyr. Sche thowt sche wold a ben in Helle for þe sorw that sche had. Sche thowt sche was worthy no mercy for hir consentyng was so wyfully do ne neuyr worthy to don hym seruyse for sche was so fals vn-to hym. [...] but he wythdrowe not hir temptacyon but rapar incresyd it as hir thowt. And þefore wend sche þat he had forsakyn hir & durst not trostyn to hys mercy, but was labowrd wyth horrybyl temptacyons of lettherye & of dyspeyr ny al þe next 3er folwyng, saue owyr Lord of hys mercy, as sche seyde hir-self, 3af hir ech day for the most party too owerys of compunccyon for hir synnys wyth many byttyr terrys. & sythen sche was labowryd wyth temptacyons of dyspeyr as sche was befor and was as for fro felyng of grace as þei that neuyr felt noon. & that mygth sche not beryn, & þefor al-wey sche dyspeyred. Safe for þe tyme þat sche felt grace, hir labowrs wer so wondyrful þat sche coud euel far wyth hem but euyr mornyn & sorwyn as þow God had forsakyn hir. (16)

We may compare Kempe's melancholia here with Hoccleve's. Whatever religious significance Hoccleve's madness may have, its immediate cause is to be found in the poet's dire financial situation and his stressful working conditions in the understaffed Privy Seal Office. Kempe's melancholia is related to her guilty sexual feelings and is much more closely bound up with her religiosity; it springs from her theological concern that she is beyond redemption.

Despite her careful differentiations between insanity and mystical union at certain points of the *Book*, then, Kempe shows symptoms of madness. This is initially perplexing. If madness and holiness were regarded as incompatible in

orthodox thought, it may seem strange that a medieval woman with aspirations to sainthood would risk appearing to be insane. By presenting herself as insane in the eyes of others, of course, she places herself in the hallowed company of the misunderstood female ecstasies whom she admires so much. But Kempe goes further than this, by admitting to symptoms of genuine madness. She must therefore find some way of vindicating, or at least softening the stigma of madness.

Towards the end of the first book, Kempe is increasingly accused of being mad or possessed by demons. It is therefore fitting that in Chapter 74 she visits and helps a number of sick people, including a woman assailed by demons. Like Kempe during her psychosis and her depressive bouts later in the *Book*, this woman is tormented by the devil with threats of damnation and lecherous thoughts. Kempe, understandably, feels sympathy for the woman and is able to comfort her with kind words and prayers.

Chapter 75 describes Kempe's cure of a woman suffering from postpartum psychosis. This is a thematically and structurally important event whose similarity to the description of Kempe's postpartum psychosis has not escaped critical notice.¹⁰⁰ Its inclusion suggests that Kempe is a canny artist that is often allowed. Nevertheless, Kempe, with typically ironic ingenuousness, does not acknowledge the similarity between what are arguably the two most memorable events in the *Book*. Despite Lynn Staley's observation that there is no comfortable closure or circularity in the *Book*, this episode, like the preceding one, seems intended to mark the end of Kempe's spiritual journey from madness to saintliness.¹⁰¹ The circumstances of this episode indicate that the onetime madwoman has become a locally revered holywoman with both the power and the authority to restore the deranged to their senses.

As Kempe is praying in the Church of St Margaret -- the site of earlier miracles -- a distracted man approaches her and implores her to visit his wife who, like Kempe at the beginning of the *Book*, has gone insane shortly after childbirth.

The madwoman's symptoms, as described by her husband, are similar to those suffered by Kempe:

As þe sayd creatur was in a chirch of Seynt Margaret to sey hir deuocyons, þer cam a man knelyng at hir bak, wryngyng hys handys & schewyng tokenys of gret heuynes. Sche, parceyuyng hys heuynes, askyd what hym eylyd. He seyde it stod ryth hard wyth hym, for hys wyfe was newly delyueryd of a childe & sche was owt of hir mende. '&, dame,' he seyth, 'sche knowyth not me ne non of hir neyborwys. Sche roryth & cryith so þat sche makith folk euyl a-feerd. Sche wyl boþe smytyn & bityn, & þerfor is sche manykyld on hir wristys. (177-178)

The passage suggests that the medieval insane led a far from carefree life and that madness, far from being a liberating experience, involved extreme suffering. In David Aers's provocative words, 'perhaps there is an anxiety in this isolating confinement of the female victim which Foucault's "history" of madness might not lead one to expect in this period'.¹⁰²

Eventually the woman's incessant crying so exasperates her neighbours that she is confined in a room at the outskirts of the town. Kempe, who converses with her easily and pleasantly, helps restore her to her right mind; the madwoman regards everyone else as possessed by demons and tries to attack them:

So sche went forth wyth hym to se þe woman. &, whan sche cam in-to þe hows, as sone as þe seke woman þat was alienyd of hir witte saw hir, sche spak to hir sadly & goodly & seyde sche was ryth wolcome to hir. & sche was ryth glad of hir comyng and gretly comfortyd be hir presens, 'For 3e arn,' sche seyde, 'a ryth good woman, & I behelde many fayr awngelys a-bowte 3ow, & þerfor, I

pray 3ow, goth not fro me, for I am gretly comfortyd be 3ow.' And, whan oþer folke cam to hir, sche cryid & gapyd as sche wolde an etyn hem & seyde þat sche saw many deuelys a-bowtyn hem. Sche wolde not suffyrn hem to towchyn hir be hyr good wyl. Sche roryd and cryid so boþe nyth & day for þe most part þat men wolde not suffyr hir to dwellyn a-mongys hem, sche was so tediows to hem. Þan was sche had to þe fortheſt ende of þe town in-to a chambyr þat þe pepil xulde not heryn hir cryin. & þer was sche bowndyn handys and feet wyth chenys of yron þat sche xulde smytyn no-body. (178)

