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Madness and Gender in Late-Medieval English Literature

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Laura Jose "Madness and Gender in Late-Medieval Literature"

This thesis discusses presentations of madness in medieval literature, and the ways in which these presentations are affected by (and effect) ideas of gender. It includes a discussion of madness as it is commonly presented in classical literature and medical texts, as well as an examination of demonic possession (which shares many of the same characteristics of madness) in medieval exempla. These chapters are followed by a detailed look at the uses of madness in Malory's <u>Morte Darthur</u>, Gower's <u>Confessio Amantis</u>, and in two autobiographical accounts of madness, the <u>Book of Margery Kempe</u> and Hoccleve's <u>Series</u>.

The experience of madness can both subvert and reinforce gender roles. Madness is commonly seen as an invasion of the self, which, in a culture which commonly identifies masculinity with bodily intactness, can prove problematic for male sufferers. Equally, madness, in prompting violent, ungoverned behaviour, can undermine traditional definitions of femininity. These rules can, however, be reversed. Malory's <u>Morte Darthur</u> presents a version of masculinity which is actually enhanced by madness; equally divergent is Margery Kempe's largely positive account of madness as a catalyst for personal transformation. While there is a certain consistency in the literary treatment of madness – motifs and images are repeated across genres – the way in which these images are used can alter radically. There is no single model of madness in medieval literature: rather, it is always fluid. Madness, like gender, remains open to interpretation.

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PhD Thesis

Durham University, Department of English Studies

2010

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Madness has been long misrepresented in medieval studies. Assertions that conceptions

of mental illness were unknown to medieval people, or that all madmen were assumed to

be possessed by the devil, were at one time common in accounts of medieval society.[1]

Michel Foucault's Madness and Civilisation (1965) propagated the erroneous idea that

mad people 'led an easy wandering existence' in the medieval countryside.[2] In fact, as

many fine recent studies have shown, a medieval person suffering from madness would

almost certainly have been looked after in the home.[3] As Wendy Turner comments, 'the

English did not demand nor ask that an insane person leave his or her community, and

were quick to reclaim an individual if he or she wandered off.'[4] Those thought to be

dangerous would in fact have been closely confined, in order to protect themselves or

others. Hospitals catering specifically to the insane, such as the infamous Bedlam, were,

during the period my thesis covers (c. 1300-1500), almost non-existent. Although

Bethlem Hospital (as Bedlam was officially known) was founded in 1247, it catered for a

variety of sufferers, not just the insane. It was not until the fifteenth century that it

became known primarily as a hospital for the mad.[5]

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[1] In fact, demonic possession, while accepted as a genuine condition, was an entirely separate affair from madness. While, as we will see, there was some overlap of symptoms, both cause and cure were entirely different.

[2] Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock, 1965) 7.

[3] See for example Wendy Turner, "Afflicted with Insanity": The Care and Custody of the Feeble-Minded in Late Medieval England, Diss., U of California, 2000 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2001).

[4] Turner 31.

[5] Jonathan Andrews, Asa Briggs, Roy Porter, Penny Tucker, and Keir Waddington, The History of Bethlem (London: Routledge, 1997) 81.

My thesis is, however, not concerned with the lived experience of madness during the Middle Ages, which has already been examined in detail by Wendy Turner, among others. Rather, I am concerned with the way in which madness is represented textually, and by the ways in which these representations are affected by, and affect in turn, conceptions of gender. I do not intend to evaluate madness in terms of modern diagnostic criteria, or to make decisions about the autobiographical status or otherwise of first person accounts such as those of Hoccleve or Margery Kempe. My criteria for determining what is or is not madness are modelled entirely on the criteria of the texts I examine. Given that they are the basis of my thesis, then, it seems logical to begin by examining the definitions of madness as accepted in the Middle Ages.

Medical Definitions of Madness

Medieval medicine is largely rooted in classical Greek medical theory, which is itself centred on the concept of the humours. In classical thought, the body is composed of four humours: phlegm, black bile, yellow bile and blood. Each humour possesses certain qualities, which in turn are predominant at different times of the year: black bile, for example, a cold and dry humour, predominates in autumn. The four humours, in turn, correspond to the four seasons, the four ages of man, and, most importantly, the four elements. The four elements – air, water, fire and earth – are the building blocks of the universe: everything is composed of a combination of elements. The body is a microcosm of the world itself. And, just as the world is composed of elements in perfect balance, so the body relies upon a balance of humours in order to remain in health.

Diseases are then, to some extent, thought of as being a product of the body itself. While the concept of infection was known to the Middle Ages (the Black Death, especially, prompted theories of transmission ranging from corruption through air to infection through the eyes), it was thought that only those whose unbalanced bodies laid them open to infection would contract disease. As Stanley Jackson notes, 'diseases were rooted in the general nature of man.'[6] The humoural balance within the body, once upset, produces illness. The composition of humours in the body determines its overall temperament: the hot and wet body, dominated by blood, produces a sanguine temperament; the cold and wet body dominated by phlegm, phlegmatic; hot and dry dominated by red or yellow bile, choleric; and cold and dry dominated by black bile, melancholic.[7] A melancholic body, then, is already predisposed to suffer from an excess of black bile, and thus vulnerable to melancholia.

The humoural theory, stemming from Hippocratic times, was developed and added to throughout the classical and medieval periods. Galen, in particular, developed the pneumatic theory, which shared popularity with the theory of the humours in medieval medical thought. Roy Porter describes the pneumatic theory as being

> built on the Platonic doctrine of a threefold division of the soul, which distinguished vital functions into processes governed by vegetative, animal and rational 'souls' or 'spirits'. Animal life was possible only because of the existence of pneuma. Within the human body, pneuma (air), the life breath of the cosmos, was modified by the three principal organs, the liver, heart and brain, and distributed by three types of vessels: veins, arteries, and nerves. Pneuma,

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[6] Stanley W. Jackson, <u>Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times</u> (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986) 14.

[7] J. A. Tasioulas, "Science," <u>Chaucer: An Oxford Guide</u>, ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 174-89, at 182.

> modified by the liver, became the nutritive soul or natural spirits which supported the vegetative functions of growth and nutrition; this nutritive soul was distributed by the veins. The heart and arteries were responsible for the maintenance and distribution of innate heat and pneuma or vital spirits to vivify the parts of the body. The third alteration, occurring in the brain, ennobled vital spirits into animal spirits, distributed through the nerves (which Galen thought of as empty ducts) to sustain sensation and movement.[8]

The brain, then, is key to the proper functioning of the body. The brain itself is, in general, thought of as being composed of three chambers.[9] Each chamber performs a different function: 'In þe formest celle and wombe is ymaginacioun conformed and imaad; in þe middle, resoun; in þe hindemest, recordacioun and mynde.'[10] Problems with different ventricles, then, can have different effects.

This emphasis on humoural theory means that the body was conceived of as largely composed of fluids. In the words of Rebecca Flemming, 'the organs were, with a few notable exceptions, generic structures of containment for the humours and *pneumata* which did most of the physiological work.'[11] Concomitantly, 'while the anatomical architecture is secure and static, the fluid and gaseous constituents of the body make it a fundamentally dynamic and unstable entity, subject to considerable amendment from a range of causes.'[12] In dealing with such instability, the most one can hope for is to achieve a balance of opposing forces. Changes in diet or environment can unbalance the humours and so cause disease. Health is precarious.

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[8] Roy Porter, The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present, 1997 (London: Fontana-Harper, 1999) 77.

[9] This can vary: Albertus Magnus, for example, considers the brain to have four ventricles. See Owesei Temkin, The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology, rev. 2nd ed., 1945 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994) 100.

[10] John Trevisa, On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum, ed. M. C. Seymour et. al., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975-88) 1:173.

[11] Rebecca Flemming, Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 95-96.

[12] Flemming 95.

Medieval medicine is distinctly gendered. In describing the pathological body, medical

texts by default also map out a normative body. This body is male. Medieval medical

texts are written by men and about men. Madness, too, is suffered almost entirely by

men; female cases are rarely found in any medieval literature, and in medical texts are

almost non-existent. Women's bodies only enter the text within the context of

discussions of sex and reproduction. The female body as represented by medical authors

is, in most cases, reduced to the generative organs: the uterus and vagina.

When the female body *is* mentioned, it, like the female character in general, is known by

its difference from (read: inferiority to) the male body. 'Man occupies the absolute

position from which, at times, woman diverges, and on which she is completely

dependent, for the female sex is not explicable in its own right, but only in relation to the

male.'[13] John Trevisa, in his late-fourteenth-century translation of Bartholomaeus

Anglicus's encyclopaedic work De proprietatibus rerum, elaborates:

> The male passiþ þe femel in parfite complexion and wirkyng, in wiþ and
> discrecioun, in miȝt and in lordschippe: in parfit complexioun for in comparisoun
> to þe femel þe male is hoot and drie, and þe femel aȝenward. In the male beþ
> vertues formal and of schapinge and werchinge, and in þe femel material,
> suffringe, and passiue.[14]

As we can see, this difference is generally constructed on Aristotelian principles: the

male is active, and associated with form; the female is passive, and associated with

matter. These polarities are especially evident in the Aristotelian theory of conception, in

which the sperm, the 'formal cause' of conception, shapes the passive matter (the

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[13] Flemming 228.
[14] Trevisa 1:306.

'material cause') provided by the female. The seeds of new life are contained entirely in the sperm; the woman merely provides the matter, menstrual blood, to be fertilized, and houses the resulting foetus until birth.[15]

As Joan Cadden notes, however, this theory co-exists with a contradictory belief, stemming from the writings of Galen, that both male and female sperm are needed for conception. The existence of an alternative theory of conception, however, does not seriously challenge the association of women with matter.[16] Indeed, Aristotelian gender categories impact directly on medieval notions of physiology. The male body, being superior, is hot, while the female body is cold. And, while the male body is comparatively dry and stable, with strictly defined boundaries, the female body is characterized by a superfluity of fluids, an abundance of menstruation, milk and lochial fluid that cannot be fully contained within the body.[17] Given these differences, then, male and female bodies should be impossible to confuse. In fact, as Thomas Laqueur has elaborated, in pre-modern medicine male and female bodies exist as different points on a continuum, with the disturbing possibility of slippage between the two.[18] Such theories, in justifying a hierarchy in which the male is innately superior to the female, provide

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[15] Menstrual blood, conceived of as matter without form, is regarded with some disgust in the Middle Ages: a subject I shall explore in the second chapter.

[16] Joan Cadden, Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture, Cambridge Hist. of Medicine, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), especially 119-30.

[17] See Ann Ellis Hanson, "The Medical Writers' Woman," Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990) 309-38, at 317.

[18] Laqueur argues that male and female bodies, in pre-modern thought, differ mainly in the positioning of the genitals. Pre-modern writers saw the female genitals as an inverted version of the male genitals; inverted, because the female body was too cold to produce perfect, external genitals. See Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990) 4-5.

ample scope for expansion. It is naturally assumed that the male should be more rational than the female.

Madness, like other diseases, is thought of as being caused by physical changes in the body. These changes are usually produced by a movement of fluids, affecting the brain. The type of fluid, and the means by which the brain is affected, determines the type of madness. This generally falls into one of four categories: mania, melancholy, phrenitis, and epilepsy. Each type of madness is characterised largely by its symptoms. Signs of madness are various: some can be read from the body, but some must be attested by the person experiencing them. Thomas Elyot, in his sixteenth-century book The Castel of Helthe, lists these signs as:

> heuynesse of mynde, or feare without cause, slepynesse in the members, many crampes without replacions or emtynesse, sodayn fury, sodayn incontinencie of the tongue, moche solicitude of lyght thynges, with palenesse of the vysage, and fearefull dreames of terrible vysyons, dreamynge of darkenes, depe pyttes, or deathe of frendes or acqueyntance, and of all thinge that is blacke.[19]

Phrenitis is an episode of madness concurrent with fever, usually caused by an imbalance of yellow bile.[20] It is a temporary madness, disappearing along with the fever. Epilepsy, more or less the disease we recognise today, 'was held to arise from an occlusion of the ventricles or passages of the brain by phlegm or, more rarely, black bile or blood.'[21] The epileptic seizure was so dramatic, however, that epilepsy was held as a disease 'laden

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[19] Thomas Elyot, The Castel of Helthe (1541): With Title-Page and Preface of 1539 Ed. (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1937) fol. 73.
[20] Simon Kemp, Medieval Psychology, Contributions in Psychology 14 (New York: Greenwood, 1990) 119.
[21] Kemp 119.

with meaning... that transcended the merely medical.'[22] It was known to the Hippocratics as 'the sacred disease,' and this aura of otherness persisted into Christian thought, where epileptic fits were often seen as a sign of possession.

The two types of madness with which I am most concerned are melancholy and frenzy (roughly, depression and psychosis, in today's terms). Melancholy, characterised by fear and depression, is caused by an excess of black bile, otherwise known as the melancholic humour. Mania, which Galen believes to be caused by yellow bile, is sometimes conflated with melancholy. [23] However, Stanley Jackson draws a distinction between them: 'mania was predominantly a matter of excited states, delusions, wild behaviour, grandiosity, and related affects; and melancholia was primarily dejected states, delusions, subdued behaviour, insomnia, discouragement, and fear.'[24] He admits, however, that manic symptoms were occasionally noted in cases of melancholy, and vice versa. In fact, all medical categories are somewhat fluid; there is overlap between categories and differing opinions on what causes and symptoms fit which category.

Melancholy is primarily characterised by fear and depression. Trevisa notes that 'First þe colour of þe skyn chaungiþ into þe blake or into bloo colour; sour sauour and sharp and erþey is ifeled in þe mouþ by þe qualite of the humour; *þe pacient is faynt and ferdful in herte withoute cause* [my italics].'[25] Frenzy is a different matter. Trevisa comments that

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[22] Ottavia Niccoli, "'Menstruum Quasi Monstruum': Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century," trans. Mary M. Gallucci, <u>Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective</u>, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Margaret A. Gallucci et. al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP,1990) 1-25, at 10.
[23] Kemp 118.
[24] Jackson 252.
[25] Trevisa 1:161.

þese ben þe signes of frenesye: discoloured vrine duringe þe feuere, wiþ woodnes and contynual wakinge, meuynge and castinge aboute þe i3en, raginge, strecchinge and castinge of hondes, meuynge and wagynge of hede, grisbaitinge [grinding] and knockinge togedres of teeþ. Alwey he wole arise of his bedde; now he singeþ, now he lau3heth, now he wepiþ, and bitiþ gladliche and rendiþ his wardeyne and his leche; selde he is stille, but he crieþ moche. þis haþ most perilous sekenes, but he knowiþ not þat he is seke.'[26]

Frenzy, then, is a far more active illness than melancholy, characterised by uncontrolled movement and emotion. They can be distinguished by the area of brain affected: 'in *mania* principalich þe ymaginacioun is ihurt and in þe oþir [melancholy] resoun is ihirt'[27]

Lovesickness, or *amor hereos*, is considered another form of madness. Lovesickness is diagnosed as excessive desire for a man or (more usually) woman, which, if not fulfilled, sends the sufferer into a sometimes fatal decline. Cadden explains further:

A man (women are seldom thus afflicted in the medical literature) encounters a beautiful form that he perceives to be a potential source of pleasure. *The greater he judges (with his estimative faculty) the potential pleasure to be, the greater will be his desire to obtain this object.* At the same time, the build up of seminal superfluities may encourage this impulse. The desire impresses the image of the object on the imagination and the memory and gives rise to a violent appetite to satisfy the desire by obtaining the object. The condition is dangerous, for the violent appetite and the hope and care associated with it can result in a fury or madness. The situation may be exacerbated by the drying of the brain by passing spirits, which in turn makes the imagination more susceptible to the strong imprinting of the image and to melancholy, a dry, cold state, which in turn can lead to a fatal wasting.[28]

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[26] Trevisa 1:348-49. Interestingly, these are the very symptoms which are attributed to Thomas Hoccleve in his autobiographical <u>Complaint</u>, suggesting that medical definitions of madness are well-known amongst a wider population.

[27] Trevisa 1:350.

[28] Joan Cadden, "Western Medicine and Natural Philosophy," <u>Handbook of Medieval Sexuality</u>, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, Garland Ref. Library of the Humanities 1696 (New York: Garland, 1996) 51-80, at 65.

Mary Frances Wack has made a detailed examination of lovesickness in the <u>Viaticum</u> and associated commentaries.[29] She concludes that:

> the symptoms of the disease, as outlined by Constantine and Avicenna, and as synthesized by Gerard [of Berry] and other medieval physicians, essentially feminise the male lover. Beyond the passivity inherent in being a patient, with the helplessness and vulnerability that it implies, the symptoms connote traits customarily associated with the feminine in medieval culture. Emotional lability, excessive or inappropriate laughing or crying, fasting, misregulation of speech, that is, inappropriate speech or silence – all these symptoms of lovesickness are corporeal signs associated with the feminine. Isidore of Seville... calls excessive love *femineus amor,* 'womanly love.'[30]

Lovesickness is an overthrow of reason, 'a loss of inner control and governance in the noble subject, a degradation of the mental faculties expressed in the infantalisation or feminisation of the lover's body and behaviour.'[31] Moreover, lovesickness, as the Latin term *amor hereos* suggests, affects only the best of men. Giles of Berry, writing in the early thirteenth century states, under the rubric 'Love that is called heros,' 'amor qui heros,' that 'heroes are said to be noble men who, on account of riches and the softness of their lives, are more likely to suffer this disease,' 'hereos dicuntur uiri nobiles qui propter diuicias et mollitiem uite tali pocius laborant passione.'[32] This goes some way to explain why lovesickness tends to appear in romance texts. The most famous medieval sufferer is perhaps Chaucer's Troilus, who displays all the typical symptoms:

> And fro this forth lo refte hym love his slep,
> And made his mete his foo, and ek his sorwe
> Gan multiplie, that, whoso tok kep,
> It shewed in his hewe both eve and morwe.
> Therfor a title he gan him for to borwe
> Of other siknesse, lest men of him wende
> That the hote fir of love hym brende,

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[29] See Mary Frances Wack, <u>Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The</u> Viaticum <u>and its Commentaries</u>, Middle Ages Ser. (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990) 1-176.
[30] Wack, <u>Lovesickness</u> 65.
[31] Wack, <u>Lovesickness</u> 72.
[32] Gerard of Berry, <u>Glosule super Viaticum</u>, ed. and trans. Wack, <u>Lovesickness</u> 199-205, at 202-203.

> And seyde he hadde a fevere and farde amys.
> ...
>
> But thanne felte this Troilus swich wo
> That he was wel neigh wood.[33]

Lovesickness even enters the discourse of saints' lives; Jacobus de Voragine in the

Golden Legend, written around 1260, attributes it to the young man who wishes to marry

St Agnes:

> When the young man had heard all this he was despaired, as he that was taken in
> blind love, and was over sore tomented, in so much that he lay down sick in his
> bed for the great sorrow that he had. Then came the physicians and anon knew his
> malady, and said to his father that he languished of carnal love that he had to
> some woman.'[34]

On a more prosaic level, Andrew Borde (or Boorde), author of a sixteenth-century self-

help guide, The Breviary of Helthe, states that lovesickness derives from 'amours whiche

is a feruent loue for to haue carnal copulacion with the party that is loued.'[35] It is a desire

not for the reciprocation of love, but simply for sex: 'yf it can nat be obtayned, some be

so folysshe that they be rauyshed of theyr wyttes.' The use of 'rauyshed' has

connotations of rape; this, combined with the 'folysshness' and subservient position of

the lover, suggests a process of feminisation is at work. While Borde states that 'women

maye haue this sicknes as well as men,' the very need for stressing its applicability to

women suggests that lovesickness was commonly seen as a disease affecting men.

Lovesickness itself stems from a failure of rationality, an impulse to 'set to the hert yt

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[33] Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, The Riverside Chaucer, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed.
(Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 1:484-491, 498-99. I will examine this in greater detail in chapter four, in
relation to Malory's Morte Dathur.
[34] Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints As Englished By William Caxton, 1900,
ed. F. S. Ellis, 7 vols. (New York: AMS, 1973) 2:247.
[35] Andrew Borde. The Breuiary of Helthe: London 1547, The English Experience 362 (Amsterdam:
Theatrum Orbis Terrarum; New York: Da Capo, 1971) fol. lxxiii back.

[what] an other doth set at the hele.' Borde warns: 'let no man set his loue so farre but that he maye withdrawe it betyme... be wyse and nat folyshe.'