The madwoman's aversion to being touched obviously indicates a deep fear of defilement by human contact. Indeed, Kempe asks us to respect this madwoman as an irrational sage who perceives in her delirium the sinfulness of normal humanity. Thus the madwoman is clearly identified as Kempe's spiritual ally. Indeed, the language in which she is described recalls the terms applied to Kempe elsewhere in the *Book*: Kempe's behaviour in the churches of London, for example, is described as 'tediows' to the 'curatys & preistys' (245). Moreover, unlike the possessed woman in Chapter 74, the madwoman is not a virgin, corroborating Christ's early message to Kempe that he loves 'wyfes also' (49). In other ways, the episode is problematic: the sympathetic attitude towards this woman's mania is inconsistent with Kempe's previous insistence on the separateness of madness and blessedness. In fact, Kempe now eschews her earlier moral distinction between madness and divine inspiration, emphasising the holiness, rather than the sinfulness and abjection of madness.

Despite its rationale in terms of social harmony, the madwoman's removal to the fringes of the town has a positive spiritual significance. Michel Foucault stresses the symbolic significance of the madman's liminal position in

late-medieval society. If he was not cast adrift on one of Foucault's imaginary ships of fools, the madman was assigned a

liminal position on the horizon of medieval concern -- a position symbolised and made real at the same time by the madman's privilege of being *confined* within the city *gates*: his exclusion must enclose him; if he cannot and must not have another *prison* than the *threshold* itself, he is kept at the point of passage. He is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely.¹⁰³

The madman's simultaneous inclusion within and exclusion from society suggests that he was regarded as only partly belonging to the world.

The insane were not the only elements of medieval society to occupy such a position. One is struck particularly by the similarity between the medieval madman's marginal location and that of the medieval anchorite, who was typically walled up in a tiny cell adjacent to a church, with only a small window to the outside world, or a narrow squint into the church itself. The anchorite's cell was fashioned like a tomb, so that her confinement signified death to the world.¹⁰⁴ Thus the anchorite, like the madwoman in the *Book*, occupies what the sociologist Victor Turner calls a 'betwixt and between' position in society, on the threshold (Latin *limen*) between this world and the next.¹⁰⁵

Whatever the associations between the mad and religious recluses, the madwoman visited by Kempe is certainly close to the spiritual world. The attitude towards her madness is therefore quite different to that in Kempe's description of her postpartum psychosis, which was seen as a token of sinfulness. Like Langland's 'lunatyk lollares' or Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlin, this madwoman combines elements of raving madness and holiness or moral insight. The madwoman's sanctity is further suggested by the fact that, like the female saints of the prose legends, she is roughly treated by her family and neighbours. When she

sees angels surrounding her visitor, then, she vicariously endorses Kempe as a 'ryth good woman' (178).

The main purpose of this vignette, of course, is to establish Kempe as a healer of the sick and insane, like other holy men and women referred to in the *Book*. Kempe is therefore obliged to stress the woman's genuine madness. The unexpected and unorthodox implication of the anecdote is that such madness is not incompatible with divine inspiration. As we have seen, this contradicts both patristic authority and the warnings of contemporary mystics. It also contrasts radically with the passage describing Kempe's cryings and roarings at Calvary. In the earlier passage, Kempe, in the voice of the priest-scribe, invokes an authoritative moral distinction between sinful madness and divine inspiration, and makes it clear that Kempe's behaviour is of the latter sort. This, as we have seen, is a distinction Kempe insists on elsewhere in the *Book*. Here, however, the distinction is abandoned: far from separating man from God, madness has become a token of saintliness. Thus Chapter 75 shows Kempe's readiness to employ very different conceptions of madness to achieve different effects. Clearly, Kempe is more interested in validating her own behaviour than in maintaining a consistent position, orthodox or otherwise, on the relationship between insanity and inspiration. This in itself is a significant conclusion, in view of the desire of many medieval critics to regard medieval texts as coherent expositions of a single theological perspective.

The comparison between the anchorite and the madwoman at 'þe forthest ende of þe town' implies not only her sanctity, but her social alienation. Like an anchorite, and like Kempe at the beginning of the *Book*, this woman is unable to communicate, deprived of subjectivity and social interaction. In this connection, we may recall a monk's gruff aside to Kempe in Chapter 13: 'I wold þow wer closyd' in an hows of ston þat þer schuld no man speke wyth þe' (27). There is no critical consensus about the precise meaning of these words. Possibly he wishes that Kempe were an anchorite; or perhaps he wants to have her confined as a

madwoman. In either case, Kempe's incarceration would neutralize the threat to public order posed by her unusual behaviour. As we shall see shortly, male authorities regarded madwomen and secular holy women as threats to social stability and upbraided them all in similar language.