Madness proper is thought of as a transient affliction. Sufferers were expected to recover their wits and return to their right minds. The 'natural idiot,' one mentally deficient from birth, was conceived of entirely differently. The 'natural idiot' formed a particular legal category: they were classed as permanently disabled, and their person and lands placed under the wardship of the king.[36] Those who became, rather than being born, mad, were also likely to be assigned a ward, usually by the king, although this could be overturned if they regained sanity.[37] Under medieval English law, the mad were not legally culpable for their actions. The collection of thirteenth-century law books known as Bracton states of the mad that:

> they are without sense and reason and can no more commit an *injuria* or a felony than a brute animal, since they are not far removed from brutes, as is evident in the case of a minor, for if he should kill another while under age he would not suffer judgement.[38]

Mad men, like women and children, were disallowed from giving legal testimony. The thirteenth-century work <u>Mirror of Justices</u> extends the category of those forbidden to give testimony 'to women, to infants, to serfs and to all who are within ward, to madmen, to excommunicates, to natural fools, ... to those who are not in the faith of Christ and of the

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[36] Turner 7. The ruling granting the king custody of all 'natural fools' and their lands was passed in 1265. As Turner points out, this ruling is only intended to apply to those natural fools who own significant land or property (Turner 8).
[37] Turner 158-59. The ward in this case would usually be a member of the mad person's own family.
[38] Turner 92.

king.'[39] Legally, madmen were classed among the 'others' of society, a definition which

we will find repeated throughout medieval texts.[40]

When the causes of madness are listed in medical texts, they are strikingly diverse. It is

hard to escape the conclusion that the potential for madness is ever-present, that anyone

may succumb to insanity. Trevisa's list of potential causes is a case in point:

> þese passiouns comeþ somtyme of malencoly metis; and somtyme of dringke of
> stronge wyn þat 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 oþir of some oþir
> venemous best; somtyme of corrupte and pestilente aier þat is infect; somtyme of
> malis of corrupt humour þat haþ þe maystrie in þe body of a man to brede siche a
> sikenes.[41]

Madness can be caused by any number of factors, internal and external: diet, alcohol,

corrupt air, excess study, sorrow, the bite of a mad dog, or just from the breakdown of

humours within one's body. It is merely one among many diseases to which man is

subject, not qualitatively different from any other ailment.[42] An ointment which cures

'fantome in þe heuede' can work just as well 'for flewme and reme in þe hede & for to

sla lyes & scalles.'[43]

There is no one model of the brain. Borde discusses the condition of 'obliuiousnes or

forgetfulnes,' which 'may come of solicitudnes or great study occupyenge ye memory so

much that it is fracted... it maye come to yonge men & women, whan theyr mynde is

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[39] Turner 130.

[40] On this note, see especially the discussion of Palomides in chapter four.

[41] Trevisa 1:350.

[42] This obviously depends on the genre of text one reads. While medical texts focus, not unnaturally, on physical causes, madness can also be characterised as a providential ailment, one which alerts the sufferer to his/her sin, as well as being a punishment for wrongdoing.

[43] The "Liber de Diversis Medicinis": In the Thornton Manuscript (MS. Lincoln Cathedral A.5.2), ed. Margaret Sinclair Ogden, EETS os 207 (London: Oxford UP, 1938) 2.

bryched.'[44] The memory, and indeed the mind, are seen as things which can be broken.

Madness comes when they are fractured or breached. Borde's description of frenzy,

however, provides a contrary model, in which it is caused by 'an impostumacion bredde

and ingendred in the pellycles of ye brayne... the which appostumacion dothe make

alyenacion of a mannes mynde and memory.'[45] Mania, on the other hand, can develop

either from 'corrupt blode in the hed... byluse blode intruted in the heed... wekenes of the

brayne... [or] a turnynge vp so downe in the heed the which dothe make the madnes.'[46]

Images of corruption, notions of poison entering the brain and creating insanity, recur

throughout these descriptions of madness.

Just as the causes of madness are varied, so too are the remedies. Trevisa comments that

> þe medicines of hem is þat he be ibounde, þat þey hurte not hemsilf and oþir men;
> and namlich suche schal be refreisschid and comfortid and wiþdrawe from cause
> and mater of busy þou3tis, and he schal be gladed with instrumentis of musik and
> somdel be occupied. And at þe laste, if purgaciouns and electuaries suffiseth no3t,
> he schal be iholpe wiþ craft of surgerye.[47]

Cures combine religious and medical elements; indeed, they make no difference between

them. The Liber de diversis medicinis, a household book of medicine probably composed

in the North Riding of Yorkshire around the first half of the fifteenth century, is a mixture

of medical recipes and altogether more exotic remedies. For madness, Thornton not only

provides the recipe for 'A gud oynement for fantome in þe heuede' ('Take rose,

walworte, salt, hony, rycles [incense] and welle [boil] þat to-gedir ouer þe fire & enoynte

þi hede þer-ith') but also suggests the sufferer

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[44] Borde, Breviary fol. lxxxxvii back.
[45] Borde, Breviary fol. cvii back – fol. cviii.
[46] Borde, Breviary fol. lxxxviii.
[47] Trevisa 1:350.

> Take a blake cok & cleue hym in twa & lay it on þe hede al hate & byng it faste &
> late it lygge a nyghte & a daye & þe thirde day late blede in þe forheuede, for it is
> prouede sothe dyuerse tymms in dyuerse place.[48]

While both these cures have a medical rationale behind them (in the case of the black

cock, either that the heat of the bird's carcass will draw the noxious humours from the

brain, or that the bird's blood itself will have a beneficial effect), the suggested treatment

for epilepsy is firmly rooted in a belief in divine intervention:

> Tak þe blode of þe littill fynger of hym þat is seke and wryte thir thre names in his
> forehed of þe iij kynges of Colayn, þat is to say: Iasper fert aurum, thus Melchior,
> Attro pamirram. He þat beris þir names of þir iij kyngis with hym, he sall be lesid
> thurgh þe petee of God of þe falland euyll.[49]

Behind the medical rationale for illness is always the Christian one: that disease occurs

for a reason, most probably in order to punish, or warn of future punishment. The

corollary of disease as a consequence of divine intervention is, of course, that it can

equally be cured in the same way. Effecting miraculous cures is one of the key duties of

saints, and pilgrimage is often undertaken in order to gain their support. Indeed, Thomas

Hoccleve, a fifteenth-century poet, writes that during his madness his friends undertake a

pilgrimage on his behalf, hoping for a cure.[50]

Medical texts, indeed, seem to echo the fluidity of the categories they define. Trevisa can,

seemingly, intertweave medical authorities, anecdote, and Biblical narrative without any

sense of disjunction. In his discussion of melancholy he jumps easily from mentioning

'Melencolik men [who] falliþ into þise and many oþir wondirful passiouns, as Galien seiþ

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[48] Liber de diversis medicinis 2, 5.
[49] Liber de diversis medicinis 42.
[50] Thomas Hoccleve, Complaint, Thomas Hoccleve's Complaint and Dialogue, ed. J. A. Burrow, EETS 313
(Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) edited text pp. 3-33, lines 47-49. I will examine Hoccleve's experience of
madness in chapter seven.

and Alisaundir [presumably Alexander of Hales] and many oþir auctours' to noting that 'þis we seeþ alday wiþ oure ei3en, as it fel late of a nobleman þat fel into suche a madnes of melancolye þat he in alle wise trowed þat he himsilf was a catte, and þerfore he wolde nowher reste but vndir beddes þere cattis waitid aftir myse.'[51] He then brings in the Biblical case of Nebuchadnezzar: 'And in cas in wreche of his synnes Nabugodonosor was ipunyschid wiþ suche a peyne, for it is iwriten in stories þat seuen 3ere hym semed þat he was a best þurou3 diuers schappis: lyoun, egle, and ox.'[52] It is this fluidity, and the possibilities which it evokes, which I intend to examine.

Previous Work on Madness

There have been several previous studies of madness in the medieval period. Perhaps the most influential is that of Penelope Doob, whose book <u>Nebuchadnezzar's Children</u> (1974) was the first to examine literary madness in any detail. Doob is largely concerned with the spiritual connotations of madness, arguing that 'in general... disease in literature is seen as punishment or purgation, and its infliction is morally justified by the sick man's guilt.'[53] For Doob, the madman is the 'symbol of the sinner and the type of postlapsarian man,' and she interprets all appearances of the insane according to this (somewhat restrictive) criterion.[54]

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[51] Trevisa 1:162.
[52] Trevisa 1:162.
[53] Penelope B. R. Doob, <u>Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature</u>, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1974) 7.
[54] Doob 10.

Judith Neaman's book, <u>Suggestion of the Devil: The Origins of Madness</u> (1975) based on

her 1968 thesis, 'The Distracted Knight: A Study of Insanity in the Arthurian Romance,'

broadens Doob's focus, examining more secular uses of madness - particularly in

romance, in which madness is often used as a signifier for the overpowering desires of

the knight. [55] However, Neaman follows Doob in outlining

> three possible attitudes toward insanity in the Middle Ages. The first and least
> common was the belief that madness was divinely inspired; the second, was that it
> was caused by the devil; the third, was that it was a medical illness. Even the last
> was not entirely untainted by moral judgement, however. The man who suffered
> from madness was either predisposed to it by his excesses or he drove himself to
> it by his failure to force his rational will to dominate his appetites and senses.[56]

Stephen Harper's <u>Insanity, Individuals and Society in Late-Medieval English Literature:</u>

<u>The Subject of Madness</u> (2003) manages to make the break away from seeing madness in

primarily moral terms. In contrast, Harper asserts that there is invariably a physiological

explanation for madness, and that the theme of madness could be used in literary texts to

produce diverse effects ranging from moral condemnation to sympathy.[57]

> 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
> orthodox 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.[58]

Sylvia Huot's <u>Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost</u>,

published in the same year, examines the interaction between madness and gender in

French and Anglo-Norman romance. Huot is particularly concerned with madness as a

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[55] Judith S. Neaman, <u>Suggestion of the Devil: The Origins of Madness</u> (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1975).

[56] Judith S. Neaman, <u>The Distracted Knight: A Study of Insanity in the Arthurian Romance</u>, Diss., U of Columbia, 1967-1968 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1977) 46.

[57] Stephen Harper, <u>Insanity, Individuals and Society in Late-Medieval English Literature: The Subject of Madness</u>, Studies in Mediaeval Literature 26 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003) 18-20, 74.

[58] Harper 276.

consequence of the strains of heterosexuality, using a combination of psychanalysis and

queer theory to examine the role madmen (and women) play as Other to the male hero.[59]

In addition to the handful of books focussing on madness in the medieval period, there

are a number of surveys of madness in literature, most including at least a section on the

Middle Ages. Lillian Feder's Madness in Literature (1980) is one of the earliest, but is

flawed by its uncritical acceptance of twentieth-century psychiatric practices. Feder's

consequent teleological approach to medical history evaluates treatments of the insane

according to how closely they approximate modern-day standards. More specifically,

Feder echoes Doob in assuming that madness is a reflection of sinfulness in the Middle

Ages: an approach that, as I argued above, I believe is overly-simplistic.[60] Feder does,

however, acknowledge the historically contingent aspect of madness: 'the nature of

madness itself as an incorporation of the very values and prohibitions it challenges.'[61]

Roy Porter's examination of the writings produced by the mentally ill, A Social History

of Madness: Stories of the Insane (1987) argues that 'the history of madness is the

history of power.'[62] Porter's intention is to explore 'how the mad tried to explain their

own behaviour to themselves and others in the language that was available to them.'[63]

While this is an interesting approach, Porter largely neglects the Middle Ages,

mentioning Margery Kempe only briefly. Allan Thiher also examines the relationship

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[59] Sylvia Huot, Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2003). 5, 211.
[60] Lillian Feder, Madness in Literature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980) 100.
[61] Feder 4.
[62] Roy Porter, A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane, 1987 (London: Phoenix-Orion, 1999) 39.
[63] Porter, Social History 2.

between madness and the creation of texts. His <u>Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature</u> (1999) takes a psychoanalytical approach to the history of madness, examining the ways in which literature and madness influence each other.[64] Again, however, Thiher mentions the Middle Ages only in passing.

Feder, Porter and Thiher all agree on the contingent nature of madness: there can be no one definition of insanity; it varies in accordance with cultural expectations. Thiher argues that 'the mad live and interpret their madness in terms of the prevailing explanatory paradigms': 'the conditions of possibility of certain types of madness are in part historical.' [65] Carol Neely has examined madness in the historical context of the early modern, particularly in <u>Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture</u> (2004) which focuses on the relationship between madness and gender in drama.[66] The early modern period, while largely preserving the medical culture of the Middle Ages, is significantly different in terms of gender expectations. While in the medieval period, as we will see, madness is thought of largely in terms of masculinity, Neely charts a shift, beginning in the sixteenth century, towards associating madness firmly with femininity.

Neely argues that during the early modern period 'the discourses of madness flourished because they were useful in reconceptualising the boundaries between natural and supernatural, masculinity and femininity, body and mind, feigned and actual

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[64] Allen Thiher, <u>Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature,</u> Corporealities: Discourses of Disability (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1999).
[65] Thiher 47, 320.
[66] Carol Thomas Neely, <u>Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture</u> (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004).

distraction.'[67] This is the case not only for the early modern period: madness in medieval literature is also a contested category.

Madness is not a single concept in the Middle Ages. Instead, it is complex and varied, changing in meaning according to text and author. Even potentially autobiographical accounts, such as those of Hoccleve and Margery Kempe, cannot be taken for granted. They, like literary texts, contain descriptions of madness that are carefully shaped and moulded. There can be no simple accounts of madness, just as there are no simple accounts of gender. This is not an exhaustive study of madness: I can make no claims to completeness. I also resist claiming that every medieval author thought in the same way about madness. This thesis aims to examine some of the possible ways that were available to discuss madness in medieval texts, and which find their way from medical texts into contemporary thought. It is not, by any means, definitive.

A fundamental problem of my discussion is how precisely to define madness. Is a knight who rides into battle 'wood wrothe' suffering from madness, or merely a rage so intense it can be compared to madness?[68] Is the author (in this case, Malory) merely using a common phrase without thinking too deeply about the implications? In such cases, I will take my cue from the text themselves. In a text in which an instance of madness forms an important part of the narrative (as it does for the Morte Darthur), and in which the author puts forward distinct views about how that madness is to be interpreted, I will consider it

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[67] Neely, Distracted Subjects 2.
[68] Thomas Malory, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, 3 vols., ed. Eugène Vinavar (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947) 911:8-9. All subsequent references to the Morte Darthur are from this edition and cited by page and line number.

legitimate to read all other instances of madness (even those where the reference is comparatively brief) in reference to this.

I shall begin by examining the role of madness in classical literature. Classical epics are filled with dangerous madwomen, positioned against rational, male, Roman and Greek civilisation. They also construct a model of male madness – expressed through near-suicidal brashness in battle – which finds resonances much later in medieval romance. While medieval literature has no parallel for the classical emphasis on madness as a distinctively feminine force, the construction of women as untrustworthy is something which persists, and authors such as Gower and Chaucer spend considerable time retelling classical myths. While much of classical literature is lost to medieval authors, I have chosen to examine texts which circulate during the medieval period. Virgil's <u>Aeneid</u> and Ovid's <u>Metamorphoses</u> are perenially popular, appearing in moralised and allegorised versions, as well as being retold in countless different forms. Statius' <u>Thebaid</u> and Lucan's <u>Civil War</u> are also popular: copies of both are found in the court library of Charlemagne as early as c. 790.[69] I also look at Seneca's <u>Medea</u>, which circulated with the rest of Seneca's tragedies from the thirteenth century.[70]

Medieval authors are also strongly influenced by medical ideas of madness. My second chapter examines the medical context for madness, moving from the classical period to the medieval. Madness inhabits these texts in ways which are surprisingly complex. Although we have already examined the classifications of madness, suggested cures, and

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[69] L. D. Reynolds, and N. G. Wilson, <u>Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature</u>, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 96.
[70] Reynolds and Wilson 116-17.

so on, medical texts have a lot more to offer a study of madness and gender. As I will

argue, medical writing, in containing a detailed account of the body and its capabilities,

also embodies the fears and anxieties associated with both femininity and masculinity.

Madness is deeply implicated in both.

In the third chapter I move on to discussing demonic possession. Possession shares many

of the same characteristics as madness: both involve an alienation of the self, a loss of

control. Despite these similarities, however, possession is a condition in its own right,

and involves a distinct set of assumptions about status and gender. Stories of demonic

possession tend to establish two opposing masculinities: the secular man, who is liable to

be possessed, and the holy man who will exorcise him. The next text I examine, Malory's

Morte Darthur, also establishes masculinity based on class status. Here personhood, and

thus the possibility of madness, is confined almost exclusively to the knight. Madness, a

consequence of failure in love, is an almost-positive force, proof that the knight has the

elevated sensibility that characterises the best of the nobility. Gower's Confessio

Amantis, the subject of my fifth chapter, is also concerned with the pernicious effects of

love, and the potential for madness which is contained within heterosexual norms. Rather

than concentrating on masculinity, however, Gower is equally concerned about

madwomen, retelling the stories of such disturbing women as Medea, Procne and

Philomela.[71]

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[71] Compared to the other texts I examine, instances of madness in Gower's work are relatively brief and to
a large extent scattered throughout the text. Nonetheless, however, I consider that these individual instances
of insanity (whether elaborated on or not) can be viewed as together making up a singular and interesting
approach to madness. I will discuss this further in chapter five.

The final two chapters concern two pieces of autobiographical writing, the Book of

Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve's Series. Both authors are concerned with the

consequences of having suffered madness themselves, and each reacts to it differently. As

we will see, madness often has a negative signification: it stands for negation and lack.

For Margery Kempe, this negation proves an unlikely positive force. In Margery's Book,

madness holds a transformative power – it is through her madness that Margery is able to

undergo a conversion from housewife to mystic. Hoccleve's experience of madness is far

less positive. Hoccleve's madness alienates him from society and from his friends,

dangerously undermining his masculinity.

I hope to trace the links between the presentations of madness in these texts, and the way

in which they are used to shape gender. Madness, in its severance of mind from body,

self from physicality, is a concept ideally suited to an exploration of gender. By

questioning what is 'normal,' the very existence of the madperson is a prompt to further

investigation of our notions of selfhood and identity. It is these notions, and the way in

which they are interpreted through medieval literature, that I wish to examine.

Chapter One: Madness in Classical Literature

Madness in classical texts is typically associated with breaking of boundaries, with being out of place. Ruth Padel, speaking of Greek tragedies, notes that 'inside is sane. Being 'out' of home and all it stands for (mind, right place) is mad. Mad is outside, other, foreign.'[1] Madness, characterised as bestial and non-human, threatens not only the boundaries of the individual self, but also the boundaries of humanity itself. And, as we shall see, it has a potentially destabilising effect on conceptions of gender. Madness in classical texts has the potential not only to break boundaries, but also to provoke a complete collapse of categories. Binary oppositions – mad/sane, inside/outside, male/female, human/nonhuman, natural/unnatural – can become destabilised. However, madness can also be employed to reinforce gender categories, as we will see in the Aeneid. As the paradigmatic Roman epic, the Aeneid introduces themes in relation to madness that are further developed in later texts.

Women are characterised as irrational from almost the earliest classical texts. As we have seen, women are characterised in medical thought as inferior versions of men: colder, wetter, and more prone to instability. This inferiority makes them more prone to irrationality: they cannot control themselves in the way which is expected of a man. Ruth Padel describes the Athenian male upper-class ideal of 'self-control': 'the ideal was control over your self, desires, body, mind. Women did not have this (or not in surviving

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[1] Ruth Padel, Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995) 15.

male images of them). Men must control everything (women, their own feelings) they see as turbulent, inner, unsafe.'[2]

The male sphere of learning and rationality is out of bounds to women, confined as they are to the inner, domestic realm. Padel argues that 'from the Greeks onwards, Western culture has had a sense of women... as innerly dark. In Athens, women were typically relegated to a darkness which contained them: the most inward, darkest, chambers of the house.'[3] Indeed, Padel suggests that, to the Greeks, mind itself was dangerously female: 'dark, interior, penetrated; filling and flowing with blood, impure and uncontrollable'[4]

Virgil's <u>Aeneid</u>

An examination of the <u>Aeneid</u> bears out Padel's theory: women are instrumental in both causing and spreading madness. The two defining moments of madness in the <u>Aeneid</u> are, first, Dido's frenzy, ending in suicide, when she is abandoned by Aeneas, and, second, Juno's enlistment of Allecto's help in maddening Amata and Turnus, in order to prompt war between the Latins and Trojans. The madness of Dido is similar in many ways to that of Amata. In both cases, madness is described in terms of fire and poison. Dido 'is on fire with love and has drawn the madness through her veins,' 'ardet amans Dido traxitque per ossa furorem'; Amata is similarly affected: 'And while first the taint, stealing on in fluent poison, thrills her senses and wraps her bones with fire,' 'ac dum

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[2] Padel 128.
[3] Padel 61.
[4] Padel 129.

prima lues udo sublapsa veneno / pertemptat sensus atque ossibus implicat ignem.'[5]

Indeed, the poem's insistence on denoting madness as a feminine characteristic means that individual madwomen are taken as archetypes for women in general.[6] Thus, Amata exemplifies 'a woman's distress, a woman's passion…,' 'femineae ardentem curaeque iraeque,' and Dido's suicide is merely an endorsement of the Trojans' knowledge 'of what a woman can do in frenzy,' 'furens quid femina possit' (7:345, 5:6). All women, it seems, contain the potential for madness. Indeed, women are throughout characterised by disorder and frenzy, in contrast to the male principles of order and rationality. As Ellen Oliensis notes, 'women make trouble and men restore order.'[7]

Women who become mad in the Aeneid tend to be guilty of transgressing their expected feminine roles. Dido, as leader and founder of Carthage, usurps male political power.[8] Amata, in her attempts to prevent the marriage of Lavinia and Aeneas, works against her husband and subverts the Trojans' quest to found their own patriarchal society. Madwomen are literally out of place. Dido 'through the city wanders in frenzy, even as a hind… in flight ranges the Dictaean woods and glades,' 'vagatur urbe furens, qualis... cerva… illa fuga silvas saltusque peragrat Dictaeos' (4:68-73). Amata, too, 'in wild frenzy rages from end to end of the city,' 'furit lymphata per urbem' (7:377). She even 'flies forth to the forest,' 'in silvas... evolat,' and incites her fellow matrons to 'seek new

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[5] Virgil, Aeneid, Virgil, 2 vols., trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999-2000) at 4:101 and 7:354-55. All subsequent references to the Aeneid are from this edition and cited by book and line number.