Despite her abjection, the madwoman is calm in Kempe's presence and is eventually returned to her senses thanks, we are told, to her visitor's frequent visits and prayers. Kempe herself does not claim to be able to perform miracles -- a precondition for sainthood. Nevertheless, the woman's cure is generally considered

a ryth gret myrakyl, for he þat wrot þis boke had neuyr be-for þat tyme sey a man ne woman, as hym thowt, so fer owt of hir-self as þis woman was ne so euyl to rewlyn ne to gouernyn, & sithyn he sey hir sad & sober a-now, worschip & preysyng be to owr Lord wythowtyn ende for hys hy mercy & hys goodnes þat euyr helpith at nede. (178-179)

The invocation of the original scribe at this point is striking. This interjection, unlike the preceding passage, recalls the priest-scribe's justification of Kempe's outrageous behaviour at Calvary. Once again madness is condemned by a representative of orthodoxy; and again, Kempe's actions -- this time in the interests of public order -- are comfortably endorsed by a male authority.

Moreover, Kempe's comment on the previously 'ungovernable' condition of the madwoman briefly but effectively reinvokes a rhetoric of male censure. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the terms 'rule' and 'governance' had widespread application. Very frequently, however, they were used in antifeminist contexts: male governance was considered necessary to suppress female autonomy. The author of the fifteenth-century *Dives and Pauper* gives the following warning:

And therfor seith the lawe that the offys of teching & chastysyng
 longyth nout only to the buschop but to euery gouernour aftir his
 name & his degre, to the pore man gouernynge his pore houshold,
 to the riche man gouernynge his mene, to the housebond gouernyng
 his wif.¹⁰⁶

That the author feels such instruction necessary implies his concern that powerful women might reject male rule: for every Constance there is a Wife of Bath. Such anxiety is evident in even the least historically-specific genres of medieval literature: thus, in the popular lyric *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, an implacable mistress tells her enthralled suitor that she will not 'be Rulyd by mannys gouernance'.¹⁰⁷

Since such a degree of autonomy was generally abhorred as unnatural and even mad, the causal connection between madness and indiscipline was reversed, so that insane women were described as 'ungovernable' or 'unrutable'. These terms often referred to the relationship between the madwoman and her relatives, especially with the rise of the bourgeois nuclear family. In his examination of the case notes of the seventeenth-century physician Richard Napier, Michael MacDonald has shown the close connection between female insanity and domestic disobedience. The 'frantic and raging' Rose Bateman, for example, would 'not be ruled by her parents and friends'.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, madwomen were often described as 'unrutable' or 'ungovernable' until at least the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹

Lay religious women were frequently condemned for similar reasons and in identical language. A sixteenth-century Spanish writer, for example, complains that some of these women

no longer want to take advice, they do not want to submit themselves to anyone. [...] Such women are obedient only in little ways, [...] but in all the rest, in important matters, they question

everything, and argue, and want to govern, and even rule their masters.¹¹⁰

Kempe, of course, is constantly made aware of such attitudes. In Chapter 43, for example, an anchorite demands that Kempe be 'gouernyd' by him (103). Kempe refuses, saying that God does not wish this, indicating that divine will overrides male governance. Kempe's unruliness is widely recognized. Everywhere she goes she is accused of being a heretic and of abandoning her proper role; thus the inhabitants of the countryside around Beverley advise her to go home and spin like other women (129).¹¹¹ Moreover, her autonomy is considered to have a corrupting effect on others. In Beverley, for example, she is accused of advising Lady Greystoke, the daughter of Lady Westmoreland, to leave her husband -- an allegation she vehemently denies (133). Kempe's cure of the madwoman is therefore important in vindicating her reputation as a woman of probity. By bringing an unruly madwoman to order, she acquits herself of the charge of being a disruptive influence.

Chapter 75, then, contains a characteristically stealthy, double-edged attempt by Kempe to vindicate her behaviour. On the one hand it suggests that 'the holy might be located in areas where we are not usually prepared to find it': since the madwoman is a seer, she is able to endorse Kempe's sanctity.¹¹² Nevertheless, the potentially heretical implications of such subjective validation are shrewdly offset by other, more orthodox, strategies. First, Kempe's cure of the madwoman places her comfortably in the eminent company of those like Sir Gowther who abandon the madness of sin to become saints with the power to cure madness. Furthermore, by couching the madwoman's previously 'ungovernable' condition in the well-established rhetoric of male censure, Kempe emphasizes her religious and political orthodoxy and negotiates the dualistic 'either/or' thinking that is applied to her throughout the *Book*.¹¹³ Describing her privileged relationship with God in language well-pleasing to His representatives on earth,

she ensures that her vicarious authority is endorsed, as it were, from both above and below. Recent research suggests that this careful balancing of orthodox and potentially dangerous ideas is a feature of other late-medieval visionary autobiographies.¹¹⁴

Regarded as an historical document, the *Book* provides some simple conclusions about the history of madness. For example, both Kempe's experience of insanity and that of the madwoman in Chapter 75 indicate that madness involved suffering and anxiety rather than a life of ease. In this regard, the treatment of madness in the *Book* corresponds with that in Hoccleve's *Series*. Although Hoccleve and Kempe would have felt little kinship, there are other, more fundamental similarities between the *Series* and the *Book*. Stephen Medcalf notes that Hoccleve and Kempe, both apparently autobiographers, were also mentally disturbed.¹¹⁵ Indeed, in both the *Series* and the *Book* insanity has an important structural function: as a radical crisis of identity, madness constitutes the inner transformation necessary for the writing of autobiography.

Kempe's bouts of melancholia are isolating and private experiences; her apparent mania, on the other hand, renders her a public spectacle. Her experiences of madness are therefore a source of alienation and self-consciousness. Sarah Beckwith fairly refers to Kempe's 'acute sense of audience', concluding that 'in place of the "harmony of her inner and outer life" which Denise Despres has found in the book, I find rather a disjunction of inner and outer'.¹¹⁶ Like Hoccleve, Kempe seeks to refute public allegations of madness by relating her subjective experiences; as she herself puts it, 'þei knewyn ful lytyl what sche felt' (69). Thus her account of madness, like Hoccleve's, challenges the widespread assumption that medieval authors spoke only with a public voice.

In other ways Kempe's and Hoccleve's experiences diverge significantly. The *Book* illustrates differences between the female and male experiences of madness. Hoccleve's madness is precipitated by a combination of professional and financial anxieties. Kempe's madness, on the other hand, is the product of her

confusion and guilt about her relation to her husband, her uncontrollable sexual urges and the oppressions of various civic and ecclesiastical figures.

Kempe's social rehabilitation, too, is in a sense more ambiguous and difficult than Hoccleve's. Hoccleve's bid for respectability depends upon his eschewing the stigma of insanity and unruliness. Kempe, on the other hand, not only behaves in such a way as to court allegations of insanity, but also presents symptoms of genuine madness. The public reactions to Hoccleve and Kempe after their recoveries also differ markedly. Although Hoccleve's friends think him still mad after his recovery and shun his company, their attitude towards him is essentially sympathetic; Kempe, like many female ecstasies, is widely regarded as possessed by demons. This attitude stems from the widespread clerical view of women's religious activities as interchangeably appealing and dangerous;¹¹⁷ and it explains why Kempe paradoxically complements her insistence on the separateness of madness and divine ecstasy with the much riskier view that madness can be a blessed condition. The very inclusion of such an unorthodox viewpoint attests to the radicalism of the *Book*. But in an age in which religious heterodoxy carried with it the danger of burning at the stake, Kempe treads carefully. Like the Hoccleve of *Jonathas and Fellicula*, she ends her book by invoking the traditional male rhetoric on female unruliness in order to establish herself as a woman of probity.

Notes to Chapter 6

- 1 For a reduced version of this chapter see *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 98.(1997), 53-61.
- 2 These points are addressed by Lynn Staley Johnson in 'The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 820-838 (p.835). Her suggestion that Kempe invented the scribe is consistent with her emphasis on the fictional status of the *Book*.
- 3 The first view is still prevalent among critics. Johnson represents the second, less common, view. She sees the *Book* as entirely fictional, noting that many of its contents are unsubstantiated by historical records. Johnson, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p.173. But as David Lawton points out, there are dangers in approaching Kempe with 'tools more suited to Langland and Chaucer, to a literary canon'. Lawton, 'Voice, Authority, and Blasphemy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992), pp.93-115. John M. Osborn denies the *Book* autobiographical status on the dubious grounds that it was written down by others and resembles a saint's life. Osborn, *The Beginnings of Autobiography in England* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1959), pp.7-8.
- 4 Douglas Gray, 'Popular Religion and Late Medieval English Literature', in *Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages in England*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp.1-28 (p.18).
- 5 As Stephen Medcalf says, there is no reason not to treat 'Margery's consciousness and personality as themselves objects of analysis, apart from her body or the influence of God and other spirits, or to trace her

behaviour to events in her personal life and to subjective roots which she would not recognise'. Medcalf, 'Medieval Psychology', p.127.

- 6 Porter, *The Faber Book of Madness*, p.520.
- 7 All citations refer to *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (London: EETS os 212, 1940).
- 8 Gray, p.12; Janel M. Mueller, 'Autobiograph of a New "Creatur": Female Spirituality, Selfhood, and Authorship in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspective*, ed. by Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp.155-171 (p.164).
- 9 Phyllis R. Freeman, Carly Rees Bogorad and Diane E. Sholomskas, 'Margery Kempe, a new theory: the inadequacy of hysteria and postpartum psychosis as diagnostic categories', *History of Psychiatry*, 1.2.2 (1990), 169-190, (p.173).
- 10 Hunter and Macalpine, pp.796-797.
- 11 Trudi Drucker, 'The Malaise of Margery Kempe', *New York State Journal of Medicine*, 72 (1972), 2911-2917 (p.2911).
- 12 Hunter and Macalpine, p.796.
- 13 Ripa, p.53.
- 14 Sarah Beckwith, 'Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism: Language, Agency, and Authority in the *Book of Margery Kempe*', *Exemplaria*, 4.1 (1992), 171-199 (p.177).
- 15 Compare, for example, p.2. The confessor is again mentioned in these terms on p.44 and p.247. Kempe's repetitions of such phrases deserve closer critical inspection than they often receive. Incidentally, the phrase 'his repreuing' evidently refers to Kempe's confessor and not, as Roy Porter understands it, to Satan. See Porter, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1987), p.103.

- 16 Julia Long says that 'if, according to Freud, "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences", the guilt that Kempe is carrying, and vainly trying to repress, is a key factor in her ensuing madness'. 'Mysticism and hysteria: the histories of Margery Kempe and Anna O.', in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and all her sect*, ed. by Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London: Routledge, 1994), 88-111 (p.92).
- 17 *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, ed. by Thomas Wright, rev edn (London: EETS os 33, 1906), pp.12-13.
- 18 Quoted in Morris, p.71.
- 19 Despres, p.74; see also p.85.
- 20 *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p.412.
- 21 Ellen Ross, '"She Wept and Cried Right Loud for Sorrow and for Pain": Suffering, the Spiritual Journey, and Women's Experience in Late Medieval Mysticism', in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. by Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp.45-59 (p.52).
- 22 Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romances* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p.196.
- 23 Phyllis Hope Weissman, 'Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: *Hysterico Compassio* in the Late Middle Ages', in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in its Contexts, 700-1600: essays in Medieval and Renaissance literature in honour of E. Talbot Donaldson*, ed. by Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim, 1982), pp.201-217 (p.206).
- 24 Aers, *Community, Gender*, p.84. Susan Dickman makes a similar point with respect to Kempe's aloofness from the sacrament of the Eucharist. 'In Margery Kempe', says Dickman, 'we see female mysticism moving out of its traditional Eucharistic context and, therefore, *potentially* away from clerical control'. Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England:*