[6] See A. M. Keith, Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic, Roman Literature and its Contexts (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 25.

[7] Ellen Oliensis, "Sons and Lovers: Sexuality and Gender in Virgil's Poetry," The Cambridge Companion to Virgil, ed. Charles Martindale, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 294-311, at 303.

[8] Marilynn Desmond, Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid, Medieval Cultures 8 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994) 14.

dwellings. They have left their home, and bare their necks and hair to the winds,' 'nova quaerere tecta. / deseruere domos, ventis dant colla comasque' (7:385-87, 393-94). This physical dislocation echoes the madwoman's mental dislocation. The abandonment of the home, the space which defines the role of wife and mother, is a definitive abandonment of proper female roles. Madness is a severing of the madwoman from her social role and from her femininity.

Even the bodies of women, and especially women associated with madness, are disordered. Woman, as Mercury famously notes, is 'a fickle and changeful thing,' 'varium et mutibile' (4:569). Women in the Aeneid are, indeed, threateningly mutable, and the poem is filled with images of altered women. The fury Allecto is described primarily in terms of her changing form: 'hateful is the monster even to her sire Pluto, hateful to her Tartarean sisters; so many are the forms she assumes, so savage their aspect, so thick her black sprouting vipers,' 'odit et ipse pater Pluton, odere sorores / Tartareae monstrum: tot sese vertit in ora, / tam saevae facies, tot pullulat atra colubris' (7:327-29). Allecto is hateful specifically because of her 'many forms'; her mutability is her most terrifying feature. Madwomen are threateningly bestial. Apollo's possession of the Sibyl is described in terms of the breaking in of a wild animal, 'so does Apollo shake the reins as she rages, and ply the goad beneath her breast,' 'ea frena furenti / concutit et stimulus sub pectore vertit Apollo,' while Amata is driven by Allecto to roam 'amid woods, amid wild beasts' coverts,' 'inter silvas, inter deserta ferarum' (6:100-101, 7:404).

Aeneas' quest for Italy is dogged by a series of female monsters. These monsters, the

harpies - 'maiden faces have these birds, foulest filth they drop, clawed hands are theirs,

and faces ever gaunt with hunger,' 'virginei volucrum vultus, foedissima ventris /

proluvies, uncaeque manus, et pallida semper / ora fame' - and 'misshapen,' 'informem'

Scylla – 'above she is of human form, down to the waist a fair-bosomed maiden; below,

she is a sea dragon of monstrous frame, with dolphins' tails joined to a belly of wolves,'

'prima hominis facies et pulchro pectore virgo / pube tenus, postrema immani corpore

pistrix, / delphinium caudas utero commissa luporum' – are both female and distinctly

unfeminine (3:216-18, 431, 426-28). Interestingly, while the monstrous female negates

femininity, male monsters, such as the Cyclops or centaurs, are hyper-masculine,

characterised as they are by physical strength, capacity for violence and excessive sexual

desire. Male monsters are also entirely less monstrous: while female monsters are

multiform, composed of a disjointed mix of human and animal, male monsters are likely

to be recognisably male, and at least part-human. Monstrosity appears to be associated

with a departure from gender role. Monstrous appearance is an indicator of madness:

outward disorder mirroring inner disorder. It is also, like madness, a sign of

transgression. As A. M. Keith notes, these misshapen female bodies 'physically

emblematise the socially transgressive character of the militaristic female.'[9] Women,

clearly, are more easily conceived of as monstrous than are men.

Madwomen are repeatedly described as being driven by their madness. Amata, as already

noted, is driven by Allecto, but is also depicted as a top, 'spinning under the twisted lash,

which boys intent on the game drive in a great circle through an empty court… the blows

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[9] Keith, Engendering Rome 71.

give it life,' 'volitans sub verbere turbo. / quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum /
intenti ludo exercent... dant animos plagae' (7:378-83). The analogy depicts Amata as
being entirely without agency: her madness dehumanises her, making her into an object
to be manipulated. The employment of a boys' game as metaphor here is deliberate: the
madness of women, it suggests, is ultimately ineffectual. Dido, too, is figured as driven
by an external force: 'in her sleep fierce Aeneas himself drives her in her frenzy,' 'agit
ipse furentem / in somnis ferus Aeneas' (4:465-66). We have the paradoxical situation in
which madwomen, while overtly threatening, are in fact portrayed as being under the
control of a man. Dido, although fantasising about committing the murderous deeds of
Medea or Procne, vents her violence only on herself. Both Amata and Dido commit
suicide: their madness leads only to their own destruction. Even their words are,
seemingly, ineffectual; both Dido and Amata are notably unable to influence events
through speech. Instead, madwomen emit uncontrolled noise, their words irrational and
meaningless. Dido, stricken with love for Aeneas, 'begins to speak and stops with the
word half-spoken,' 'incipit effari, mediaque in voce resistit' (4:76). Amata, while 'her
soul has not yet caught the flame throughout her breast,' 'necdum animus toto percepit
pectore flammam,' speaks 'softly, and as mothers are wont,' 'mollius et solito matrem de
more'; after the madness has taken hold, she 'fiercely shouts' 'vociferans... clamat,' as
her fellow matrons 'fill the sky with tremulous cries' 'tremulis ululatibus aethera
complent' (7:356-57, 390-400, 395).

The Sibyl's words, too, are controlled by both Apollo and Aeneas. She is merely a
conduit for the god:

as thus she spoke before the doors, suddenly not countenance nor colour was the same, nor stayed her tresses braided; but her bosom heaves, her heart swells with wild frenzy and she is taller to behold, nor has her voice a mortal ring, since now she feels the nearer breath of deity

…cui talia fanti
ante fores subito non vultus, non color unus,
non comptae mansere comae, sed pectus anhelum,
et rabie fera corda tument, maiorque videri
nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando
iam propiore dei. (6:46-51)

The Sibyl's prophetic frenzy is a feminine, embodied form of madness. The truth that Aeneas seeks is contained within the body of the Sibyl. Prophetic frenzy, although inspired by Apollo, comes from within; the 'wild frenzy' of the Sibyl swells within her own heart. Prophetic madness, then, is associated with the inner spaces of the female body. The fascination that the figure of the prophetess seems to hold for epic writers may stem from this connection with the secrets of the female body. The truth that is contained within the Sibyl, however, can only be brought out by the intervention of Apollo. Her 'raving mouth,' 'os rabidum,' and 'raving lips,' 'rabida ora,' need to be 'moulded,' 'fingit' by Apollo in order to produce coherent speech (6:80, 102, 80). The Sibyl's body, penetrated by Apollo, gives birth to truth.[10] The Sibyl is used by Apollo and Aeneas to predict the future of Italy: her body the medium for a male-dominated truth. However elided the role her body plays in the process may be, however, it is still necessary. Indeed, the role of the Sibyl in the dissemination of prophecy is analogous to that of women in general in male society. Women's bodies, while necessary to the process of reproduction, are feared: they need to be kept firmly under masculine control.

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[10] This figuring of prophetic inspiration as rape, which lurks in the background the Sibyl episode, becomes central to Lucan's portrayal of Phememoe, as I will show.

Women, then, are both dangerous and, paradoxically, passive. While women are

necessary in order to bear children and perpetuate the Trojan (or Roman) race, they are

nonetheless potentially treacherous. Women are perilous objects of desire, attracting the

male gaze in a way that often proves fatal. By instigating desire in men, they are

responsible for the breaking of male bonds, the subversion of homosocial relationships.

As Keith notes, there is a systematic 'displacement of the violent summons of war from

male to female characters' in the Aeneid; women breed war.[11] The paradigmatic example

of the dangerous woman is, of course, Helen, the cause of the Trojan war, and thus

ultimately of the foundation of Rome itself. Helen, carried off by Paris, plays a largely

passive role in proceedings, yet is nonetheless blamed for the fall of Troy.

It seems that women need only to exist in order to present a threat. Even Lavinia, who is

never granted the power of speech, much less of agency, in the text, is held to be a second

Helen: 'the cause of all this Trojan woe is again an alien bride, again a foreign marriage!'

'causa mali tanti coniunx iterum hospita Teucris / externique iterum thalami' (6:93-94).

Helen herself appears in Deiphobus' account, told from the underworld, of his own death:

> when the fateful horse leapt over the heights of Troy, and brought armed infantry
> to weight its womb, she feigned a solemn dance and round the city led the
> Phrygian wives, shrieking in their Bacchic rites; she herself in the midst held a
> mighty torch and called the Danaans from the castle-height
>
> cum fatalis equus saltu super ardua venit
> Pergama et armatum peditem gravis attulit alvo,
> illa, chorum simulans, euhantis orgia circum
> ducebat Phrygias; flammam media ipsa tenebat
> ingentem et summa Danaos ex arce vocabat (6:515-19).

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[11] Keith, Engendering Rome 73. For an expanded discussion on the relationship between women and war in the Aeneid, see Keith 69-81.

Here, a number of images are conflated. Helen is aligned with female madness, through her association with Bacchus; with fire, which, as we have seen, is a recurring image of the dangerous female; and with the shrieking, the uncontrolled noise that repeatedly accompanies madness. Helen, in her role as the destroyer of Troy, is also conflated with the Trojan horse itself, which becomes female, carrying 'armed infantry to weight its womb.'[12]

Birth, paradoxically, is here aligned with death. Women's capacity to create life is inverted, becoming the capacity to breed warfare and death. This facility is epitomised in Allecto, whose ability to inspire madness and conflict is described explicitly in terms of fertility: 'Rouse your fertile bosom, shatter the pact of peace, sow seeds of wicked war!' 'fecundum concute pectus, / disice compositam pacem, sere crimina belli' (7:338-39). Female ability to procreate is clearly deeply threatening. The hidden womb becomes a symbol of the essentially unknowable nature of woman and, concomitantly, the inability of men ever to master the incomprehensible feminine. The Trojans leave their women behind in Sicily, ensuring that they play no role in the settlement of Italy. The Roman race, the text attempts to persuade us, springs directly from men: the role of women is elided.[13] The land of Italy itself, fertile and uncultivated, stands in for the bodies of the women on which the Trojan men will found the Roman race. Keith notes that the 'myth of Rome's origins… conjoins the maternal body with the Italian landscape.'[14]

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[12] On the construction of Greek deception as feminine, see Mihoko Suzuki, <u>Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic</u> (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989) 100.

[13] Alison Sharrock notes the same elision of the feminine in Ovid's account of Caesar's fathering of Augustus in <u>Metamorphoses</u> 15. See Sharrock, "Sexuality and Gender," <u>The Cambridge Companion to Ovid</u>, ed. Philip Hardie, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 95-107, at 105.

[14] Keith, <u>Engendering Rome</u> 46.

Turnus is the only man to participate in a hitherto-feminine madness. Allecto appears to him in his sleep, infecting him with 'monstrous terror' 'pavor,' and leaving him madly shrieking for arms: 'arma amens fremit' (7:458, 460). It is notable that Turnus' response to this madness is gendered from the outset. When Allecto appears to him in the guise of an old woman, he summarily rejects her warning of war:

> but you, mother, old age, enfeebled by decay and barren of truth, frets with vain distress, and amid the feuds of kings mocks your prophetic soul with false alarms. Your charge it is to keep the gods' images and temples; war and peace men shall wield, whose work war is.

> sed te victa situ verique effeta senectus,
> o mater, curis nequiquam exercet, et arma
> regum inter falsa vatem formidine ludit.
> cura tibi divum effigies et templa tueri;
> bella viri pacemque gerent quîs bella gerenda. (7:440-44).

Ironically, this 'men's work' of war is shown to be, in fact, driven and initiated by Allecto 'in my hand I bear war and death' 'bella manu letumque gero' (7:455). Turnus' accusation of barrenness is equally ironic: as we have seen, it is Allecto's fertility that he should fear. Her inexhaustible capacity to inspire madness and frenzy will, through Turnus' mad pursuit of Aeneas, lead to his own loss of Lavinia and thus the prospect of children. It is Turnus who will die barren.

Turnus' madness is specifically masculine. Unlike Dido's or Amata's, his madness is characterised by a desire for war: 'lust of the sword rages in him, the accursed frenzy of war, and resentment crowning all,' 'saevit amor ferri et scelerata insania belli, / ira super' (7:461-62). In contrast to the madwomen of the Aeneid, he is not described as being driven by an external force; instead, the impulse for action seems to come from within

him. While Amata is compared to a top 'which boys intent on the game drive in a great circle,' Turnus' eruption into madness is likened to boiling water in a cauldron: 'within seethes the liquid flood, steaming and bubbling up high with foam; and now the wave contains itself no longer, and the black smoke soars aloft,' 'furit intus aquai / fumidus atque alte spumis exuberat amnis, / nec iam se capit unda, volat vapor ater ad auras.' (7:464-66). Turnus is not prey to the ineffectiveness of speech that plagues his female counterparts. Although he initially 'madly shrieks' for arms, this outburst is succeeded by a return to formal, structured forms of language. Turnus orders his men, and makes vows to the gods. Interestingly, the initial effect of madness on Turnus seems to be to accentuate his masculinity. Turnus' mad desire for the 'accursed frenzy of war' is endorsed and echoed by the men of his court: 'the Rutuli vie in exhorting one another to arms,' 'certatim sese Rutuli exhortantur in arma' (7:472).[15]

While madness is seemingly not necessarily an obstacle to maintaining masculinity, it appears to negate traditional concepts of femininity. This can be seen most clearly in the figure of the maenad, the paradigmatic madwoman, who, in the words of Debra Hershkowitz, is 'at the same time hyper-feminine and masculine, possessed by divinity and possessed of violent strength and ferocity as well as heightened sexuality.'[16] Maenads are the followers of Bacchus, god of wine and theatre, both of which, interestingly, encourage altered states. They are characterised by their ecstatic madness, which blinds them to all normal concerns of propriety and morality. Other than their

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[15] We will see this seeming acceptability of madness in the service of warfare repeated in medieval romance texts, which often stress the heroic behaviour of the mad knight. See chapter four for an examination of this in greater detail.

[16] Debra Hershkowitz, The Madness of Epic: Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 37.

allegiance to Bacchus, they are women who are free of all control, especially male control. As Hershkowitz suggests, the maenad defies gender roles, being both 'hyper-feminine and masculine' at the same time. They are a mix of categories, a characteristic, as we have seen from the depictions of Scylla and the harpies, that is considered monstrous.

Acts of s*paragmos* and *omophagia*, the tearing apart and consumption of bodies, define maenads. They fragment and consume male bodies in an act that echoes male rape of female bodies. Interestingly, their own bodies are impervious to harm, in a reversal of the usual situation, in which female bodies are vulnerable. Indeed, vulnerability is so strongly associated with the female body that Jonathan Walters comments that:

> In Latin, when a male was sexually penetrated by another, a standard way of describing this was to use the expression *muliebria pati*; that is, he was defined as 'having a woman's experience.' Clearly, what happens to the sexually passive man is conceived of as being the same as what happens to a woman.[17]

Maenads reverse gender roles entirely: the male becomes vulnerable, while the female is all-powerful. This is deeply threatening.

The otherness of the maenad is expressed through her positioning in the text. Bacchus is the god of wild nature; his rites take place outside the city, marking them as other to civilised society. Euripides' Bacchae depicts maenads living in harmony with nature, easily handling snakes and nursing wild animals. They are able to draw streams of water, wine and milk from the soil. Madness, as we have seen in the Aeneid, is always

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[17] Jonathan Walters, "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought," Roman Sexualities, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997) 29-43, at 30.

associated with the outside; this identification with wildness positions the maenad as other from civil society.

So striking is the image of the uncontrollable maenad, that it can be argued that all female madness is, in effect, structured in relation to her: certainly the figure of the maenad recurs throughout the texts I examine. The maenad, Hershkowitz asserts, is 'the most powerful way female madness can be expressed or represented': 'the ecstatic maenad embodies the extremes which result in and which reflect madness, as well as the power of madness to change nearly every aspect of the individual.'[18] The image of the maenad recurs throughout the Aeneid. Amata feigns the performance of Bacchic rites to escape with Lavinia to the forest; 'Allecto drives her far and wide with Bacchic goad,' 'Allecto stimulis agit undique Bacchi' (7:405). Dido rages through the city 'like some Thyiad startled by the shaken emblems, when she has heard the Bacchic cry: the biennial revels fire her and at night Cithaeron summons her with its din,' 'qualis commotis excita sacris / Thyias, ubi audito stimulant trieterica Baccho / orgia nocturnusque vocat clamore Cithaeron' (4:301-304). Later, she aligns herself with Medea and Procne, both perpetrators of *sparagmos*: 'could I not have seized him, torn him limb from limb, and scattered the pieces on the waves? Could I not have put his men to the sword, and Ascanius himself, and served him up as a meal at his father's table?' 'non potui abreptum divellere corpus et undis / spargere? non socios, non ipsum absumere ferro / Ascanium patriisque epulandum ponere mensis?' (4:600-602).

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[18] Hershkowitz 37, 51.

Ovid's <u>Metamorphoses</u>

The paradigmatic maenadic act is perhaps the death of Pentheus, killed by his maddened mother after attempting to prevent the worship of Bacchus. In the <u>Metamorphoses</u>, Pentheus' opposition to Bacchus is specifically gendered: Pentheus aligns the 'untried boy,' 'puero... inermi' with 'unmanly men,' 'molles' and 'women's shrill cries,' 'femineae voces,' in opposition to 'real' men, whose masculinity has been proved in war.[19] The 'wine-heated madness,' 'mota insania vino' that he accuses Bacchus of fostering is essentially effeminate, a perversion of normal masculinity, constructed around reason, and for which 'real war, with its drawn swords, the blare of trumpets, and lines of glittering swords, had no terrors,' 'quos non bellicus ensis, / non tuba terruerit, non strictis agmina telis' (3:536, 534-35). In contrast to Pentheus' attempts to construct a clear definition of masculinity, the rites of Bacchus described in the <u>Metamorphoses</u> do not differentiate by gender or hierarchy, but are composed of 'men and women, old and young, nobles and commons, all mixed together,' 'mixtaeque viris matresque nurusque / vulgusque proceresque' (3:529-30). Even the geographical location of his rites, outside the boundaries of the city, places them outside normal social categories.

Pentheus, in an echo of Virgil, attempts to construct the masculine without any reference to female origins, addressing the men of Thebes as 'sons of the serpent's teeth… seed of Mars,' 'anguigenae, proles Mavortia' (3:531). The implied audience for Pentheus' speech is clearly male, set onto the feminised background of the city of Thebes:

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[19] Ovid, <u>Metamorphoses</u>, 2 vols., trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958) 3:553, 547, 536. All subsequent references to the <u>Metamorphoses</u> are from this edition and cited by book and line number.

> if it be the fate of Thebes not to endure for long, I would the enginery of war and heroes might batter down her walls and that sword and fire might roar around her: then should we be unfortunate, but our heroes without stain; we should bewail, not seek to conceal, our wretched state; then our tears would be without shame

> ...si fata vetabant
> stare diu Thebas, utinam tormenta virique
> moenia diruerent, ferrumque ignisque sonarent!
> essemus miseri sine crimine, sorsque querenda,
> non celanda foret, lacrimaeque pudore carerent (3:548-552).

Given the prevalence of rape in the Metamorphoses, this picture of the assaulted, feminised Thebes seems merely another threatened female body. It seems, in fact, that the female body (whether the metaphorical body of Thebes or the actual bodies of the raped women that recur so frequently in the text) must be penetrated in order that men become fully masculine.[20] Although Pentheus envisages a Thebes penetrated by his enemies, the mere fact that the walls are 'battered down' and that 'sword and fire… roars about her' validates the masculinity of all concerned: 'then should we be unfortunate, but our heroes without stain.' This construction of gender, though, is prone to slippage. Masculinity, needing to be performed on the female body, is open to instability, and it is madness that provides the destabilising factor.

Ironically, Pentheus' body will take the place of the female body he envisages as vulnerable to penetration and violence. Indeed, Pentheus' masculinity becomes increasingly open to question. He becomes tainted by the feminised madness that he attempts to exclude: 'his mad rage is fretted by restraint and grows apace, and their very efforts at control but make him worse,' 'inritaturque retenta / et crescit rabies moderaminaque ipsa nocebant' (3: 566-67). Pentheus' lack of self-control is distinctly

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[20] Keith, Engendering Rome 104.

unmanly, his desire to overcome reasonable boundaries frighteningly reminiscent of the Bacchantes themselves.