- Papers read at Dartington Hall, July 1984*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1984), 150-168 (p.165). Kempe was certainly no Lollard, having 'a deep faith and trust in the established sacraments, the efficacy and realness of which most of Wycliffe's actual adherents denied'. William Provost, 'The English Religious Enthusiast: Margery Kempe', in *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. by K.M. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), pp.297-319 (p.302 note 7).
- 25 Medcalf, *The Later Middle Ages*, p.117.
- 26 Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.220.
- 27 Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.61.
- 28 Charlotte Garrett, 'The Soul Journey of Margery Kempe: Hysteria, Vision and Record', in *Sovereign Lady: Essays on Women in Middle English Literature*, ed. by M. Whitaker (New York: Garland, 1995), pp.157-170 (p.157). Given the prevalence of religious mania in his own day, Freud himself would have had no difficulty in understanding Kempe's experience, including her demonic auditory hallucinations; he would simply have interpreted it in his own terms. As Freud makes clear in his 1893 article on the French neurologist Charcot, those held to be possessed in the Middle Ages were in reality suffering from hysteria. 'It would only have been a matter', says Freud confidently, 'of exchanging the religious terminology of that dark and superstitious age for the scientific language of to-day'. Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-), III, p.20. Charcot himself often made the same observation.
- 29 Quoted in Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.215.
- 30 E. Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: Treatise on Insanity*, trans. by E.K. Hunt (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), pp.139-140.
- 31 *Sir Orfeo*, 78-82.

- 32 *Valentine and Orson*, pp.231-232.
- 33 Aers, *Community, Gender*, p.85.
- 34 As Lynn Staley (p.88) points out, the birth of a first child, in the Middle Ages as today, constitutes a *rite de passage*.
- 35 Felman, 'Women and Madness', p.2. Felman is summarising the argument of Phyllis Chesler.
- 36 Long, pp.93-94.
- 37 Quoted in Hunter and Macalpine, p.340.
- 38 J.C. Bucknill and Daniel Hack Tuke, *A Manual of Psychological Medicine* (London: John Churchill, 1858), pp.238-239.
- 39 It is therefore ironic that Hunter and Macalpine (p.338) should regard Woodward's case notes as groundbreaking in the field of clinical description.
- 40 Jean Starobinski, 'The Style of Autobiography', in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. by S. Chatham (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.289-290.
- 41 Of course, as Karl Weintraub reminds us, 'the conditions in which Augustine came to an understanding of his own experience were radically different from those faced by medieval autobiographers'. Weintraub, p.49.
- 42 The author of *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry* (p.67) warns his daughters that 'it is synne to haue so mani diuerse clothes, and to do so moche coste to pare the foule body to haue the lokes and plesaunce of the worlde, the whiche, as it ys aforesaid, causithe to fall into pride and into lechery'. For a patristic attack on female finery see Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, ed. by Giuseppe Marra (Turin: in aedibus Io. Bapt. Paraviae, 1930), II, 3, 1ff. For denunciations in medieval sermons see Owst, pp.390-404. For other relevant comments see DuBoulay, pp.14-15 and p.67.

- 43 Compare Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p.177. On the emotional nature of late-medieval depictions of the crucifixion see D.W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p.217. In this period, too, the pietà emerges as a popular form of religious portrayal.
- 44 Quoted in Gray, p.20.
- 45 As Kempe's 'rationalist' contemporary Reginald Pecock states, 'wommen reulen hem silf [...] in alle her gouernaunces aftir hir affeccoun and not aftir resoun'. (London: Rolls Series; *Rerum britannicarum medii aevi scriptores*, 1860-61), p.67.
- 46 Mainly women were seduced by devils according to the *Malleus Malificarium*. See Alison Weber, 'Saint Teresa, Demonologist' in *Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain*, ed. by Anna J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp.171-195 (pp.172-173). See also Laharie, p.36.
- 47 Beckwith, 'Problems of Authority', p.189.
- 48 John C. Hirsch, 'Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Medium Aevum*, 44 (1975), 145-150 (pp.149-150).
- 49 Zilboorg, p.107. Zilboorg's account is drawn from Antoine Gauthier's *Histoire du somnambulisme chez tous les peuples...* (Paris: F. Malteste, 1842), p.119.
- 50 David Knowles, *The English Mystics* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1927), p.26.
- 51 William B. Ober, 'Margery Kempe: Hysteria and Mysticism Reconciled', *Literature and Medicine*, 4 (1985), 24-40 (p.37).
- 52 Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p.36.