Ovid's representations of madness are inextricably linked with conflicting uses of the gaze. The gaze is central to Pentheus' masculinity.[21] He taunts Tiresias 'with his darkness and loss of sight,' 'tenebrasque et... lucis ademptae / obicit' and expresses his anger towards Acoetes 'with gaze made terrible by his wrath,' 'oculis, quos ira tremendos / fecerat' (3:515-16, 577-78). His decision to leave the city, however, to 'spy with profane eyes upon the sacred rites,' 'hic oculis illum cernentem sacra profanis' places him in a liminal space: 'about midway of the mountain, bordered with thick woods, was an open plain, free from trees, in full view from every side,' 'Monte fere medio est, cingentibus ultima silvis, / purus ab arboribus, spectabilis undique, campus' (3:710, 708-709). As we have seen from the stories in book three, these liminal wilderness spaces are potentially dangerous. The tales of Actaeon, Narcissus and Echo demonstrate especially the potential for disaster implicit in the uncontrolled gaze. Pentheus, like Actaeon, moves from the looker-on to the one looked at, from the wielder to the object of the gaze. His mother 'was the first to see him, first to rush madly on him,' 'prima videt, prima est insano concita cursu' (3:711).

The gaze determines the status of the object perceived. Thus, men throughout the text fix the status of women as objects of desire, objects inviting rape and male possession.

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[21] For a fuller discussion of gender and the gaze in the Metamorphoses, see Alison Keith, "Versions of Epic Masculinity in Ovid's Metamorphoses," Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the Metamorphoses and its Reception, ed. Philip Hardie, Alessandro Barchiesi, and Stephen Hinds, Cambridge Philological Society Supplementary Volume 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Soc, 1999) 214-39, at 216-20.

Madness enables, it seems, a destabilising of gender, allowing a female adoption of the

male gaze and the capacity for transformation that this entails. Agave sees Pentheus as a

boar, a beast, and as she looks at him his body transforms from the inviolable body of the

ruler into one open to penetration and dismemberment. Pentheus' body is not only

transformed, but fragmented, ripped apart by his mother and aunt. One of the most

fundamental boundaries, between self and other, inside and out, is ruptured. This

dramatic violence inflicted by the female on the male body parallels the normative model

of male penetration of the female body.

As well as its negation of male impenetrability, female madness entails a denial of the

male voice, of reasoned, ordered speech. In a culture where 'rhetorical skill was

considered a definitive test of masculine excellence,'[22] masculinity can be defined in part

by the capacity to influence others through speech. Female speech is not expected to have

any such power. Pentheus, as we have seen, equates 'women's shrill cries' with 'clashing

cymbals' and 'empty drums': both equally empty of meaning. In contrast, masculinity is

performed through rational speech; a mastery of rhetoric proves the man. To render this

meaningless is, at a stroke, to deny masculine authority.

The potential threat to male dominance is dramatised most powerfully in the death of

Orpheus, where the 'huge uproar,' 'clamor' of the maenads drowns out the sound of

Orpheus' voice, leaving him vulnerable to their violence (11:16). It is only when

Orpheus' song loses its power to compel that the maenads are able to overpower and

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[22] Maud W. Gleason, Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995) 160.

finally kill him. The noise created by the Bacchantes, 'the huge uproar of the Berecyntian flutes, mixed with discordant horns, the drums, and the breast beatings and howlings of the Bacchanals,' 'ingens / clamor et infracto Berecyntia tibia cornu / tympanaque et plausus et Bacchei ululates,' is deliberately meaningless, without structure, words or tune (11:15-17). In contrast, the song of Orpheus is a harmony of words and music that both reflects and creates an equivalent harmony in the natural order: 'with such songs the bard of Thrace drew the trees, held beasts enthralled and constrained stones to follow him,' 'carmine... tali silvas animosque ferarum / Threicius vates et saxa sequentia ducit' (11:1-2). Madness not only affects the mad, but also causes a general overturning of reasoned speech. The 'mad fury,' 'insana... Erinys' of the Bacchantes overpowers the power of Orpheus' words; Pentheus' speech is unintelligible to his mother and aunt (11:14). Masculine authority and power, clearly, are overwhelmed by the subversive power of maenadic madness.

Orpheus is the target of the maenads' violence because he spurns their advances. Here, in stark contrast to the rest of the Metamorphoses, the role of sexual aggressor is taken by women, and that of their helpless victim by a man. Charles Segal comments that

> the female body in the Metamorphoses is characterized by its status as a visual object, its passivity, its appropriation by the male libidinal imagination, and its role as a vessel to be 'filled' by male seed to continue a heroic lineage…[while] the ideal of the male body is impenetrability.'[23]

The Orpheus story thwarts both concepts. Not only do maenads fragment the male body, they actively reject the procreative role. The maenads who kill Orpheus first seize the hoes and mattocks of nearby peasants ploughing the field. Ploughing, as Keith notes, is a

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[23] Charles Segal, "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the Metamorphoses," Arion 5.3 (1998): 9-41, at 23.

common euphemism for sex, with the male actively making fertile the feminised ground.[24] Seizing the peasants' tools, then, is not merely a usurpation of the phallus; it is also a reclaiming of the female body, a refusal of fertility. Agave and Procne both tear apart their own children. For a woman to kill her child is literal madness, a loss or denial of her identity, her self. If a woman is not a mother or a wife, she does not fit in society. She is not who she should be. She is, suddenly, Other. And what is this if not madness?

Statius' Thebaid

The Thebaid once again positions women as carriers of madness. Even 'good' women such as Argia and Deipyle, who perfectly fulfil their roles as daughters, wives and mothers, are potentially threatening. It is their marriages to Polynices and Tydeus that prompt the Greeks to declare their disastrous war on Thebes. Rumour, another threatening, mad female, conflates war and marriage, chanting 'of guests and weddings, pacts of royalty and mingling of families, and now (such license has the monster, such her madness!) of war,' 'hospitia et thalamos et foedera regni / permixtumque genus (quae tanta licentia monstro, / quis furor?) et iam bella.'[25] At their wedding, Argia and Deipyle are compared to Pallas and Diana, 'both grim of weapons and of eye… you could never by long gazing (were your eyes permitted) determine which had the grander grace, which the more charming, which had more of Jupiter,' 'tunc, si fas oculis, non umquam longa tuendo / expedias, cui maior honos, cui gratior, aut plus / de Iove' (2:240-42). As the fate

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[24] Keith, Engendering Rome 63.
[25] Statius, Thebaid, Statius, 3 vols., ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2003) 2:211-13. All subsequent references to the Thebaid are from this edition and cited by book and line number.

of Actaeon, among others, reminds us, gazing at goddesses is indeed a dangerous

occupation. As we have seen in the <u>Aeneid</u> in reference to Helen, even women's status as

a desirable object, attracting the male gaze, can be construed as threatening.[26]

When women feature in the text, regardless of the reason, they are shadowed by

menacing images of monstrous, threatening activity. The Theban women, engaged in the

seemingly harmless pursuit of mourning the men killed by Tydeus, are compared to

Thessalian witches ransacking the corpses:

> not otherwise does a woman of Thessaly, whose nation's crime it is to bring the
> dead back to life with spells, visit the fields by night rejoicing in a recent battle,
> and holding high her splintered torch of ancient cedarwood turn the lifeless throng
> over in their blood and explore the dead
>
> Thessalis haud aliter bello gavisa recenti,
> cui gentile nefas hominem revocare canendo,
> multifida attollens antiqua lumina cedro
> nocte subit campos versatque in sanguine functum
> vulgus et explorat manes (3:140-44)

Witches, as we will see in Lucan's portrayal of Erictho, both cause and feed off death; in

asserting a parallel with the grief-stricken Theban women, Statius suggests that all

women are fatal, all equally complicit in the death of men. Later, Ismene's grief over her

fiancé Atys is juxtaposed with the image of Bellona (Enyo) 'reviving the fight, bristling

with other snakes and a fresh torch,' 'aliis serpentibus horrens / et face mutata bellum

integrabat Enyo' (8:655-56). Women, it seems, cannot be seen without bringing to mind

their capacity for damaging men. The episode in which Argia and Deipyle are introduced

is interspersed with images of monstrous women. The feast at which they are promised to

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[26] See Alison Keith, "Versions of Epic Masculinity in Ovid's <u>Metamorphoses</u>" 222.

Tydeus and Polynices is held in honour of the killing of a female monster sent by Apollo

to avenge the murder of a woman he raped:

> it had the face and bosom of a girl; from its head rises a serpent ever hissing, parting the livid brow. This dreadful pest, moving by night, slides squalid into the bedrooms and tears lives newly born from their mothers' breasts, to devour them with bloody bite and feed fat on the land's mourning.
>
> ...cui virginis ora
> pectoraque; aeternum stridens a vertice surgit
> et ferrugineam frontem discriminat anguis.
> haec tum dira lues nocturno squalida passu
> illabi thalamis, animasque a stirpe recentes
> abripere altricum gremiis morsuque cruento
> devesci et multum patrio pinguescere luctu (1:598-604).

What may seem to be the body of a woman, promising sex and children, is in fact a

repulsively monstrous creature, actively devouring children and spreading disease and

death. This deep distrust of women seems to stem from the story of Oedipus, which

functions as a cautionary tale: the woman whom one thinks is desirable (sexually

available) can in fact turn out to be monstrous (sexually forbidden). And this causes

madness.[27]

Indeed, the madness that haunts the house of Thebes stems from that original act of

incest. Incest is monstrous because it overturns family boundaries and upsets categories.

The incestuous family, like the maddened mind, provides the paradigmatic model of

society overturned. Incest duplicates the effect of madness in that it makes language

meaningless: 'son' becomes 'husband'; 'mother' becomes 'wife.' It is a perversion of

narrative, as well as nature. Oedipus 'turns himself back to his beginnings and thrusts

back her child on his undeserving mother,' 'qui semet in ortus / vertit et indignae regerit

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[27] Incest continues to be associated with madness, as we will see in Gower's <u>Confessio Amantis</u>, and particularly in his retelling of the Apollonius story. See chapter five.

sua pignora matri' (4:631-32). Incest makes one like an animal, bestial, in the same way

that madness makes one less than human.[28] Unsurprisingly, the physical reminder of the

horror of incest is a woman, Jocasta, 'the impious mother of the war,' 'impia belli /

mater' (7:483-84). She resembles the eldest of the Furies; her very presence terrifies the

soldiers (7:477-78, 485-86).

The confusion of categories by which both incest and madness are defined persists in the

repeated motif of gender slippage. The men of Thebes, involved in Bacchic rituals, are

construed as less than fully masculine; concomitantly, the women of Lemnos abandon

their feminine roles, murdering their husbands and adopting their armour. Both instances

of gender collapse, interestingly, are identified with madness. The women of Lemnos are

driven to kill their husbands because they are unable to fulfil their female gender roles.

The men have abandoned them; as a result, they cannot have sex or give birth to children.

They are no longer proper women. They are able to kill, however, as a result of

deliberately casting off their gender: 'steel your courage and drive out your sex,' 'firmate

animos et pellite sexum!' (5:105). Their decision to murder their families is explicitly

presented as madness, a madness which is inseparable from gender disruption:

> 'twas as though Scythia was afire with Amazonian tumult and the crescent-
> shielded host descending when their father allows them arms and opens the gates
> of cruel War… The same madness is for all, the same will to make homes
> desolate, cut short life's threads for old and young, break little ones at the full
> breast, and carry the sword through every generation.
>
> Amazonio Scythiam fervere tumultu
> lunatumque putes agmen decendere, ubi arma
> indulget pater et saevi movet ostia Belli...
> ... furor omnibus idem,

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[28] See Elizabeth Archibald, Incest in the Medieval Imagination (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001) 17, for the connection between incest and bestiality in Roman thought.

> idem animus solare domos iuvenumque senumque
> praecipitare colos plenisque affrangere parvos
> uberibus ferroque omnes exire per annos. (5:144-51)

The comparison with the Amazons, women also living without men, stresses the

indeterminate gender status of the Lemnian women. Women without men are not fully

women at all; they even attempt to usurp male roles:

> they are not ashamed even to don scaly coats of mail and put helmets on their
> nerveless faces. Pallas blushed in amazement at the bold bands and Gradivas in
> distant Haemus laughed. Then for the first time headlong frenzy left their minds.

> ...quin et squalentia texta
> thoracum et vultu galeas intrare soluto
> non pudet; audaces rubuit mirata catervas
> Pallas, et averso risit Gradivus in Haemo.
> tunc primum ex animis praeceps amentia cessit. (5:354-358)

Gender roles, then, are ultimately affirmed. The women are unable to perform as men:

their attempts to don male armour and prepare for war are laughable. Even Pallas, the

virgin warrior goddess, rejects their attempt to mimic men in war: her blushing reaction, a

marker of femininity, marking even her as more feminine than the Lemnian women.

At the sight of the true masculinity of the Argonauts, their pretence of manliness

collapses: 'hearts froze, hands relaxed in a shudder, alien weapons fell, their sex returned

to their hearts,' 'deriguere animi, manibusque horrore remissis / arma aliena cadunt, rediit

in pectora sexus' (5: 396-97).

Statius' warriors, in contrast, assert a masculine madness; a battle frenzy that actually

confirms masculinity. Adrastus interprets Tydeus' and Polynices' rage towards each

other as a sign of both masculinity and class: 'Why this madness, young strangers?... For

such wrath argues [that you are] of no mean degree and great signs of proud race show

plain in your blood-letting,' 'quae causa furoris, / externi iuvenes... nam vos / haud

humiles tanta ira docet, generisque superbi / magna per effusam clarescunt signa

cruorem' (1:438-46). This manly madness is asserted in contrast to Bacchic frenzy,

which, as we have noted, is characterised as feminine. Tydeus taunts the Thebans sent to

ambush him:

> this night is not your triennial returning by ancestral custom; you look not at Cadmus' orgies or mothers greedy to stain Bacchus with crime. Did you think you were carrying fawnskins and frail wands to unwarlike music, joining shameful battle that real men know not of to the sound of Celaenae's pipe? Here are different slayings, different frenzy!

> non haec trieterica vobis
> nox patrio de more venit; non orgia Cadmi
> cernitis aut avidas Bacchum scelerare parentes.
> nebridas et fragiles thyrsos portare putastis
> imbellum ad sonitum maribusque incognita veris
> foeda Celaenaea committere proelia buxo?
> hic aliae caedes, alius furor (2:661-67)

Tydeus identifies 'real men' with success in battle. Capaneus, whose denial of the gods is

perceived as insane by those around him, is nonetheless a successful warrior. His

masculinity, gained through prowess in battle, is seemingly unaffected by his madness.

Even his attempt to challenge the gods, while acknowledged to be insane, actually

enhances his masculinity and his status as a hero: 'Was his frenzy sent from the depth of

night, did the Stygian Sisters take arms against Jove following Capaneus' standard? Or

was it valour past bounds or reckless thirst for glory and fame granted to a great

death…?' 'sive ille profunda / missus nocte furor, Capaneaque signa secutae / arma

Iovem contra Stygiae rapuere Sorores, / seu virtus egressa modum, seu gloria praeceps /

et magnae data fama neci' (10:831-35).

Failure in battle, concomitantly, is feminising. Roman conceptions of masculinity

constructed the ideal male body as impenetrable: the penetrable body is construed as

feminine.[29] Thus, Eunaeus, already associated with the feminine through his position as a

priest of Bacchus, is feminised by association through his possession of a shield with a

'penetrable texture,' 'penetrabile textum' (7:652). His entry into the war is phrased in

terms of a clear opposition between the feminine madness of Bacchus and the masculine

madness of war: 'Who persuaded you, Eunaeus, to leave Bacchus' worship… and to

change a madness used to Bromius?' 'Quis tibi Baccheos, Eunaee, relinquere cultus...

suasit et assuetum Bromio mutare furorem?' (7:649-51). This clear-cut assertion of

masculinity, however, is vulnerable to slippage. True masculinity, attained through

victory in battle, can only be sustained as long as one is winning. The possibility of

losing, and thus being penetrated by an opponent, is ever present. Likewise, acceptable

masculine madness can easily slip into dangerous feminine madness.

The concept of a clearly distinguishable manly madness is undermined by prophetic

madness, which is endured by both men and women. Thiodamus' experience of prophetic

madness highlights this fluidity of gender. He experiences the gods penetrating his mind,

controlling his body. 'Lo, a sudden thrill comes upon Thiodamus as the High Ones drive

his mind to madness and command him in terrifying tumult to reveal the fates… He leaps

into the midst, terrible to see and to hear, unable to bear the deity – too much for the frail

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[29] See Walters 29-43. Penetration is, however, not automatically feminising. It is worth noting the existence of a parallel tradition of 'Greek love,' typified by the relationship between Nisus and Euryalus in the Aeneid, in which both partners are seen as equally masculine. Indeed, men involved in such a relationship may even be said to increase in masculinity: they are inspired to commit impressive feats of arms in order to impress their lover. For a fuller discussion see Eva Cantarella, Bisexuality in the Ancient World, trans. Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1992), particularly 125.

receiving mind to contain,' 'ecce repens superis animum lymphantibus horror /

Thiodamanta subit formidandoque tumultu / pandere fata iubet... prosilit in medios, visu

audituque tremendus / impatiensque dei, fragili quem mente receptum / non capit'

(10:160-66). The experience of penetration aligns Thiodamus with the feminine.[30]

Even Theseus' final victory over Creon, ostensibly heralding a restoration of order and

reason, and an end to the madness embedded in the Theban line, cannot suppress the

threat of this feminine madness. Theseus is initially positioned as the upholder of 'the

laws of earth and the world's covenants,' 'terrarum leges et mundi foedera,' as well as

the champion of masculinity in his defeat of the Amazons (12:642).[31] Theseus' military

conquest of the Amazons is symbolised by his sexual conquest of Hippolyte and her

adoption of Athenian models of femininity, 'now bland of eye and patient to the marriage

bond… she blends herself, a barbarian, with great Athens and comes to bear children to

her foeman husband,' 'iam blanda genas patiensque mariti / foederis... magnis... barbara

semet Athenis / misceat atque hosti veniat paritura marito' (12:534-39). Theseus actively

excludes the Amazons from participating in his war against Creon; Hippolyte is kept at

home due to 'the hope of her swelling womb,' 'tumentis / spes uteri' (12:636-37).

Theseus' victory is short-lived, however; the focus is immediately displaced onto the

Argive women. The final image of the Thebaid is that of women running onto the

battlefield in triumph: 'a cry of women shakes the stars and the Pelasgian matrons are

running down like mad Thyiads summoned to Bacchic wars; you might think they were

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[30] Interestingly, Tiresias, perhaps the most famous seer in classical literature, is also associated with gender
fluidity. In some versions of his story he is transformed from man to woman, after striking a pair of
copulating snakes with his staff, and from woman to man seven years later, after repeating his action.
[31] Keith, Engendering Rome 99.

demanding some great crime, or had committed one,' 'femineus quatit astra fragor,

matresque Pelasgae / decurrunt, quales Bacchea ad bella vocatae / Thyiades amentes,

magnum quas poscere credas / aut fecisse nefas' (12:790-93).[32]

Lucan's <u>Bellum civile</u>

In his <u>Civil War</u>, Lucan builds on the identification of war and madness. He employs

images of madness as the natural corollary to civil war, which itself encompasses a

deliberate confusion of categories.[33] He depicts civil war as a form of madness in itself,

in which fellow Romans become indistinguishable from enemies, kinship bonds are

ignored and the unnatural becomes all too natural. This association of madness and civil

war sets up an organic model of society, a body politic in which the overturning of

society 'naturally' results in madness. Civil disturbance is seen as attacking the natural

order, and therefore itself unnatural. While the trope of the body politic enables civil

disturbance to be seen as a temporary disease, a madness that has temporarily

overwhelmed the body and can thus be healed, Lucan rejects any possibility of healing.

Instead, he presents a dystopic vision of a world in which madness is itself the basis of a

new sanity.

Civil war, for Lucan, entails a total collapse of categories, an inability even to distinguish

natural from unnatural. Against the backdrop of civil war, actions which would normally

be considered natural – bravery in battle, desire to attack the enemy – become stark

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[32] Keith, <u>Engendering Rome</u> 99.