- 53 Walter Hilton, *On Angels's Song*, in *Yorkshire Writers*, ed. by Carl Horstmann (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895), I part 2, p.182.
- 54 Knox, p.36.
- 55 Rolle, p.18.
- 56 Capgrave, p.120.
- 57 Timea Szell, 'From Woe to Weal and Weal to Woe: Notes on the Structure of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992), pp.73-91 (p.74).
- 58 Carolly Erikson, *The Medieval Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.30.
- 59 Donald R. Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.35.
- 60 Langland, p.165 note 105.
- 61 Screech, 'Good Madness', p.25. Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p.19; on the same point compare Porter, *A Social History of Madness*, p.14.
- 62 Roland Maisonneuve, 'Margery Kempe and the Eastern and Western Tradition of the "Perfect Fool"', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at the Exeter Symposium, July 1982*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1982), pp.1-17.
- 63 Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech (London: EETS os 212, 1940), p.286.
- 64 Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p.158.
- 65 Screech, 'Good Madness', p.32.
- 66 Screech, 'Good Madness', p.26.
- 67 In the fifteenth-century *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* Christ is clothed in white, 'ffor that was signe of gret despit'. Ed. by Charlotte D'Evelyn (London: EETS os 158, 1921), p.37.
- 68 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, pp.228-229.

- 69 Knox, p.35. For Albert's view see Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.32 note 47.
- 70 In many respects, of course, Kempe challenges the teachings of the Church Fathers. Christ's reassurance to Kempe that he loves wives as much as maidens, for example, is 'a radical one, for it overturns the accepted tradition usually identified with Paul and Jerome by rendering God's love non-hierarchical, and all women, as recipients of his love, equal'. Karma Lochrie 'The Book of Margery Kempe: The marginal woman's quest for literary authority', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 16 (1986), 33-55. p.48.
- 71 Paul of Aegina, I, p.383. For Alexander of Tralles's view see *Oeuvres médicales d'Alexandre de Tralles*, ed. by F. Brunet, 4 vols (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1851-76), II, pp.223-224.
- 72 Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p.19.
- 73 For a discussion of the language of *probatio* in a late-medieval English text see Kathryn Kerby-Fulton '"Who Has Written This Book?": Visionary Autobiography in Langland's C Text', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers read at Dartington hall, July 1992*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp.101-116.
- 74 Screech 'Good Madness', p.25.
- 75 *An Alphabet of Tales*, ed. by Mary MacLeod Banks (London: EETS os 126, 127, 1904-05), p.446.
- 76 Quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp.162-163.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Neaman, *The Distracted Knight*, p.43.
- 79 Carl Horstmann, 'Prosalegenden: die Legenden des ms. Douce 114', *Anglia*, 8 (1885), 102-196 (p.121).

- 80 For a discussion of this episode see Screech, 'Good Madness', p.34.
- 81 Horstmann, pp.108-109.
- 82 *An Alphabet of Tales*, pp.223-224.
- 83 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longman, 1902), p.387.
- 84 *Christ's Body*, p.91. For a discussion of interiority in medieval English mysticism see Andrew Louth, 'Platonism in the Middle English Mystics', in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. by Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.52-64 (p.55).
- 85 Drucker, p.2913.
- 86 These include 'an extreme and sometimes catastrophic lability of mood, so that a patient may swing from normal cheerfulness to suicidal depression in the space of an hour' and 'a shallow, sentimental and sometimes sanctimonious attitude which convicts the patient (perhaps unfairly) of insincerity with those around him'. H. Merskey and W. Lawton Tong, *Psychiatric Illness* (London: Baillière Tindall, 1974), pp.89-90.
- 87 Clarke, p.85.
- 88 Eluned Bremner, 'Margery Kempe and the Critics: Disempowerment and Deconstruction', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992), pp.117-135 (p.130).
- 89 Drucker, p.2914.
- 90 See for example pp.2 and 137.
- 91 Freeman, Bogorad and Sholomskas, p.173. Trudi Drucker, for example, discusses Kempe's condition after childbirth alongside the cryings which occur only later in the *Book*. Drucker, *passim*.
- 92 Medcalf, *The Later Middle Ages*, p.114.
- 93 Freeman, Bogorad and Sholomskas, p.173.
- 94 'Rationality and historical sympathy', says Partner, 'would be best served if scholars now could refrain from using the word hysteria, in the vulgar,

popular sense of hyperexcitability, irrational carrying on about nothing, weakmindedness, simple sexual deprivation, or a general tendency to fly out of control'. Partner, pp.62-63.

- 95 Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (London: Longman, 1993), p.274.
- 96 Freeman, Bogorad and Sholomskas, p.170.
- 97 Freeman, Bogorad and Sholomskas, p.185.
- 98 David Aers explains that 'as much as for the aristocracy or rural gentry the maintainance of oligarchic identity in towns depended on maintaining social and class differentiations expressed through display'. Aers, *Community, Gender*, p.76. Compare Partner, p.40. For conventional denunciations of such attire see note 43.
- 99 For a nineteenth-century example see Ripa, p.100. James Joyce's daughter Lucia showed similar symptoms during her schizophrenia.
- 100 See for example Despres, p.85.
- 101 Staley, p.4.
- 102 Aers, *Community, Gender*, p.86.
- 103 Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.11. The italics are Foucault's.
- 104 The purgatorial aspect of the madman's liminal position is noted by Laharie, p.254.
- 105 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp.231-270.
- 106 *Dives and Pauper*, II, p.3.
- 107 *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Rossell Hope Robbins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p.328. Stephen Knight argues that the popularity of such lyrics reflects widespread anxiety about female autonomy. See 'Why was *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight* the Most Popular Ballad in Europe?', in *Medieval English Poetry*, ed. by Stephanie Trigg (London: Longman, 1993), 272-288.