[33] For the confusion of categories entailed in civil war, see John Henderson, <u>Fighting for Rome: Poets and Caesars, History and Civil War</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 166-67.

madness, and deeds of insanity become normal fare: 'if you bid me bury my sword in my

brother's breast or my father's throat or the body of my teeming wife, I will perform it

all, even if my hand be reluctant,' 'pectore si fratris gladium iuguloque parentis / condere

me iubeas plenaeque in viscera partu / coniugis, invita peragam tamen omnia dextra.'[34]

As Lucan's Nigidius Figulus attests, 'the madness of war is upon us, when the power of

the sword shall violently upset all legality, and atrocious crime shall be called heroism,'

'inminet armorum rabies, ferrique potestas / confundet ius omne manu, scelerique

nefando / nomen erit virtus' (1:666-68). Language loses its stability; paradoxes become

the norm. One of the first categories to disintegrate is that of gender, and civil war is,

indeed, presaged by a breakdown of masculinity:

> when Rome had conquered the world and Fortune showered excess of wealth
> upon her, virtue was dethroned by prosperity, and the spoil taken from the enemy
> lured men to extravagance: they set no limit to their wealth or their dwellings;
> greed rejected the food that once sufficed; men seized for their use garments
> scarce decent for women to wear; poverty, the mother of manhood, became a
> bugbear; and from all the earth was brought the special bane of each nation
>
> ut opes nimias mundo fortuna subacto
> intulit et rebus mores cessere secundis,
> praedaque et hostiles luxum suasere rapinae,
> non auro tectisve modus, mensasque priores
> aspernata fames; cultus gestare decoros
> vix nuribus rapuere mares; fecunda virorum
> paupertas fugitur, totoque accersitur orbe
> quo gens quaeque perit (1:160-67)[35]

It is unsurprising, therefore, that disturbances of gender play a role in the Civil War.

Women feature in the Civil War much as they do in the Thebaid, as a destabilising

presence in the text. The war begins with the death of Julia, and she reappears to Pompey

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[34] Lucan, The Civil War (Pharsalia), trans. J. D. Duff, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1928) 1:376-78. All subsequent references to the Civil War are from this edition and cited by book and line number.

[35] Gower uses much the same associations in his Vox Clamantis, in which a breakdown of social order is identified with a concomitant breakdown in sanity, gender and even humanity itself. See chapter five.

'in the guise of a Fury,' 'furialis,' 'a spectre full of dread and menace,' 'pleno horroris

imago,' to prophesy disaster (3:11, 9). The masculine madness of the war is played out

against a background of disturbingly mad women.

This female madness centres on two contrasting scenes of female prophecy. Book five

features the Delphic priestess Phemonoe, followed by the Thessalian necromancer

Erictho in book six. Where Erictho is, as we shall see, a threatening, destructive presence,

actively controlling and inducing madness in those around her, Phemonoe is merely a

tool of Apollo; her prophetic ability inspires madness only in herself. The body of

Phemonoe, like that of Virgil's Sibyl, is taken over by Apollo, its integrity shattered: 'the

human frame is broken up by the sting and surge of that frenzy, and the stroke from

heaven shatters the brittle life,' 'stimulo fluctuque furoris / conpages humana labat,

pulsusque deorum / concutiunt fragiles animas' (5: 118-120).[36] As Hershkowitz points

out, the subjugation of Phemonoe, to a much greater extent to that of the Sibyl, is overtly

sexual.[37] Phemonoe is accosted by the priest of Apollo while 'wandering free from care

about the spring of Castalia,' 'Castalios circum latices nemorumque recessus /

Phemonoem errore vagam curisque vacantem,' a situation made familiar from the

Metamorphoses as a prelude to rape (5:125-26). The prophetic madness that seizes

Phemonoe is indeed portrayed as a rape:

> at last Apollo mastered the breast of the Delphian priestess; as fully as ever in the
> past, he forced his way into her body, driving out her former thoughts, and
> bidding her human nature to come forth and leave her heart at his disposal.
>
> ...tandemque potitus

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[36] Jamie Masters, Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's Bellum Civile, Cambridge Classical Studies
(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 192-93.
[37] Hershkowitz 43-45.

> pectore Cirrhaeo non umquam plenior artus
> Phoebados inrupit Paean mentemque priorem
> expulit atque hominem toto sibi cedere iussit
> pectore. (5:165-69).[38]

Madness, here, is the product of penetration. It is implanted in Phemenoe's body by Apollo; she is merely a vessel for his will. The bringing forth of prophecy seems to be akin to gestation, with the female body acting merely as vessel for the active male spirit. This elision of an active female role in fertility leaves the female as merely body, emptied of will and intellect. Indeed, Phemenoe's frenzy is explicitly a loss of self: her human nature is driven out of her body. During her madness Phemenoe becomes inhuman, almost bestial. Lucan describes her as being tamed like an animal by Apollo: 'nor does he ply the whip and goad alone, and dart fire into her vitals: she has to bear the curb as well, and is not permitted to reveal as much as she is suffered to know,' 'nec verbere solo / uteris et stimulos flammasque in viscera mergis: / accipit et frenos, nec tantum prodere vati / quantum scire licet' (5: 174-77).

Once madness strikes, Phemenoe loses the power of speech that is the hallmark of her humanity: 'first the wild frenzy overflowed through her foaming lips; she groaned and uttered loud inarticulate cries with panting breath; next, a dismal wailing filled the vast cave; and at last, when she was mastered, came the sound of articulate speech,' 'spumea primum rabies vaesana per ora / effluit et gemitus et anhelo... / murmura, tum maestus vastis ululatus in antris / extremaeque sonant domita iam virgine voces' (5:190-93). The loss of human speech, the resort to an 'inarticulate cry of indistinct utterance,' 'confusae murmure vocis,' becomes a defining feature of prophetic madness (5: 149). The fact that

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[38] See Hershkowitz 42.

Phemonoe's voice is, at first, recognizably her own is proof that she only feigns possession. She must 'cease… to speak [her] own words,' 'desinis ipsa loqui' (5:161). The voice she utters is Apollo's; he speaks through her.

In stark contrast to this model of the possessed, passive madwoman, Erictho, the Thessalian witch, seizes both male power and male speech. While Phemenoe is defined by her penetrable female body, Erictho is positioned in explicit opposition to female roles. Her very presence negates fertility: 'her tread blights the seeds of the fertile cornfield, and her breath poisons air that before was harmless,' 'semina fecundae segetis calcata perussit / et non letiferas spirando perdidit auras' (6:521-22). Thessalian witches are defined by their ability to thwart marriage: 'even when defiled by no horrid draught of poison, men's minds are destroyed by incantations. Those whom no bond of wedlock and no attraction of alluring beauty can bind together are compelled by the mystic twirling of the twisted thread,' 'mens hausti nulla sanie polluta veneni, / excantata perit. Quos non concordia mixti / alligat ulla tori blandaeque potentia formae, / traxerunt torti magica vertigine fili'; and motherhood: 'they steal from the mare the sign that she will love her foal – the sign that grows, swollen with juice, upon its forehead,' 'turgentia suco / frontis amaturae subducunt pignora fetae'; 'she pierces the pregnant woman and delivers the child by an unnatural birth, in order to place it on the fiery alter,' 'volnere... ventris, non qua natura vocabat, / extrahitur partus calidis ponendus in aris' (6:457-60, 455-56, 557-58). Erictho is barely female: 'haggard and loathly with age is the face of the witch,' 'tenet ora profanae / foeda situ macies'; old age marks her as other to proper womanhood, defined as it is by sexual and procreative activity (6:515-16).

Erictho seizes male prerogatives, while at the same time emasculating men that come into

contact with her. She usurps the male role in the prophetic process, possessing male

bodies and using them for her own ends. Erictho's necromancy operates in much the

same way as Apollo's possession of Phemonoe. Both use the bodies of others as conduits

for prophecy. Like Apollo, Erictho violates the integrity of bodies, forcing them, by the

power of her voice, to prophesy. She usurps the powerful speech commonly gendered as

male, while depriving men of even the capacity for speech. Thus, her voice, 'more

powerful than any drug to bewitch the powers of Lethe… with accents that went down to

Tartarus,' 'vox Lethaeos cunctis pollentior herbis / excantare deos confundit...

penetratque in Tartara lingua,' contrasts with the muteness of the male corpse she restores

to life: 'the mouth was fettered and gave forth no sound,' 'sed murmure nullo / ora

astricta sonant' (6: 685-94, 760-61). Erictho's possession, too, is closely akin to rape:

> Often, too, when a kinsman is buried, the dreadful witch hangs over the loved body: while kissing it, she mutilates the head and opens the closed mouth with her teeth; then, biting the tip of the tongue that lies motionless in the dry throat, she pours inarticulate sound into the cold lips, and sends a message of mysterious horror down to the shades of Hell.
>
> Saepe etiam caris cognato in funere dira
> Thessalis incubuit membris atque oscula figens
> truncavitque caput conpressaque dentibus ora
> laxavit siccoque haerentem gutture linguam
> praemordens gelidis infudit murmura labris
> arcanumque nefas Stygias mandavit ad umbras. (6:563-68)

Erictho's severance of the corpse's tongue can be seen as a symbolic castration, while her

forcible penetration of the corpse's mouth is both sexual and deeply effeminising. In

Roman thought, oral penetration is one of the most degrading sexual acts, as Craig

Williams explains.[39] Any penetration, however, threatens masculinity. Much of the horror

Lucan finds in Erictho arises from her propensity to penetrate male bodies: 'the witch

eagerly vents her rage on all the limbs, thrusting her fingers into the eyes, scooping out

gleefully the stiffened eyeballs, and gnawing the yellow nails on the withered hand,'

'omnes avide desaevit in artus / inmergitque manus oculis gaudetque gelatos / effodisse

orbes et siccae pallida rodit / excrementa manus' (6:540-43). Bodily mutilation has

hitherto been the mark of the battlefield, a confirmation of masculinity. Here, inflicted by

a woman after death, it is a final mark of degradation.

Erictho's unnatural nature is echoed in her identification with the land of Thessaly. Like

Erictho, the land is dangerous to men; she and Thessaly collude to lure Sextus into

necromancy: 'the place itself fed his false and cruel delusion… the land produces baneful

herbs on her heights, and her rocks yield to the deadly spell chanted by her wizards,'

'vanum saevumque furorem / adiuvat... Thessala quin etiam tellus herbasque nocentes /

rupibus ingenuit sensuraque saxa canentes / arcanum ferale magos' (6:434-40). Nature

and Erictho, both female, are conflated. While combining magical ingredients to

reanimate a corpse, Erictho mixes 'all that Nature inauspiciously conceives and brings

forth,' 'quidquid fetu genuit sinistro natura,' with 'all the poisons that she herself gave to

the world,' 'quidquid mundo dedit ipsa veneni' (6:670, 684). As we saw in the Aeneid,

the land is traditionally assimilated to the passive, fertile feminine, existing in order to be

used by men. Thessaly, however, is an 'accursed country,' 'damnata... tellure,' which

turns on the men who try to master it (6:413-14). In the case of Thessaly, the land instead

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[39] Craig A. Williams, Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity, Ideologies of Desire (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 197-98.

represents the dangerous feminine. Thessaly, as the place 'where Agave, then an exile, once bore the head and neck of Pentheus and gave them up to the funeral fire, lamenting that she had carried off no more from her son's body,' 'ubi quondam Pentheos exul / colla caputque ferens supremo tradidit igni / questa, quod hoc solum nato rapuisset, Agave' is strongly identified with female madness (6:357-59). Instead of crops, it brings forth war and death: 'In this land the seeds of cruel war first sprang to life. From her rocks, smitten by the trident of the sea, leaped forth first the Thessalian charger, to portend dreadful warfare,' 'hac tellure feri micuerunt semina Martis. / Primus ab aequorea percussis cuspide saxis / Thessalicus sonipes, bellis feralibus omen' (6:395-97). Nature, as it operates in Thessaly, is distinctly unnatural.

This paradoxical nexus of woman, nature and the unnatural recurs with the introduction of the story of Medusa. Lucan sets out to reveal 'why the clime of Libya abounds in such plague and teems with death, or what bane mysterious Nature has mingled with her soil,' 'cur Libycus tantis exundet pestibus aer / fertilis in mortes, aut quid secreta nocenti / miscuerit natura solo,' admitting that 'no study and pains of ours avail to discover; but a world-wide legend has taken the place of the true cause and deceived mankind,' 'non cura laborque / noster scire valet, nisi quod volgata per orbem / fabula pro vera decepit saecula causa' (9:619-23). The legend is that the snakes of Libya sprang from the blood of Medusa, associated from her first appearance with nature, poison, and deceit. As with Erictho and Thessaly, the land of Libya takes on the characteristics of Medusa: 'in her body malignant Nature first bred these cruel plagues; from her throat was born the snakes that poured forth shrill hissings with their forked tongues,' 'hoc primum natura nocens in

corpore saevas / eduxit pestes; illis e faucibus angues / stridula fuderunt vibratis sibila linguis' (9:629-31). The deserts of Libya, and the snakes of Medusa, produce madness and bodily mutilation. Cato's soldiers, bitten by the snakes, become monstrous: their bodies swell and collapse on themselves, and become unrecognizable, 'the distended limbs can no longer be contained by the body – a round and featureless mass with no distinct parts,' 'tumidos iam non capit artus / informis globus et confuso pondere truncus' (9:800-801). They succumb to the frenzy for water that drives Aulus to 'open his swollen veins with his sword, and fill his mouth with the blood,' 'ferroque aperire tumentes / sustinuit venas atque os inplere cruore' (9:759-60).

Medusa's deadly nature, like that of Lavinia or Helen, stems from her role as passive object of the male gaze. It is not *Medusa's* gaze that turns the spectator to stone, but his own:

> who ever felt fear of the monster's face and open mouth? Who that looked her straight in the face was suffered by Medusa to die?... No living creature could endure to look on her, and even her serpents bent backward to escape her face.

> nam rictus oraque monstri
> quis timuit? quem, qui recto se lumine vidit,
> passa Medusa mori est?...
> nullum animal visus patiens, ipsique retrorsus
> effusi faciem vitabant Gorgonos angues. (9:637-39, 652-53)

Throughout the passage, Medusa's face is cited as the most dangerous part of her body, and her 'open mouth' is cited alongside her face as a danger. The throat, indeed, is considered to be analogous to the vagina in Roman thought.[40] Medusa literally gives birth through her throat: 'from her throat was born the snakes that poured forth shrill hissings with their forked tongues' 'illis et faucibus angues / stridula fuderunt vibratis siila

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[40] This correspondence will be discussed further in chapter two.

linguis' (9:630-31). The horrifying nature of Medusa stems at least in part from this fertility, from the power of autochthonous creation, without male involvement. The phallic nature of the snakes merely emphasizes Medusa's usurpation of the male creative prerogative. Her autonomous fertility is echoed in the land itself, which is characterised by not being 'softened by the plough,' 'non mollia sulco' (9:627).

The beheading of Medusa by Perseus can thus be seen as a kind of castration. Indeed, the text insistently draws attention to Medusa's body as an object now appropriated to the male gaze: 'how looked the Gorgon then, when her head was severed by the stroke of the cunning blade!' 'quos habuit voltus hamati volnere ferri / caesa caput Gorgon!' (9:678-79). From a threat to the male gaze, her severed head becomes an instrument of male control in the hands of Perseus. Despite this, however, blood dripping from the severed head still engenders snakes as it drops onto the Libyan sand. The confluence of female body and land still holds power.

Medusa, embodying the dangerous feminine of Africa, cannot but be compared to Cleopatra. Cleopatra's power, too, lies in her beauty, in her fatal capacity to draw the male gaze. She gains control of Caesar by gaining control of his gaze: 'her face supported her petition, and her wicked beauty gained her suit,' 'voltus adest precibus faciesque incesta perorat' (10:105). Like Dido, she is likened to Helen, whose 'dangerous beauty… overthrew Argos and Troy town,' 'inpulis Argos / Iliacasque domos facie... nocenti' (10:60-61). Helen and Dido, however, although dangerously alluring, are largely passive. Cleopatra is not. Indeed, she attempts to seize power, using her beauty and sexuality as

tools. This combination of masculine ambition and feminine wiles makes her an object of horror, 'the shame of Egypt' 'dedecus Aegypti' (10:59). The conquest of male reason by female sexuality represented by Cleopatra is explicitly linked to madness; Cleopatra is 'the fatal Fury of Latium, whose unchastity cost Rome dear,' 'Latii feralis Erinys, Romano non casta malo' (10: 59-60). She embodies unreasonable lust, inspiring madness in others and 'fan[ning] the frenzy of Italy,' 'Hesperios auxit... furores' (10:62). Cleopatra and Caesar's union is one of madness, originating 'in the midst of his rage and fury,' 'in media ravie medioque furore' (10:72).

Lucan defines Cleopatra by her sexuality. Her desire for political power is conflated with sexual lust: 'Cleopatra considers every man of us guilty, if he has not defiled her,' 'quem non e nobis credit Cleopatra nocentum, / a quo casta fuit?' (10:369-70). Once again, the body of a woman stands for that of her country. Cleopatra's penetrated, lustful body substitutes for that of Egypt itself, an Egypt which in its willingness to be ruled by either a boy or a woman is already construed as effeminate and unnatural. Cleopatra is accused of not merely unchastity, but incest. Incest has occurred already in the text in the context of the effeminate exotic, in Lucan's description of the 'soft' Parthians ('every step you go towards the East and the torrid zone, the people grow softer as the sky grows kinder,' 'quidquid ad Eoos tractus mundique teporem / ibitur, emollit gentes clementia caeli') and their 'infamous,' 'infando,' king, who, 'maddened by feasting and wine, ventures on unions that no laws have ever specified,' 'epulis vaesana meroque / regia non ullis exceptos legibus audet / concubitus' (8:365-66, 397, 401-403). Incest, madness and

effeminacy coalesce as the hallmarks of the Other. All three are perversions of the normal

order, and it is easily believable that someone who is guilty of one could be guilty of all.

Incest, as we have seen, is, like madness, used to denote the unnatural, and to point to a

collapse of 'normal' categories. While a general breaking down of categories occurs

throughout the Civil War, it reaches its nadir in Cleopatra's overturning of gender:

> her rattle terrified the Capitol – can such things be? – she hurled unwarlike
> Canopus against Roman warriors, hoping to head an Egyptian triumph and lead a
> Caesar captive; and by the waters of Leucas it was a question whether the world
> should be ruled by a woman who was not even a Roman.

> terruit illa suo, si fas, Capitolia sistro
> et Romana petit inbelli signa Canopo
> Caesare captivo Pharios ductura triumphos;
> Leucadioque fuit dubius sub gurgite casus,
> an mundum ne nostra quidem matrona teneret. (10:63-67)

As Keith points out, this image neatly reverses the accepted form of the triumph, wherein

a Roman general would lead the feminine image of a conquered country.[41] As a corollary

to Cleopatra's assumed masculinity, Caesar is feminised. He succumbs to the charms of

Cleopatra in a way entirely incompatible with his position as Roman citizen and general:

'he suffered adulterous love to mingle with his anxieties, and combined with war

unlawful wedlock and spurious offspring,' 'perfusus adulter / admisit Venerem curis, et

misuit armis / inlicitosque toros et non ex coniuge partus' (10:74-76). Lucan accuses

Caesar of desiring 'rather [to] give the country to another than conquer it for himself,'

'dum donare Pharon, dum non sibi vincere mavolt': abandoning the masculine role of

conqueror, he submits to a woman's wishes (10:80). The Civil War ends, indeed, with

Caesar forced into an explicitly feminine role:

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[41] Keith, Engendering Rome 89.

now he dreaded the wickedness of slaves, and crouched within walls while
missiles rained upon him… he, for whom the whole Roman world is too small,
who would not be satisfied to rule at once India and Phoenician Gades, seeks
safety within a house, like a defenceless child or a woman when her city is taken;
he relies for his life upon a closed door; he hastens from room to room, wandering
in uncertainty.

expavit servile nefas, intraque penates
obruitur telis...
hic, cui Romani spatium non sufficit orbis,
parvaque regna putet Tyriis cum Gadibus Indos,
ceu puer inbellis, ceu captis femina muris,
quarit tuta domus; spem vitae in limine clauso
ponit, et incerto lustrat vagus atria cursu (10:453-54, 457-60)

The masculine madness of the civil war finally degenerates into a feminine madness:

Caesar is even likened to Medea, the paradigmatic mad*woman*. He is left hiding in his

palace, planning to murder Ptolemy before he himself dies: 'so, we are told, the foreign

woman from Colchis, fearing vengeance for her treason and her flight, waited her father's

coming with her sword in one hand and her brother's head in the other,' 'sic barbara

Colchis / creditur ultorem metuens regnique fugaeque/ ense suo fratrisque simul cervice

parata / expectasse patrem' (10:464-67).

Medea is a powerful figure in the Roman imagination, embodying all that is dangerous

about the uncontrolled female, and especially the mad female. The figure of Medea

haunts the Civil War. Lucan uses her as a benchmark for the power of Thessalian

witchcraft: we are to infer the power of Thessalian herbs by Medea's desire for them: 'the

Colchian stranger gathered on Thessalian soil herbs she had not brought with her across

the sea,' 'terris hospita Colchis / legit in Haemoniis quas non advexerat herbas' (6:441-

42). The mass suicide of Vulteius and his men is compared to the sons of Earth who

'filled the vast furrows with kindred blood, when magic spells had filled them with fury;

and Medea herself was appalled by the first crime which her herbs, untried before, had wrought,' 'terrigenae missa magicis e cantibus ira / cognato tantos inplerunt sanguine sulcos, / ipsaque, inexpertis quod primum fererat herbis, / expavit Medea nefas' (4:553-56). The horror of this self-destruction is heightened because it goes beyond even the blood-lust of Medea. She is the standard by which horror is judged.

Seneca's Medea

The text which most stresses the horrific nature of Medea's crimes is Seneca's Medea. Seneca takes his story from Apollonius of Rhodes' Argonautica, Book VII of the Metamorphoses, and, in all probability, from Ovid's lost play Medea.[42] Medea, like Erictho, is a figure of horror, embodying all that is most feared about women. Seneca's Medea is portrayed in what seem to be expressly maenadic terms, as an unstable mix of female and male, combining 'a woman's evil willingness to dare anything, along with a man's strength,' 'feminea cui nequitia ad audendum omnia, / robur virile est.'[43] However, as Padel comments, 'the worst, strangest thing about Medea is that she is not mad.'[44] Medea is never described as insane in the text: rather, she debates her emotions and decisions in what appears to be a state of relative rationality. The possibility of a woman

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[42] John G. Fitch, Introduction to Medea, Seneca, Tragedies, vol. 1 of 2 vols., ed. and trans. John G. Fitch, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002) 334-42, at 340.

[43] Seneca, Medea, Tragedies, vol. 1 of 2 vols., ed. and trans. John G. Fitch, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002) pp334-433, at lines 267-68. All subsequent references to Medea are from this edition and cited by line number.

[44] Padel 207.

making a rational decision to destroy her husband and children is, perhaps, more horrific than any madwoman could ever be.[45]

Medea evokes the blurring of categories. Granddaughter of the sun, niece of Circe, Medea straddles the human and divine worlds.[46] She is associated with the breaching of boundaries through her link with the *Argo*, the first ship to cross the sea, 'the covenants of this well-separated world / were dragged together by Thessaly's pinewood boat,' 'bene dissaepti foedera mundi / traxit in unum Thessala pinus' (335-36). The sea, as a potentially threatening, empty space conquered by men, is akin to the female. It is characterised by feminine monstrousness, containing both Scylla, 'her womb girt round with rabid dogs,' 'rabidos utero succincta canes,' and the 'dread danger,' 'dirae pestes,' of the Sirens, and the monstrous, terrifying nature of the sea is, in turn, conflated with the monstrous Medea: 'What was the prize gained by this voyage? / The Golden Fleece / and Medea, an evil worse than the sea, / fit merchandise for the first vessel,' 'Quod fuit huius pretium cursus? / aurea pellis / maiusque mari Medea malum, / merces prima digna carina' (351, 355, 361-64).[47]

Medea becomes the locus of anxiety about displacement and the fragility of borders. A figure from the very outskirts of the navigable world, she is Other, alien and therefore

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[45] While Medea's lack of madness might seem to exclude her from this thesis, she remains an important model for female madwomen. Her story is retold by both Chaucer and Gower. See chapter five for a reading of Gower's version.

[46] Ruth Morse, The Medieval Medea (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996) 28.

[47] Helen Fyfe, "An Analysis of Seneca's Medea," Seneca Tragicus: Ramus Essays on Senecan Drama, ed. A J. Boyle (Berwick, Victoria: Aureal, 1983) 77-93, at 87.

threatening.[48] As the embodiment of the barbarous Other, living within Corinth, she

raises, as Sarah Iles Johnston has pointed out, 'the disturbing possibility of *otherness*

lurking within the self – the possibility that the 'normal' carry within themselves the

potential for abnormal behaviour, that the boundaries expected to keep our world safe are

not impermeable.'[49] Her madness is infectious, polluting: Creon orders her to 'leave,

cleanse my kingdom,' 'egredere, purga regna,' and plans 'to eliminate this evil infection

quickly by the sword,' 'abolere propere pessimam ferro luem / equidam parabam' (269,

183-84). She brings the Other into the city: 'every outrage that Phasis or Pontus saw, the

Isthmus will see,' 'quodcumque vidit Phasis aut Pontus nefas, / videbit Isthmos' (44-45).

In fact, she finally negates the possibility of separating self and other: 'All boundaries are

removed, and cities / have established their walls in new lands. / Nothing is left where it

once belonged / by a world open to access,' 'Terminus omnis motus, et urbes / muros

terra posuere nova. / nil qua fuerat sede reliquit / pervius orbis' (369-72).

Indeed, Medea's madness is structured around fragmentation, around the tearing apart of

boundaries. Like a maenad, she is known for the ripping apart of bodies: herself tearing

apart her brother Absyrtus, and tricking his daughters into dismembering Pelias. She even

tears apart her own body: in her prayer to the moon, Medea vows to slice open her skin:

'my blood must flow onto the altar. / Rehearse, my hands, how to draw the steel / and

endure the shedding of your own dear blood,' 'manet noster sanguis ad aras: / assuesce,

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[48] Another similarity between Erictho and Medea is that they are both set apart from civilisation – Erictho dwelling in the wilds of Thessaly; Medea found in barbarous Colchis. It could be argued that Medea's departure from Colchis, and her subsequent reappearance at the heart of the civilised world, makes her even more threatening than Erictho.

[49] Sarah Iles Johnston, Introduction, Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy and Art, ed. James J. Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997) 3-17, at 8.

manus, stringere ferrum / carosque pati posse cruores' (808-810). Medea's madness

seems in fact to stem from the penetration of her own body, from the breaching of bodily

boundaries in marriage and birth:

> Savage, unheard-of, horrible things, evils fearful to heaven and earth alike, my mind stirs up within me: wounds and slaughter and death creeping from limb to limb. But these things I talk about are too slight; I did all of them as a girl. My bitterness must grow more weighty: greater crimes become me now, after giving birth (347-49).

> effera ignota horrida,
> tremenda caelo pariter a terris mala
> mens intus agitat: vulnera et caedem et vagum
> funus per artus. levia memoravi nimis;
> haec virgo feci. gravior exsurgat dolor:
> maiora iam me scelera post partus decent (45-50)

Her own body is the locus of her madness: she offers it to the Furies: 'Drive torches into

my eyes, mutilate me, burn me: see, my breast is open to the Furies,' 'fige luminibus

faces, / lania, perure, pectus en Furiis patet' (965-66). This offering of the body for

penetration balances the original rupture of the body in her loss of virginity to Jason.

Likewise, her final act of murder, the killing of her children, is phrased an act of

reparation for the *sparagmos* of her brother: her guilt is displaced onto the bodies of her

children. The fragmentation of their bodies results in a return to wholeness for Medea's

own body: 'Now in this moment I have recovered my sceptre, brother, father, and the

Colchians hold the spoil of the golden ram. My realm is restored, my stolen maidenhood

restored,' 'Iam iam recepi sceptra germanum patrem, / spoliumque Colchi pecudis

auratae tenent; / rediere regna, rapta virginitas redît' (982-84). The murder of her children

negates her marriage to Jason and the social identity as wife and mother which that

entailed: 'Raise your tear-swollen eyes here, ungrateful Jason. Do you recognise your

wife?' 'lumina huc tumida alleva, / ingrate Iason. coniugem agnoscis tuam?' (1020-21).

Again, wholeness is paradoxically achieved through rupture; she vows to penetrate her body with steel in order to achieve a final bodily integrity, independent from Jason: 'If some love pledge is hiding even now in my mothering body, I shall probe my vitals with the sword, drag it out with steel,' 'in matre si quod pignus etiamnunc latet, / scrutabor ense viscera et ferro extraham' (1012-13).

Medea, then, in her madness, constructs her true identity in opposition to her role as wife and mother:

> Nurse: Medea –
> Medea: I shall become her.
>
> Nutrix: Medea –
> Medea: Fiam. (171)

Through her madness, Medea constructs a new identity outside the patriarchal culture and its expectations of gender roles. Her departure from conventional society is enacted literally by her final escape into heaven, flying away in a chariot pulled by dragons. Medea's entrance into the world of the supernatural acknowledges the impossibility of this new identity within patriarchal culture. Jason implicitly acknowledges this, in the last line of the play, in his assertion that Medea's very existence negates all social order, human or divine: 'bear witness where you ride that there are no gods,' 'testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos' (1027).

Madness in classical texts, then, is used both to reinforce and subvert gender roles. Masculinity may be enhanced by masculinity; femininity disrupted. However, it may be

more complex than this. In the case of Medea, it is the lack of madness which is truly striking. If her deeds were carried out while mad, they might fit into a pattern which conflates women and the irrational. Choosing to kill her children while sane, however, is a total and deliberate negation of her femininity. This points to a larger truth: female madness may provoke women into carrying out deeds which subvert their feminine roles, but itself acts to justify a worldview which sees women as threateningly other, disturbingly unpredictable. As we will see, this is a view of women which emerges again and again in both classical and medieval medical texts.

Chapter Two: Madness in Medical Texts

Medical writing is fundamentally gendered. The body, as Nancy Schemer-Hughes and
Margaret Lock comment, is 'simultaneously a physical and symbolic artefact... both
naturally and culturally produced, and... securely anchored in a particular historical
moment.'[1] Bodies are culturally specific, produced by the society which they inhabit, and
medicine is one of the discourses that gives them meaning. Medical authors construct
bodies as they dissect them. As we will see, the ways in which medical writers think
about bodies are determined by their own gendered identity. This identity is, to an
overwhelming extent, male, as is the body which is the focus of their work. The female
body is largely omitted from medical texts, although, as will become apparent, it returns
in unwelcome ways.

Medieval medical texts are dependent on their classical antecedents, which are
themselves written from a complex gendered background. Flemming divides classical
medical texts into two categories: professional medical texts written by actual physicians,
and texts written in the encyclopaedic tradition by elite Roman men. Medical texts were
the product of a competitive environment, in which physicians' self promotion 'had to be
bigger and better than that of others': 'these are not the utterances of a clearly
demarcated, well-organized, high-status group of recognised experts in a highly regarded
field, but the writings of a somewhat amorphous, unregulated, and fractious group of

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[1] Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," <u>Medical Anthropology Quarterly</u> ns 1.1 (Mar 1987): 6-41, at 7, <u>JSTOR</u>, 10 July 2006 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

questionable standing.'[2] Authors such as Pliny and Celsus, working within the

encyclopaedic tradition, however, belonged to the elite of Roman society. They therefore

had no need to prove their eligibility to speak. Instead, Flemming notes, 'they were

engaged in the exhibition and promulgation of the mastery of the domain of useful

knowledge (of which medical knowledge was an accepted part) that marked the educated

Roman man.'[3] A basic knowledge of medicine was a part of elite masculinity, enabling

one to care for slaves and dependants. Faye Getz comments that these encyclopaedists

found the Greek philosophical medical tradition and its concern with the body 'excessive,

even effeminate.'[4] Pliny, in his <u>Natural History</u>, writes: 'It is certainly true that our

degeneracy, due to medicine more than to anything else, proves daily that Cato was a

genuine prophet and oracle when he stated that it is enough to dip into the works of

Greek brains without making a close study of them,' 'ita est profecto, lues morum, nec

aliunde maior quam e medicina, vatem prorsus cottidie facit Catonem et oraculum: satis

esse ingenia Graecorum inspicere, non perdiscere.'[5]

The medieval medical tradition is a combination of Galenic and Aristotelian theories,

inherited from the Greek and Roman worlds.[6] Until the twelfth-century, Galenic thought

dominated medicine: the so-called 'twelfth-century Renaissance,' however, saw new

Latin translations of Aristotle, as well as the circulation of Arabic works by the thinkers

known to the West as Rhazes, Avicenna and Averroes, which combined Galenic and

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[2] Flemming 59, 78.
[3] Flemming 59.
[4] Faye Getz, <u>Medicine in the English Middle Ages</u> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998) 45.
[5] Pliny, <u>Natural History</u>, vol. 8, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963) bk 29, line 27, cited by Getz 45.
[6] Temkin 121.

Aristotelian theories.[7] The twelfth-century Renaissance also saw the beginning of a shift

from medicine as the preserve of the Church to being a largely secular profession, centred

on the medical schools at Salerno and Montpellier.[8] The medieval texts I examine tend to

combine Aristotelian and Galenic theories. They are largely from the later Middle Ages,

and fall into the category of natural philosophy rather than being strictly medical.

However, there is significant overlap between these categories in the medieval period,

with works such as Albertus Magnus' Quaestiones de animalibus being used as medical

school textbooks. I have also focussed on the more popular texts, those which had a

broader audience than just scholars or medical professionals: those, in short, which have

the greatest chance of finding their way into literary works. Needless to say, this chapter

offers a sample, rather than a comprehensive examination, of medieval medical writings.

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which medical texts construct and are

constructed by gender, and how this gendering affects their representation of madness.

As we have seen, the body is dangerously mutable. In the words of Gower

> [Division] may ferst proeve upon a man;
> The which, for his complexioun
> Is mad upon divisioun
> Of cold, of hot, of moist, of drye,
> He mot be verray kinde dye:
> For the contraire of his astat /
> Stant evermore in such debat,
> Til that o part be overcome,
> Ther may no final pes be nome.
> Bot other wise, if a man were
> Mad al togedre of o matiere
> Withouten interrupcioun,
> Ther sholde no corrupcioun

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[7] Nancy G. Siraisi, Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990) 12.
[8] Siraisi 13-14.

> Engendre upon that unite:
> Bot for ther is diversite
> Withinne himself, he may noght laste,
> That he ne deieth ate laste.[9]

The body, then, is a source of constant anxiety. It is liable to turn on one, to corrupt,

decay, collapse. Because diseases originate from disturbances within the body, the body

can only ever achieve a precariously balanced health. It is vulnerable to the slightest

variation in circumstances, and can swiftly collapse into chaos. Thomas Elyot's

commentary on melancholy demonstrates the fine balance that must be kept within the

body:

> the natural melancoly kepte in his temperance, profyteth moche to true iugement
> of the wyt, but yet if it be to thicke, it darkeneth the spirites, maketh one timorous,
> and the wytte dulle. If it be myxte with fleume, it mortifieth the bloude with to
> moche cold. Wherfore it may not be so littell that the bloud and spirites in their
> feruentnes, be as it were vnbridlyd, wherof do happen vnstablenesse of witte and
> slipper remembraunce: not yet so moche, that by the weight therof (for it is heuy,
> approchynge nyghe to the erthe) that we seme to be alwaye in sleape, and nede a
> spurre to prycke vs forwarde.[10]

Possession of a rational mind depends on an inherently unstable balance within one's

body. The weakness of the body, and its capacity for undermining rationality, is a

persistent theme in medieval writing.

Even in cases in which the body is meant to be a stable, unalterable construct, there is a

disturbing amount of slippage. Specifically, the body cannot be counted on to produce

gender. Trevisa's attempt to catalogue bodily proofs of masculinity demonstrates the

problematic nature of the male body. In his writing on the beard, 'þe hi3tnes and þe

ornament of mannes face... [and] token of vertue,' Trevisa confidently asserts that as a

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[9] John Gower, Confessio Amantis, The English Works of John Gower, ed. G. C. Macaulay, vol. 1 of 2
vols., EETS e.s. 81-82 (London: Kegan Paul, 1900-1901) Prologue, lines 974-90.
[10] Elyot fol. 73.

beard is a sign of bodily heat, and, as 'a man is kyndeliche more hoote þan a womman,' it

is thus 'a certeyn assay to knowe differens bytwene men and wymmen.'[11] This certainty,

however, is immediately undermined. As it turns out, facial hair is not linked directly to

gender:

> somtyme wymmen of hote and moist complexioun hauen berdes. And a3enwardis, men of colde and drye complexioun hauen litil berdes. þerfore in men þat ben igelded growiþ no berd, for þey hauen ilost þe hattest membre þat schulde brede þe hote humour and smoke þat is þe matere of heer.

Leaving aside the complex issue of beards, Trevisa locates masculinity in the testicles.

However, this poses its own problems. If the testicles are removed, masculinity is

suddenly lost:

> And oþir membres bene grounde and foundament of þe vertue of gendringe, as þe ballockes þat hatte *testiculi* in latyn, dyminutif of *tistibus* "witnesses."... wiþoute witnes of hem is no parfite man.... And 3if þey bene ikutte of, mannes strengþe passiþ and manly complexioun chongiþ into femel complexioun... alle þe heres of þe body falleþ away, and bycomeþ as it were wommenische, neische and feble of herte and of body.... þe voys of men whanne þey bene igelded chaungiþ and beþ as voys of wommen.[12]

We find another instance of this gender fluidity, although in this case reversed, in the

Golden Legend. Galla has been recently widowed, and decides to devote the rest of her

life to Christ, and to chastity:

> Galla, however, was a very hot-blooded woman, and her doctors told her that unless she gave herself again to the embraces of a husband, the excessive internal heat would cause her to grow a beard, unnatural as that would be. This actually happened, but she felt no concern about the external deformity because she loved inner beauty more, nor did she fear that if the beard made her ugly her heavenly spouse would not love her. She therefore put off her secular attire and entered the monastery attached to the church of St Peter...

> Huic autem cum valde ignea conspersio corporis inesset, coeperunt medici dicere, quia, nisi ad amplexus viri rediret, calore nimio contra naturam barbam habitura esset. Quod ita post factum est: sed illa nihil exterius deformitatis timuit, quod

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[11] Trevisa 1:196.
[12] Trevisa 1:261.

> interiorem speciem amavit, nec verita est, si hoc in ea foedaretur, quod a coelesti sponso non amaretur. Abjecto igitur saeculari habitu apud ecclesiam sancti Petri monasterio se dedit...[13]

The body, clearly, is tricky: no reliable guide to either masculinity or femininity. Notions of gender are never absolute, but always open to contest.

Contested ideas of masculinity are central to medical writing from the start, just as the male body is itself central to classical ideals of masculinity. Masculinity depends on an intact body, a body whose boundaries are strictly controlled. The elite Roman man, or *vir*, was expected to maintain strict bodily integrity. Penetration equals feminisation. Jonathan Walters notes that 'social status was characterized on the basis of perceived bodily integrity and freedom, or the lack of it, from invasion on the outside.'[14] Bodily integrity, as defined by Walters, is not just about freedom from sexual penetration, but also from being beaten. Beating is 'one of a number of assaults on the body that, by their invasive quality, are intrinsically demeaning.'[15]

If control over one's body determines masculinity, then illness is a definite threat. As Flemming notes, disease posed 'a particular challenge to self-mastery, if not to signal that it has already become unstuck and is in need of restoration, like the health of the patient

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[13] Jacobus de Voragine, <u>The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints</u>, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993) 1:349; Jacobus Voragine, <u>Legenda Aurea</u>, ed. Th. Graesse (Dresden, 1846) 378. This story is not contained in Caxton's edition. The confusion here about the 'unnatural' yet clearly naturally-occurring beard growth is something which often recurs in medical texts, particularly on occasions when medical theory contradicts social and gender roles. This extract also points to an anxiety about sexual activity, and the role which this plays in health: something I shall explore in detail later in the chapter.

[14] Walters 30.

[15] Walters 37.

itself.'[16] Self-mastery is central to Roman masculinity: a man must be able to control

every aspect of his life, most especially his body. The male body, when succumbing to

disease, becomes uncontrolled. Dale Martin, in relation to male menstruation, another

issue which threatens the ideology of Roman masculinity, sums up the dilemma of the

Roman male:

> Although the cultural construction of "the male" was on the surface sturdy and monolithic, particular men could never be sure their bodies would live up to that construction. *The male* was secure; but *men* were not. Particular men were caught in a contradiction within the system of ancient masculinity. By definition they could not menstruate; their bodies had to be completely sufficient and efficient. But they knew that their bodies could at any moment betray them by a feminine excess that their wills were powerless to contain.[17]

Ideas of control were central to Roman masculinity; the corollary of bodily integrity was

individual autonomy. As Richard Alston notes, 'the ideal man should be legally,

financially and personally autonomous. Once that autonomy was threatened... one's

status as a *vir* was also threatened.'[18] Craig Williams adds:

> According to the conceptualisations of masculinity prevalent in the Roman textual tradition, a real man is in control of his own desires, fears, and passions, and he exercises dominion over others and their bodies. An effeminate man cedes control and is dominated, whether by his own desires and fears or by others' bodies.[19]

Masculinity is thus conceived of, paradoxically, as being both innate to the male body

and performative. 'Masculinity was still thought to be grounded in "nature," yet it

remained fluid and incomplete until firmly anchored by the discipline of an acculturative

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[16] Flemming 66.

[17] Dale B. Martin, "Contradictions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Culture," <u>Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe</u>, ed. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001) 81-108, at 104-105. The fraught issue of male menstruation, by which is meant bleeding from the nose or anus, is yet another gender-blurring anomaly, and one which I will consider later in the chapter.

[18] Richard Alston, "Arms and the Man: Soldiers, Masculinity and Power in Republican and Imperial Rome," <u>When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity</u>, ed. Lin Foxhall and John Salmon, Leicester-Nottingham Studies in Ancient Society 8 (London: Routledge, 1998) 205-23, at 206-207.

[19] Williams, <u>Roman Homosexuality</u> 153.

process.'[20] As a result, 'manhood was not a state to be definitively and irrefutably

achieved, but something always under construction and constantly open to scrutiny.'[21] In

a culture in which masculinity depends on a rigorous maintenance of rationality and

control, madness dramatically undermines manliness. The mad man is a liminal figure,

something other than fully male. Indeed, in his irrationality and lack of control, he is open

to being read as feminine.[22]

Flemming depicts the vulnerability of the elite Roman man during illness, his need to

place himself under the control of his doctor, and thus forfeit his masculine autonomy.