- 108 MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p.127.
- 109 Ripa, p.122.
- 110 Diego Pérez de Valdivia, *Adviso de gente recogida*. Quoted and trans. in Alison Weber, 'Between ecstasy and exorcism: religious negotiation in sixteenth-century Spain', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 23 (1993), 221-234 (p.229).
- 111 For spinning as a typically female occupation see Tilde Sankovitch, 'Inventing Authority of Origin: The Difficult Enterprise', in *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp.227-243 (pp.237-241). On the opposition between traditional women's work and mysticism see Weber, 'Saint Teresa', p.178.
- 112 Staley, p.193.
- 113 The phrase 'either-or thinking' is Janel Mueller's (p.161).
- 114 In her brilliant discussion of *Piers Plowman* in relation to visionary texts including Alphonse's *Epistola Solitarii ad Reges*, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (p.115) writes that 'like Langland, Alphonse struggles to find a balance between a heartfelt belief that God will choose unlikely vessels as his prophets, and the need to show orthodoxy and discretion (*discretio*). In the chapters that follow, Alphonse does all he can to dissociate the true visionary from the lunatic, while preserving the dignity of the *idiota* -- not an easy task, and one which Langland began to handle with discretion only in the C Text'.
- 115 Medcalf, *The Later Middle Ages*, p.128.
- 116 Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p.91.
- 117 For the ambiguous position of the medieval clergy towards women's religious activities see Laurie A. Finke, 'Mystical Bodies and the Dialogic of Vision', in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Late*

Medieval Women Mystics, ed. by Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp.45-59.

Conclusions

Despite the dangers of generalizing about madness, we can draw a number of broad conclusions about the significance of madness in the Middle Ages and the function of insanity in the medieval texts discussed here. Some of these conclusions belong to the domains of psychiatric or cultural history, others to literary criticism. Since we have so far not endeavoured to separate purely literary considerations (whatever that phrase might mean) from other concerns, there is no need to do so now. In any case, it is seldom either possible or necessary to decide when a theory is illuminating a text or vice versa.

In the Introduction it was suggested that rather than interpret texts in the light of a pre-established theory, we must be critically flexible, taking account of the different ways in which medieval writers adapted the available concepts of madness to their artistic design and vision. It was also suggested that the lack of critical consensus about the definition of madness has been a considerable, but hitherto unacknowledged obstacle to discovering its significance. In particular, the tendency of critics to conflate the concepts of madness and folly has led to alarmingly widespread disagreement about the meaning of madness. In the Middle Ages, it was suggested, madness was not synonymous with folly; on the contrary, legal, theological, and literary works distinguished madness from folly in all of its forms. Although frequently associated with folly of various kinds, 'madness' or 'woodness' usually referred to mania or melancholia. Finally, madness, contrary to a vast body of literary critical opinion, was not generally considered a blessed condition.

Even working with a relatively clear definition of madness, the significance of madness in medieval literature and society is less one-sided than certain psychiatric historians and literary critics have implied. Perceptions of madness and madmen depended on a writer's social position. Theologians stressed the causal

connection between insanity and spiritual turpitude. Medical writers, however, generally regarded madness as an organic affliction to be treated by rational methods. Moreover, as Hoccleve's *Complaint* suggests, the theory of demonic possession was not credited by all elements of medieval society.

The few texts examined here exhibit a striking diversity of attitudes towards madness. Sometimes madness is used as a metaphor for sinfulness or social disintegration; at other times it is interpreted as an occasion for sympathy, or even, in exceptional circumstances, as a sign of sanctity. Many literary texts contain a number of conflicting views of madness. Medieval authors clearly saw madness as a relatively fluid concept which could be used to achieve various, often contradictory effects. The language of madness can be used either to articulate condemnation of the politically or socially unorthodox or to register dissent from social or political norms. Indeed, the subversive potential of madness lies in its protean nature, its capability of bearing different meanings in different circumstances.

The powerful association of madness and sin ensured that insanity functioned, in didactic contexts at least, as a metaphor for sin and its punishment. Madness has this significance in all of the works examined here. As the medieval chivalric romances demonstrate, however, madness and allegations of madness can have secular, as well as Christian meanings. As well as evoking a Golden Age of chivalry, Malory's works present madness as the outcome of a struggle for a degree of autonomy within a competitive and repressive society. At this level, Malory, quite as much as Margery Kempe, presents madness in a recognisably fifteenth-century social context. In fact, many of the texts we have examined undermine the view that madness had no social or political significance until after the Middle Ages.

Some romances, especially clerical adaptations like *Sir Gowther* or the *Tale of Beryn*, emphasize the sinfulness of madness. Gowther, Robert of Sicily and Beryn -- like Margery Kempe -- all progress from unholy to holy folly via a period

of penitential madness. In these romances madness is clearly viewed as an undesirable and often sinful state. Other romances draw on the increasingly positive view of the Wild Man and therefore reflect a more tolerant, even reverential attitude towards the mad hero. Malory's works, for example, view the mad knights as bestial but well-natured and present madness as an extreme symptom of social alienation from a culture which leaves little room for autonomous self-expression.

The latter point is vividly contextualized in the works of Chaucer and Gower. Both writers reflect, in their different ways, the language of madness in which the representatives of official culture stigmatized the peasantry at the time of the Peasants' Revolt. In the dream in Book I of the *Vox*, madness is imputed collectively to the unrulable peasantry and is seen as the consequence of their violation of the divinely-ordained social order. In this way, opposition to authority is rescripted as insanity. The peasant disorder necessitates the dreamer's pathetic life of exile and madness. Thus Book I describes both the contemptible frenzy that leads to the breaking of social bonds and the pitiable mental distraction of others that follows. In this sense, the *Vox* affirms Malory's view of madness as an implicit rejection of civilized values. Gower's view of human nature, however, is more pessimistic and more typically medieval than Malory's. For Gower insanity is linked to the dominant concerns of the late Middle Ages, Original Sin and the Last Judgement. The *Vox* is a lament for mankind as it degenerates to the level of beasts through the sinful madness of the peasantry.