She describes the ways in which elite medical texts negotiate this unmanly submission to

one's doctor, figuring this voluntary abnegation of control as a type of self-control. While

Flemming concludes that the role of patient 'appears less a challenge to, than a privilege

of, maleness,' this is surely true only of physical disease.[23] Madness, defined by a lack of

rational control, is another matter. If disease itself is potentially unmanning, then

madness raises the possibility of a complete loss of masculinity. Even in those cases in

which madness is transient, the madman loses his ability to control himself. Those with

longer lasting forms of madness, such as mania, relinquish their bodies to the control of

others. The recommendation of Celsus in his De medicina, that in some cases of madness

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[20] Gleason 81.
[21] Gleason xxii.
[22] Given that madness is usually regarded as transient, any femininity which accompanies it is equally temporary. However short-lived, such gender fluidity still has an effect on masculine identity, as we will see in Hoccleve's Complaint.
[23] Flemming 74.

the patient be 'coerced by starvation, fetters and flogging,' 'fame, vinculis, plagis

coercendus est,' is typical.[24]

While masculinity 'meant being in control, both of oneself and others... femininity meant

ceding control.'[25] Both lack of control and irrationality are characterised as feminine. In

the Timaeus, Plato describes his bipartite soul in just such gendered terms:

> And within the chest – or 'thorax,' as it is called – [the gods] fastened the mortal
> kind of soul. And inasmuch as one part thereof is better, and one worse, they built
> a division within the cavity of the thorax – *as if to face off two separate chambers,*
> *for men and for women* – by placing the midriff between them as a screen [my
> italics].[26]

The midriff thus separates that part of the soul 'which partakes of courage and spirit,'

from the part of the soul 'which is subject to appetite for food and drinks, and all the

other wants that are due to the nature of the body.'[27] This appetitive soul

> they planted in the parts midway between the midriff and the boundary at the
> naval, fashioning as it were a manger in all this region for the feeding of the body;
> and there they tied up this part of the Soul, as though it were a creature which,
> though savage, they must necessarily keep joined to the rest and feed, if the
> mortal stock were to exist at all.[28]

The female part of the soul, then, while necessary, is bestial and lustful, characterised by

its insatiable appetites. Rationality is the preserve of men; irrationality the hallmark of

women. Plato says that the 'female' soul is placed in the lower parts of the body

> in order... that this part, feeding thus at its manger and housed as far away as
> possible from the counselling part, and creating the least possible turmoil and din,
> should allow the Supreme part to take counsel in peace concerning what benefits
> all, both individually and in the mass, - for these reasons they stationed it in that

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[24] Celsus, De medicina, trans. W. G. Spencer, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann;
Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1935-38) vol. 1, bk. 3, ch. 18.
[25] Williams 137.
[26] Plato, Timaeus, Plato IX, trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1929)
181. While the Timaeus did circulate in Latin translation during the Middle Ages, this passage is omitted.
[27] Plato, Timaeus 181-83.
[28] Plato, Timaeus 183.

position.... they knew that it would not understand reason, and that, even if it did have some share in the perception of reasons, it would have no natural instinct to pay heed to any of them but would be bewitched for the most part both day and night by images and phantasms.[29]

The 'female' soul, characterised by irrationality and with no 'natural instinct' for reason, produces meaningless noise, 'turmoil and din.' The Supreme, 'male' soul, in contrast, is supremely rational. The irrationality of the 'female' soul is, in fact, strikingly similar to madness. It does not understand reason, and is 'bewitched' by 'images and phantasms.' As we shall see, these are the terms used to describe madmen.

Plato's very insistence upon rationality as constitutive of masculinity perhaps betrays an unease about the possibility of its loss. In his discussion of divination, (itself a form of madness), Plato states that the insights of divination cannot be achieved by the rational man, 'but only when the power of his intelligence is fettered in sleep or when it is distraught by disease or by reason of some divine inspiration.'[30] Rationality, then, by Plato's own assessment, is not a continuous state of being: it is interspersed with periods in which a man is open to the irrational. Plato's anxiety about the power of irrationality leads him, rather than celebrating the diviner, to valorise instead those who interpret such visions. Such frenzied inspiration is only valid when interpreted by a rational mind, for 'it is not the task of him who has been in a state of frenzy, and still continues therein, to judge the apparitions and voices seen or uttered by himself.'[31] Irrationality, however powerful, must be kept in check by rational man.

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[29] Plato, Timaeus 183-85.
[30] Plato, Timaeus 187.
[31] Plato, Timaeus 187. The notion of inspiration as a type of madness is not something which is particularly medieval, although it does recur in the Renaissance. I will not, however, consider it in this study.

The normative body for Plato is strictly masculine: female bodies are entirely elided. Women are defined as what men are not. In a later passage explaining the origins of the sexes, Plato asserts that 'all those creatures generated as men who proved themselves cowardly and spent their lives in wrong-doing were transformed, at their second incarnation, into women.'[32] The female is introduced into the text only in order to be dismissed. Madness in the Timaeus is phrased in terms of a falling away from reason; women have no reason from which to fall.

Close contact with women is, then, a locus for the anxieties which surround masculinity. In a culture in which self-control is prized, the violence of sexual urges is deeply troubling. It disturbs what Peter Brown has called the 'time-worn polarity between "male" self-control and its opposite, a convulsive violence, associated with a "womanish" lack of self-restraint.'[33] In the Timaeus, Plato stresses man's subjection to his body: 'in men the nature of the genital organs is disobedient and self-willed, like a creature that is deaf to reason, and it attempts to dominate all because of its frenzied lusts.'[34] Men themselves are not irrational – rather, they are the victims of their penises: 'the wicked man becomes wicked by reason of some evil condition of body and unskilled nurture, and these are experiences which are hateful to everyone and involuntary.'[35] The body undermines rationality, and hence self-control.

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[32] Plato, Timaeus 249.
[33] Peter Brown, The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity, 1989 (London: Faber, 1990) 12.
[34] Plato, Timaeus 249.
[35] Plato, Timaeus 235.

Indeed, the orgasm, the point at which the body escapes the control of the will, can be likened to madness. Peter Brown writes that, in classical thought,

> successful intercourse was a convulsive act, little different in its cause and physical effects from a sudden burst of rage. It bore a dread resemblance to the falling sickness: orgasm was a "minor epilepsy." Did not the very mouth of the epileptic also froth with the same bubbling, whitened blood as did the penis?[36]

Sex and madness continue to be inextricably intertwined in early Christian writing. Sex, for the Church Fathers, entails a loss of rational control akin to insanity. Sexual desire is a potent reminder of the inability of the will entirely to suppress bodily desires. This inability, in medieval theology, is linked to original sin. Before the Fall, the human body was perfectly balanced, and because of this there was no possibility of illness or death. The disobedience of Adam and Eve, however, brought disorder into Paradise. The body became the fragile, unbalanced, vulnerable construct which we see in medical texts. Irrationality reigned.

It was the sexual organs that most embodied this irrational state. Dyan Elliott comments that 'from the time of Augustine, the genitals' noncompliance with the will was the most compelling example of the postlapsarian body's revolt against reason.'[37] Pierre Payer elaborates:

> There is a radical dislocation in the human constitution resulting from original sin, a tendency for desires to rebel against reason in the pursuit of their own independent ends. This lack of harmony is particularly true of sexual desire, symbolised in the absence of rational and voluntary control over the genitals. The challenge and imperative for everyone born after Adam is to attempt to re-establish and maintain rational control over the lower appetites, under God.[38]

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[36] Brown 18.

[37] Dyan Elliott, Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages, Middle Ages Ser. (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999) 35.

[38] Pierre J. Payer, The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993) 132.

This dynamic especially applies to men, as Elliott explains:

> This paradigm of unruliness was supposed to pertain to both sexes. But since Augustine's observations were apparently based on the genitals' irrational movements, and were therefore more evocative of phallic folly, the female instance was very much at the margin of his concerns.[39]

This firmly links sex and madness. Indeed, Augustine, in the <u>City of God</u>, describes orgasm as a negation of thought. His account of sexual desire parallels descriptions of illness 'asserting power over the body':

> this lust asserts its power not only over the entire body, nor only externally, but also from within. It convulses all of a man when the emotion in his mind combines and mingles with the carnal drive to produce a pleasure unsurpassed among those of the body. The effect of this is that at the very moment of its climax there is an almost total eclipse of acumen and, as it were, sentinel alertness.

> haec... sibi non solum totum corpus nec solum extrinsecus verum etiam intrinsecus vindicat totumque commovet hominem, animi simul affectu cum carnis appetitu coniuncto atque permixto, ut ea voluptas sequatur qua maior in corporis voluptatibus nulla est, ita ut momento ipso temporis quo ad eius pervenitur extremum paene omnis acies et quasi vigilia cogitationis obruatur.[40]

Sex, then, is deeply problematic. Conceived of as a point at which the rational will is subsumed by the body, it holds the potential to both undermine and, since a vigorous sex life is associated with secular masculinity in both classical and Christian cultures, confirm masculinity.

Fear of sexual activity stems from classical times. Classical authors believed that discharge of semen could directly affect the brain. Martin points out that, in Galen's writing, 'semen is associated with the brain, strength, and power, but also danger (its

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[39] Elliott, <u>Fallen Bodies</u> 35.

[40] Augustine, <u>The City of God Against the Pagans</u>, trans. Philip Levine, vol. 4, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1966) bk. 14, ch. 16, pp. 352-53.

activities are hard to predict or control), it becomes connected to insanity.'[41] Martin continues: 'the ancients consistently assumed a direct physiological connection between the genitals/anus and the head. Diseases or cures in one region necessarily affected the other.'[42] Thus the brain, the seat of rationality, can be overthrown by the lower organs. Martin comments that 'for some theorists, an excess of semen may cause insanity; for others, its ejaculation prefigures insanity.'[43] Gonorrhoea (involuntary discharge of semen) is linked to epilepsy, while retention of semen can cause illness and even mental disturbance.[44] As Galen illustrates:

> I... knew of a man who refrained from sexual pleasure because of grief for his wife. Since he had previously enjoyed intercourse quite frequently, he became nauseated, could hardly digest the little food he consumed and evidently, if he forced himself to eat more, promptly vomited. He became despondent neither for this reason nor for any other obvious cause, as do melancholic patients. This condition subsided, however, as soon as he took up his earlier habits.[45]

Plato ascribes madness explicitly to an excess of semen:

> whenever a man's seed grows to abundant volume in his marrow, as it were a tree that is overladen beyond measure with fruit, he brings on himself time after time many pangs and many pleasures owing to his desires and the issue thereof, and comes to be in a state of madness for the most part of his life because of those greatest of pleasures and pains, and keeps his soul diseased and senseless by reason of the action of his body.[46]

Sex is necessary to rid oneself of excess semen. According to Galen, women also have a store of semen that needs to be purged. Widows, especially, are prone to disease through retention of semen: 'a widow could have her monthly flow but retention of troublesome

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[41] Martin 92-93.
[42] Martin 101.
[43] Martin 92-93.
[44] Galen, On the Affected Parts, trans. Rudolph E. Siegel (Basel: Karger, 1976) 193.
[45] Galen, On the Affected Parts 184.
[46] Plato, Timaeus 235.

and damaging semen can still occur.'[47] Galen compares the effect of retained semen to that of a scorpion bite, or a deadly poison:

> When... an affection involving our body originates inside and resembles the effect of the administration of a dangerous poison, then it is not astonishing that an abnormally composed semen or an equally abnormal menstrual discharge produces serious symptoms by stagnation or putrefaction in persons susceptible to such diseases.[48]

While classical authors are concerned about problems caused by a lack of sex, medieval anxieties focus, in contrast, on the consequences of excessive sex. Borde acknowledges that the urge for sex is seemingly inescapable, 'naturally euery male desyreth copulacion to his make.'[49] However, sex is dangerous: 'and furthermore I do say *Qui multum coiunt diu viuere non possunt* [Those who often have sexual intercourse cannot live long], for it dothe ingender diuers infyrmytes.'[50] Sex, in drawing off the vital sperma, dries out the male body.

The theory that sex directly affects the brain is put forward by the tradition, persisting throughout the Middle Ages, which attributes the origin of semen to the brain.[51] Aristotle states that:

> of all the regions in the head the eyes are the most seminal, as is proved by the fact that this is the only region which unmistakeably changes its appearance during sexual intercourse, and those who over frequently indulge in it have noticeably sunken eyes. The reason is that the nature of the semen is similar to that of the brain; its matter is watery whereas its heat is a mere supplementary acquisition.[52]

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[47] Galen, On the Affected Parts 185.
[48] Galen, On the Affected Parts 186.
[49] Borde, Breviary fol. xxxvi back.
[50] Borde, Breviary fol. xxxvii.
[51] Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity, 1988) 53.
[52] Aristotle, Generation of Animals, trans. A. L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1943) 747a.

In the thirteenth century, Albertus Magnus asserts 'that sperm came... from the principal

members, and especially from the brain, whose substance, in its whiteness, softness and

moistness, corresponded to that of semen,' 'ideo ab illis partibus magis derivatur sperma

et maxime a cerebro, quia cerebrum est album et molle et humidum, et in hoc convenit

cum substantia spermatis.'[53] An anonymous commentator on the <u>Secretis mulierum</u>, an

immensely popular misogynist text written in the late-thirteenth or early-fourteenth

century and attributed in the Middle Ages to Albertus Magnus, states confidently that:

> the humour in the cerebrum is attracted through the veins and sent to the testicles
> and ejected through the male penis, for, as Hippocrates says, whoever has
> unusually small veins behind the ears will not be able to generate.[54]

All models, classical and medieval, involve a movement of semen beyond the boundaries

which usually contain it. In the classical model semen, not being expelled in the 'natural'

manner during sex, builds up and spills over into the body, causing madness. In the

medieval model, in contrast, it is the loss of semen in sex, breaching the boundaries of the

body, which can cause insanity.[55]

Maintenance of bodily boundaries is an important trope in both classical and Christian

writings.[56] Self-control is a prerequisite for public office, and this includes a strict control

over the emission of bodily fluids. Nocturnal emission, occurring outside conscious

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[53] Albertus Magnus, <u>Quaestiones super de animalibus</u>, <u>Opera Omnia</u> XII (Monasterii Westfalorum: Aschendorff, 1955) p. 268 (15:14); trans. Jacquart and Thomasset 55.

[54] Commentator B, <u>Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's</u> De Secretis Mulierum <u>with Commentaries</u>, ed. and trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay, SUNY Ser. in Medieval Studies (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1992) 62. This commentary only exists in certain editions of the <u>Secretis mulierum</u>, and was unavailable for consultation at the time of writing.

[55] As we will see, the same paradigm governs menstrual blood, which causes madness either by moving through the woman's body or by infecting others once released from the body.

[56] This is, however, expressed in different ways depending on the genre of text, and the type of masculinity which is being described. In religious texts, while nocturnal emission is a mark of sinfulness, shedding blood and tears, for example, can be valorised as imitative of Christ.

control, is a particular concern.[57] Leyser examines the equation made in Christian texts

between ability to maintain bodily boundaries and to wield power: the 'flow of semen at

night may symbolize the uses of power – its fluidity and control.'[58] This is an equation

which continues in one form or another throughout the Middle Ages. Within the medical

encyclopaedias, the weakness of the mind is often demonstrated by the disturbing

phenomenon of nocturnal emissions: 'whan nature doth depart agaynst a mannes wyll the

which dothe come to a man thorow imbecyllyte and wekenes of the body.'[59] This kind of

involuntary pollution (as Borde terms it) may not be classed as a sin, but it is a disturbing

reminder that the body defies rational control.

Madness and Speech

As we will see, the flow of semen is often equated to the flow of speech. Conrad Leyser

examines the matrix of meanings constructed around the Latin '*fluxus*,' which can refer

interchangeably to the flux of desire, speech, or bodily fluid.[60] Leyser cites Gregory the

Great's assertions that 'an ascetic who has control over his "verbal emission" is a man

who can claim to be more trustworthy than his less guarded fellows': excessive speech is

as disturbing as excessive semen.[61] Uncontrolled speech is itself symptomatic of

madness. Trevisa comments on melancholics that 'suche holdeþ here pes whanne þey

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[57] See for example Elliott, <u>Fallen Bodies</u> 27; Conrad Leyser, <u>Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great</u>, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000) 50-51.

[58] C. Leyser, "Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emission and the Limits of Celibacy in the Early Middle Ages," <u>Masculinity in Medieval Europe</u>, ed. D. M. Hadley, Women and Men in Hist. (London: Longman, 1999), 103-20, at 110. For a fuller discussion of nocturnal emissions, see chapter three.

[59] Borde, <u>Breviary</u> fol. cxi.

[60] Leyser, "Masculinity in Flux" 111.

[61] Leyser, "Masculinity in Flux" 111.

schulde speke, and speke to moche whanne þey schulde be stille and holde here pees.'[62]

He adds that 'Somtyme lesinge of speche comeþ by lesinge of witte, as in frenesye and litergye.'[63] Elyot cites 'sodayn incotinencie of the tongue' as a sure sign of madness.[64] Descriptions of mad behaviour, such as Trevisa's account of men believing themselves cocks, stress an inability to produce coherent speech: 'þey rereþ vp here armes and crowiþ… and at þe laste þey ben hoos for grete cryenge and doumbiþ.'[65] Moreover, even the speech of those recovered from madness may not be trusted. One of Hoccleve's main complaints is that after recovering from madness he is not listened to by his former friends: instead, they shun him, refusing to accept his account of his sanity.

This treatment is particularly galling as rational speech holds a fundamental place in medieval theories of masculinity. It distinguishes men from women, who are characterised by gossip and inconsequential chatter. The sixth-century encyclopaedist Isidore of Seville defines foolishness as an inability to comprehend or use speech correctly:

> A fool (*fatuus*) is thought to be so called because he understands neither what he says (*fari* third person *fatur*) himself nor what others say. Some think that the term "fool" derives originally from admirers of Fatua, the prophesying wife of Faunus, and that they were first called *fatuus* because they were immoderately stupefied by her prophecies, to the point of madness.
>
> Fatuus ideo existimatur dictus, quia neque quod fatur ipse, neque quod alii dicunt intellegit. Fatuos origine duci quidam putant a miratoribus Fatuae, Fauni uxoris fatidicae, eosque primum fatuous appellatos, quod praeter modum obstupefacti sunt vaticiniis illius usque ad amentiam.[66]

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[62] Trevisa 1:161.
[63] Trevisa 1:207.
[64] Elyot fol. 73.
[65] Trevisa 1:162.
[66] Isidore of Seville, Etimologías: Edicion Bilingüe, ed. Jose Oroz Reta and Manuel-a. Marcos Casquero, 2 vols. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982-83) 10.F.103; trans. Stephen A. Barney et. al. as The 'Etymologies' of Isidore of Seville (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 219.

In its essence, this is an inability to fit into the nexus of speech that defines masculinity.

Foolishness is also linked, in its very origins, to a belief in the speech of women. Not

only is the fool unable to negotiate the world of masculine speech, but also he is unable to

distinguish this worthwhile speech from the meaningless chatter of a woman. This,

Isidore notes, is madness.

Speech is particularly important to Isidore. The fundamental premise of his Etymologies

is that truth inheres in words. Correct use of speech is inalienably associated with

masculinity.

> One ought to speak in good Latin, and clearly, for he speaks in good Latin who
> persistently seeks the true and natural words for things, nor does he diverge from
> the speech and culture of the present time. It is not enough for such a man to
> watch what he says, unless he says it openly and smoothly; and more than that,
> his actions must match his words.
>
> Latine autem loquitur, qui verba rerum vera et naturalia persequitur, nec a
> sermone atque cultu praesentis temporis discrepat. Huic non sit satis videre quid
> dicat, nisi id quoque aperte et suaviter dicere; ne id quidem tantum, nisi id quod
> dicat et facere.[67]

Here, too, speech acts as an extension of the body, and is thus potentially sexual: 'the

pure and chaste speech of an orator should be without all faults, as much in letters as in

words, and indeed in expressions (*sententia*),' 'purum et honestum oratoris eloquium

carere debet omnibus vitiis tam in litteris, quam in verbis, quam etiam in sententiis.'[68]

Both body and speech must be chaste, controlled.

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[67] Isidore 2.16.2, trans. Barney 74.
[68] Isidore 2.19.1, trans. Barney 75

Indeed, madness often occurs at the point at which masculinity is threatened. The experience of madness undermines one's gender role. Melancholy, in particular, is primarily characterised by fear: 'þe pacient is faynt and ferdful in herte withoute cause.'[69] This is worrying; excessive fear undermines masculinity. The Book of Quinte Essence, a fifteenth-century text promoting the alchemical elixir known as the 'quinte essence,' ('þat hermys þe prophete and kyng of Egipt, after the flood of Noe, fadir of philosophris, hadde by reuelacioun of an aungil of god'), cites cowardice as one of the (astonishingly many) diseases that can be cured by the miraculous properties of the essence.[70] Here, cowardice is a 'sijknesse' that can be cured in much the same way as 'frenesye,' 'woodnes' or even 'vexaciouns of deuelis.'[71] All one needs to do is follow the recipe given in the text

> and aftir sodeynly; as it were by myracle, þe coward man schal lese al maner drede and feyntnes of herte, and he schal recouere strenkþe þat ys lost by drede, and take to him hardynesse, and he schal dispise deeþ; he schal drede no perelis, and passyngly he schal be maad hardy.[72]

The cowardly man becomes an acceptably masculine man once more.