In the *Miller's* and *Summoner's* tales Chaucer is also concerned with the relation between madness and social class. Whereas the *Vox* is characterized by a terrible sincerity, however, these tales are essentially parodic or satirical. Peasant madness is again described and defined by the distinctly clerical discourse of reason. Chaucer, however, deconstructs Gower's ideological opposition of madness and reason. In the *Miller's Tale* the allegations of madness against the carpenter, however deserved, are undermined by a variety of formal techniques

which cast doubt upon traditional clerical interpretations of madness and reveal the constructedness of insanity. By inviting us to compare one dubious allegation of madness with another, the text solicits suspicion about the language of madness and the social groups that make use of it. Similar 'undercutting' techniques are at work in the *Summoner's Tale*, in which the imputations of peasant madness are deflected by Jankyn's foolish, satirical but essentially conservative scientific demonstration. The tale nevertheless has radical implications. Jankyn's solution to the problem of the fart is couched in scholarly terminology which recalls the unpleasant class antagonism of the *Miller's Tale*.

Predictably, Chaucer's fabliaux present their mad protagonists as objects or comic spectacles. Other works of literature, however, emphasize a different side of insanity. In the major works of Hoccleve, madness does not function simply, or even mainly, as a spectacular moral emblem. Indeed, if discovering the significance of madness in the romances involves looking beyond the moral surface of the texts, the case of Hoccleve suggests the dangers of privileging 'deep' Christian interpretations of texts at the expense of 'surface' meanings. The *Series*, it has been seen, concerns the social as well as the moral meaning of madness. Hoccleve rejects common wisdom about madness, suggesting that insanity is subjective, secret and hidden. This contradicts a basic assumption of psychiatric history which would never have attained such currency if translations of Hoccleve's works, like Margery Kempe's, were more easily available to historians of psychiatry.

Hoccleve's writings about madness, like the medieval romances, attest to a growing interest in expressions of individual experience. For Hoccleve, as for the knights of the romances, recovery from madness involves feelings of deep shame and self-consciousness. Furthermore, five centuries before Freud, madness is perceived by a medieval author as the 'enemy within'. Indeed, Hoccleve's *Series*, Kempe's *Book* and the medieval romances all point to the close association of madness and subjectivity or self-consciousness. In the works of Hoccleve and

Kempe, madness constitutes, among other things, the radical crisis of identity which is the prerequisite of autobiographical writing.

Like the *Series*, *The Book of Margery Kempe* suggests the one-sidedness of many modern assumptions about madness. One of the most widespread of these is that madness and religious devotion went hand in hand. Kempe generally upholds the orthodox opinion that insanity and divine ecstasy are essentially incompatible; like the moralizing Hoccleve of the end of the *Series*, she frequently distances herself from the mad or riotous behaviour of others in order to validate her own unusual conduct.

Nevertheless, the *Book*, rather like Hoccleve's *Series*, presents another, more positive attitude towards madness. It is perhaps because Kempe herself exhibits symptoms of what many of her contemporaries regard as madness that the madwoman whom she brings to health in Chapter 75 displays the signs of divine inspiration. Even the insane, Kempe implies, can be blessed. Thus, while describing the madwoman's cure as a triumph of male 'governance' over female 'unruliness', Kempe implies that a woman, in all her madness, may perceive and interact with an order higher than that supervised by men. Like Hoccleve, Kempe overturns orthodox ideas about madness to gain credibility in her own right. Both authors write about madness not simply because it is a convenient metaphor for sinfulness, but because by doing so they are able to express and eventually overcome their sense of social alienation. In this sense, Kempe's *Book*, of all the texts considered here, constitutes the most detailed illustration of madness as an individual response to the often oppressive ideologies of late medieval society.

Whatever conclusions about madness we have arrived at, and however much a full understanding of madness in literature depends on an appreciation of historical context, it is hoped that this discussion has contributed to the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of some of the works discussed. The discussion of madness in Chaucer's tales, for example, increases critical understanding of their well-known formal complexity. Similarly, the analysis of

representations of madness in *The Book of Margery Kempe* reveals Kempe's too rarely acknowledged literary virtuosity.

This dissertation also raises a more general point about late-medieval literary aesthetics. All of the works discussed here manipulate a variety of often incompatible attitudes towards madness. The consideration of such textual contradictions is no doubt encouraged by recent trends in critical theory; but it is also sanctioned by the inherently inclusive nature of many late-medieval texts, by what might be called a Gothic tendency to juxtapose apparently incongruent ideas. The critic's task is not necessarily to discern the aesthetic consistency of medieval texts, but to draw out and account for the multiple perspectives they contain.

Perhaps the chief theoretical conclusion of this dissertation, however, is that the common deterministic approach to the history of madness, tacitly endorsed by scholars as diverse as Michel Foucault and Penelope Doob, is less valuable than one which takes account of the interactions between subjects and history. On the one hand, the language of madness is used to articulate and consolidate political and moral authority; but representations of madness may also be used by individuals to question or subvert orthodox values. After so long a period of resistance, it is necessary for historians and literary critics to take account of the individual voices, as well as the official pronouncements, of the Middle Ages.

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