The connection between madness and anxieties about identity may account for the form of the delusions attributed to madmen, which typically centre on bodily disorder. An enumeration of the fears and beliefs of the insane is a common feature of medical writings. These fears comprise a set of stock delusions that are cited by nearly every writer on madness since Galen. They tell us more about expectations of mad behaviour,

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[69] Trevisa 1:161.
[70] The Book of Quinte Essence or the Fifth Being: That is to say, Man's Heaven. Ed. from the Sloane MS. 73. ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, rev. ed., EETS os 16 (London: Trübner, 1889) 1.
[71] Book of Quinte Essence 23, 22, 17.
[72] Book of Quinte Essence 23.

therefore, than they do about the lived experience of insanity. The delusions of madmen,

as traditionally listed in medical texts, focus around the body.

Neely notes that these delusions

> involve male fantasies that encode anxieties about body configurations and boundaries, accompanied by grandiose notions of physical size (a man who believes his nose is huge) or responsibility (a man who thinks Atlas will pass on the world to him). The comic sufferers are terrified of bodily distortion or penetration: men imagine they are made of glass and will break, of earthenware and will dissolve, of butter and will melt, or that they have massively long noses, are crowing cocks, or have had their heads and arms taken away.[73]

The inner disorder of madness is reflected in images of outer disorder, of bodily

disruption: 'somme weneþ þat þey haue none heedes, and somme þat þey haue leden

hedes or asse hedis or som oþir weyes euel ischape.'[74] Melancholics fear fragmentation

or bodily dissolution. Trevisa notes that 'some trowiþ þat þey beþ erþene vessellis and

dredeþ to be touchid lest þey beþ ibroke.'[75] There is a constant anxiety here, a concern for

the fragility of the body. Bodies are misshapen, bestial, invariably threatened:

> somme weneþ þat an aungel holdeþ vp þe worlde and wolde forwery late þe worlde falle, and þerfore þey heueþ vp here hondes and schuldres to holde vp þe worlde þat hem semeþ is in point to falle; and breideþ strongliche and streyneþ if fisicians makeþ hem holde doun here hondes.[76]

As Neely notes, a concern about holding up the world suggests a certain anxiety about

one's capabilities. All these fantasies, in fact, can be directly related to the strains of

medieval masculinity.

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[73] Neely, <u>Distracted Subjects</u> 77.
[74] Trevisa 1:162.
[75] Trevisa 1:161-62.
[76] Trevisa 1:162.

Another commonly cited delusion features a loss of humanity entirely. As we have seen, madmen often possess the belief that they are cockerels.[77] As Chaucer's depiction of Chaunticleer in the <u>Nun's Priest's Tale</u> suggests, cocks, characterised by their belligerence and aggressive sexuality, are frequently used as icons of masculinity. Their frequent appearance in the list of delusions, then, suggests a close connection between the pressures of masculinity and madness.

It seems that there is an anxiety attached to the male body, a sense that a man is vulnerable at precisely those points which make him masculine. Men are identified, and made superior to women, by their greater strength and rationality, and in their active, penetrative role in procreation. The two organs that might be thought to define men, therefore, are the brain and the genitals. The use of both, however, is seemingly fraught with danger. Compulsory heterosexuality, in particular, is an area of deep anxiety. As we will see, madness in romance occurs when the protagonists are trapped between homosocial and heterosexual roles, when their masculine status is thrown into crisis as a result of their sexual relations with a woman. Sex drains a man's vital essence, leaving him weak and prone to disease. The requirement to have sex in order to be manly coexists with a sense of sexual vulnerability, of the male body being at risk during sex. Similarly, excessive use of the brain in studying or thinking 'grete þou3tes of sorwe' can also lead to madness.[78] Ironically, over-exercise of one's rational faculty can make one irrational.

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[77] See, for example, Trevisa 1:162.
[78] Trevisa 1:350.

Femininity in Medical Texts

While the male body is envisaged as strictly controlled and contained – so much that the

possibility of its permeability is the stuff of delusion – its female counterpart is a very

different proposition. As we have seen, the female body is characterised by a superfluity

of fluids: menstruation, milk, lochial fluid.[79] As Martin notes, it is defined by its excess:

> Heat is generally considered male, and cold female. The male body is dry; the
> female moist. The male is compact and dense; the female porous. The male body
> is efficient; it properly uses up its fuel and so has no need to expel any excess on a
> regular basis. In contrast, the female body is a location of surfeit and excess,
> signified in its need to slough off excess blood and semen every month.[80]

Heinrich von Staden comments that the female body in Celsus' <u>De medicina</u> is 'weaker,

more labile, and bloodier than the male body; in Celsian taxonomy it belongs

categorically among the susceptible *inbecili* rather than the *sani*; it is softer and more

loosely arranged or structured than the male body.'[81] As von Staden notes, blood in

particular is central to Celsus' conception of the female body. It is the movement of blood

around the body which determines health and, more importantly, reproductive health.

Women bleed more than men do under similar circumstances. However, von Staden

points out, 'since she is bloodier than the male, the woman is both more threatened by

excessive blood and less endangered by a loss of blood.'[82] Fortunately, monthly

menstruation means that blood is regularly expelled from the female body. Women who

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[79] Hanson 317.
[80] Martin 82.
[81] Heinrich von Staden, "*Apud nos foediora verba*: Celsus' Reluctant Construction of the Female Body," <u>Le latin médical: La constitution d'un langage scientifique</u>, ed. Guy Sabbah, Mémoires 10 (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1991) 271-96, at 272-73.
[82] von Staden 274.

fail to menstruate, however, risk blood moving around the body and collecting in body parts, leading to a variety of illnesses, including insanity. [83]

Women do not have the intact body of men; in fact, they are defined by their perviousness, their ability to be penetrated. Women are associated with penetration to such an extent that men who experience sexual penetration are commonly described as *muliebria pati*, 'having a woman's experience.'[84] Indeed, the female body is viewed almost entirely in a sexual and reproductive context. The reproductive organs are used as a synecdoche for the body itself. Maud Gleason comments that 'women's reproductive organs are analogous to the organs of (men's) speech': thus, 'menstruation and intercourse were sometimes conceived as the feminine counterparts to masculine speech and physical activity.'[85]

The linking of different parts of the body, particularly those at the top and bottom of the body, is an integral factor of classical medicine. Flemming states that: 'diseases are only poorly localised, and even when they are organically anchored... somatic disruption diffuses outwards from these focal points, transmitted by the movement of bodily fluids and pneumata, by the vascular and nervous networks, and by the contiguity and mutual resemblance of various organs.'[86] Thus, organs have sympathetic connections with each other, and one organ can be affected by changes to another part of the body. In women, for example, the genitals and neck/throat mirror each other. Ann Ellis Hanson notes the

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[83] von Staden 273.
[84] Walters 30.
[85] Gleason 97.
[86] Flemming 106.

convention linking 'widening of the "neck below" and sympathetic widening of the "neck above"': defloration causes an increase in the size of the girl's neck, and a subsequent deepening of her voice.[87]

Women's bodies, then, are figured around the womb, the sign of their difference from men. The womb, this mysterious inner space, is central to conceptions of the female body. Plato and the Hippocratic writers went so far as to propose a 'womb-centred' theory of anatomy, in which women 'were subject to the erratic influence of a powerful and active organ that affected health and disposition and was the repository of a formidable sexual appetite.'[88] Changes in the womb can produce 'derangement' in the brain. Flemming reports Soranus' opinion that satyriasis in women 'causes them to develop an unrestrainable urge for sexual intercourse and, on account of the sympathy between the inflamed uterus and the meninges [membranes covering the brain], produces a certain derangement of thought and shamelessness.'[89]

In contrast to its draining effect on the male body, sex is positively beneficial to the female body. Indeed, women need regular sex in order to maintain their health (and, as we have seen, their lack of facial hair). Women's sexual needs, as set out by medical writers, can only be fulfilled at the risk of a male loss of masculinity. 'The more women have sexual intercourse, the stronger they become... On the other hand, men who have sex frequently are weakened by this act because they become exceedingly dried out.'[90]

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[87] Hanson 328.
[88] Cadden, Meanings of Sex Difference 26.
[89] Flemming 242.
[90] Commentator B, Lemay 127.

Given this clash of needs, then, women are open to being portrayed as sexually

threatening, capable of devouring the vulnerable male. The paradigmatic version of this

comes perhaps in Trevisa's <u>Properties of Things</u>. Here, Trevisa describes a monster

called lamya:

> þat haþ an heed as a mayde and body as a grym fissche. An it is iseide þat whan
> þat best *lamya* may fynde ony man, first a flatereþ wiþ hym with a wommannes
> face and makeþ hym ligge by here while he may dure, and whanne he may no
> ferþere suffice to here lecherye, þanne he rendeþ and tohaleþ hym wiþ bitinge and
> sleþ and eteþ hym.[91]

The lamya, while appearing to be a woman, has a revolting fish-like body. She uses her

deceptive speech to lure men into bed, and when they are unable to perform she devours

them. This grotesque description merely develops the assumptions about women in

medical texts. They are dangerous to men, pleasing on the surface, but deadly beneath.

Women are both dangerous and fascinating. The female body is an unknown space, and

its very unknowability makes it suspect. Monica Green has commented on the idea of

secrecy which attaches to female genitals from the twelfth century 'with the introduction

of references to the "secret places" of the female body and then to their "secret

diseases."'[92] Into the lacuna presented by the female body, medieval writers project their

fears of bodily dissolution, of decay and collapse. Women are the natural object of men's

knowledge. When women are attributed knowledge over their own 'secrets,' this

knowledge is invariably sinister. Thus, 'certain women who are knowledgeable about the

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[91] Trevisa 1:172. This is presumably derived from the classical lamia: a lover of Zeus whose children were killed by Hera, she hunts and kills the children of others out of revenge – another disturbing subversion of femininity.

[92] Monica Green, "From 'Diseases of Women' to 'Secrets of Women': The Transformation of Gynaecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages," <u>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</u> 30.1 (Winter 2000): 5-39, at 6, <u>Project Muse</u>, 20 Sept. 2007 <http://muse.jhu.edu>.

matter place... corrosive substances in their lower members when they have sexual intercourse, and since the male member is extremely porous, it is immediately corroded and harmed by them.'[93]

Female knowledge, it is feared, will harm men. Borde describes a disease called 'burnynge of an harlot' in which 'the gutts wyll burne and fall out of the bely.' This is a disease deliberately induced by women; it occurs 'whan a harlot doth holde in her breth & clapse her handes harde togyther & toes in lyke maner.'[94] In his discussion of diseases of the penis, Borde states that as well as having natural causes, they 'maye come of an euyll disposed woman that is eyther fylthy or else pretendynge to do man displeasure... or else thorowe much medlyng with a woman specially if she be menstryous, pockey, or leporous.'[95] So profound is this fear of women that Borde, in his <u>Breviary of Helthe</u>, pathologises the female entirely. Women are listed in his encyclopaedia in the same style as any other disease:

> The cause of this matter: This matter doth sprynge of an euyl educacion or bryngynge vp, and of a sensual and a peruerse mynde, nat fearynge god nor worldly shame... A remedy: Phisicke can nat helpe this matter but only god and great sicknes maye subdewe this matter and no man els.'[96]

Such are the fears associated with the female body, it often seems as if the anxiety evoked by the male body – in particular, the uncertainty of how, precisely, it can be controlled – is projected firmly onto the opposite sex. The particular focus of this anxiety is the organ which sets apart the female sex: the uterus.

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[93] Commenrator B, Lemay 89-90.
[94] Borde, <u>Breviary</u> fol. xv back.
[95] Borde, <u>Breviary</u> fol. cxxxvii
[96] Borde, <u>Breviary</u> fol. lxxxxiiii – fol. lxxxxiiii back.

For medieval thinkers, the uterus is a definitive model of inner space. Marie-Christine

Pouchelle argues that there is an 'intimate association of femininity with inner space';

'interior space, be it of the house or of the body, is a feminine place'.[97] She argues that,

for anatomists, the 'secret places of women', 'what the human body was at most pains to

conceal', are synecdochic for the rest of the body, representing all that anatomists strive

to *reveal*.[98] The brain, therefore, as a mysterious, inner space, is immediately identifiable

with the womb. And in medical texts themselves, we find that the brain and the womb are

indeed conceived of in the same terms. The thirteenth-century surgeon Henri de

Mondeville refers, Pouchelle notes, to both brain and uterus as 'cells'.[99] Trevisa describes

the brain as being made up of three hollows called '*ventriculos*' or 'smale wombes'.[100]

'Wombes' is probably used here to mean 'belly' rather than 'uterus', but its use

nonetheless suggests a correspondence between the brain and the inner places of the

body.

On top of these structural similarities between the brain and the uterus, there also existed

a well-established train of thought which identifies the thought process with conception.

The mind conceives thought just as the uterus conceives offspring; the brain takes on the

function of the womb. Laqueur, indeed, traces this conflation of uterus and mind back to

Aristotelian theories of generation: '[Aristotle's] images bring us back to the

constellation of phlegm/brain/sperm: conception is for the male to have an idea, an

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[97] Marie-Christine Pouchelle, <u>The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages</u>, trans. Rosemary Morris (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP; n.p.: Polity, 1990), 136, 130.
[98] Pouchelle 180.
[99] Pouchelle 209.
[100] Trevisa 1:173.

artistic or artisanal conception, in the brain-uterus of the female'.[101] Verna Harrison

identifies this idea of 'spiritual childbearing' as stemming from Plato's identification of

Socrates in the <u>Thaeatetus</u> as a midwife delivering the ideas of men:

> All that is true of their art of midwifery is true also of mine, but mine differs from theirs in being practised upon men, not women, and in tending their souls in labour, not their bodies. But the greatest thing about my art is this, that it can test in every way whether the mind of the young man is bringing forth a mere image, an imposture, or a real and genuine offspring.[102]

Plato develops this theme in the <u>Symposium</u>, applying the concept of mental

impregnation to the relationship between a youth and his older lover. Harrison describes

the way in which this model of spiritual impregnation of pupil by teacher, stripped of its

homosexual context, 'will become a recurring theme among early Christian writers'.[103]

Lynda Coon tracks the persistence of the image in Christian thought, exploring the efforts

of writers to inspire 'the transformation of ascetic male bodies into perfect wombs for

divine penetration'.[104] In this analogy, the word of God, the *logos*, takes the place of

semen, and the mind of the believer becomes the womb in which it develops. Coon

explains that Origen of Alexandria viewed 'those converted to the teachings of Christ [as]

transformed into receptacles of the *logos*'.[105] 'Proselytising [...] takes the form of spiritual

impregnation, a kind of mystical pregnancy that replicates Christ's own conception.'[106]

This theme of spiritual pregnancy is developed further by the ninth-century exegete

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[101] Laqueur 42.

[102] Plato, <u>Thaeatetus</u>, <u>Plato II: Thaeatetus, Sophist</u>, trans. H. N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam, 1921), 7-257, at 35; Verna E. F. Harrison, "The Allegorization of Gender: Plato and Philo on Spiritual Childbearing," <u>Asceticism</u>, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 520-34, at 526.

[103] Harrison, "Allegorization of Gender" 526.

[104] Lynda Coon, "'What is the Word if not Semen?': Priestly Bodies in Carolingian Exegesis', <u>Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900</u>, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 278-300, at 295.

[105] Coon 295.

[106] Coon 295.

Hrabanus Maurus, who explains that 'when the Word is emitted in an orderly fashion, the

hearing mind – like a conceiving uterus – is impregnated for the offspring of good

works,' 'sermo [...] qui dum ordinate mittitur, audientis mens, quasi concipientis uterus,

ad boni operis prolem fecundatur'.[107] Coon comments that Hrabanus 'equates the penis's

ability to discharge semen with the mouth's ability to expel the Word [...] For Hraban,

Christian priests are both receptacles of God's seed and inseminators of others, just as

Christ himself "is semen", and, as semen, the Son of God penetrated the bodies of his

apostles'.[108]

This image of mind as womb becomes particularly interesting in the context of

malfunction. Plutarch in his Praecepta conjugalia likens a woman's mind and her womb:

> No woman can make a child without the part played by a man; the shapeless,
> fleshy masses formed in the womb as a result of corruption are called 'moles.'
> One must take precautions against such developments in women's minds also. If
> they do not receive the seeds of good words or share their husband's education,
> they conceive many strange and evil schemes and feelings on their own.[109]

The fertile womb, then, is compared to a properly functioning mind. The mind that

remains unfertilized by 'the seeds of good words', however, like the womb that does not

receive a man's seed, will produce monsters. Isidore of Seville comments that 'in

Campania there are waters that are said to cure sterility in women and insanity in men,'

'In Campania sunt aquae quae sterilitatem feminarum et virorum insaniam abolere

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[107] Hrabanus Maurus, Expositiones in Leviticum, Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, CVIII, col. 403D, 12 April 2008 <http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk>; trans. Coon in '"What is the Word if not Semen?"' 279.

[108] Coon, '"What is the Word if not Semen?"' 291.

[109] Plutarch, Praecepta conjugalia, trans. Donald Russell, Plutarch's 'Advice to the Bride and Groom' and 'A Consolation to His Wife': English Translations, Commentary, Interpretive Essays, and Bibliography, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 5-13, at 13.

dicuntur.'[110] Brief as it may be, the reference implies that, to Isidore, insanity and

diseases of the womb are somehow connected.

Interestingly, a recurrent theme in medieval medical texts is the need to remove all

images from the mad person's presence. Trevisa insists that 'diuers schappis of face and

semblant and of peinture schal nou3t be ischewid tofore hym, lest he be snarled wiþ

woodnes [madness]'.[111] Andrew Borde counsels: 'The chamber or the howse that the

madde man is in, let there be no paynted clothes, nor paynted wallys, nor pyctures of man

nor woman, or fowle, or beest; for suche thynges maketh them ful of fantasyes.'[112]

Presumably, this injunction against paintings is to prevent the images influencing the

brain of the mad person, and prompting delusions. The idea that the brain will be

imprinted with images seen in paintings and tapestry parallels the medieval belief that

pregnant women can give birth to children who resemble images they have seen at the

moment of conception. Isidore advises pregnant women

> not to gaze at repulsive animal faces, such as *cynocephali* [dog-headed men] or apes, lest they should bear offspring resembling what they have seen. Indeed, the nature of women is such that whatever sort of thing they look at or imagine in the extreme heat of desire, while they are conceiving, is the sort of progeny they will bear. Thus in the act of procreation an animal conveys external forms internally, and since she is filled with the images of these things, she combines their appearance with her own particular quality.

> nullos intueri turpissimos animalium vultus, ut cynocephalos et simios, ne visibus occurrentes similes foetus pariant. Hanc enim feminarum esse naturam ut quales perspexerint sive mente conceperint in extremo voluptatis aestu, dum concipiunt, talem et sobolem procreent. Etenim animal in usu Venerio formas extrinsecus

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[110] Isidore XIII.xiii.4; trans. Barney 276.
[111] Trevisa 1:349.
[112] Andrew Boorde, <u>A Compendyous Regyment or a Dyetary of Helth, Andrew Boorde's Introduction and Dyetary, with Barnes in the Defence of the Berde</u>, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS e.s. 10 (London: Trubner, 1870) 223-304, at 298.

intus transmittit, eorumque satiata typis rapit species eorum in propriam qualitatem.[113]

As Isidore suggests, this openness to imprinting is seen as an essentially feminine characteristic. Women, as well as being colder than men, are also moister, with a concomitant yielding, malleable temperament. Nancy Caciola notes that 'moistness begets a changeable, inconstant, and highly impressionable nature, like mud retaining a footprint'. Indeed, Caciola points out, a frequently cited etymology of *mulier*, woman, gives its derivation as stemming from *mollier*, 'softer': women are softer than men.[114]

According to Albertus Magnus

> The complexion of the woman is more moist than the man's, and moistness receives an impression easily, but retains it poorly. A moist thing is easily influenced, and therefore women are inconstant and are always looking for novelties. [...] Hence there is no faith in a woman.

> Complexio enim feminae magis est humida quam maris, sed humidi est de facili recipere et male retinere. Humidum est enim de facili mobile, et ideo mulieres sunt inconstantes et nova semper petentes. [...] Unde nulla fides est in muliere.[115]

The uterus, as the paradigmatic female organ, unsurprisingly shares these characteristics. Much like the mind, it is naturally impressionable. Problems arise, however, with excessive impressionability, when an excess of moistness means that the matter fails to hold the desired form. This, interestingly, is the medical rationale behind both madness and problems in conception. The mad brain resembles a womb unable to conceive healthy children, producing instead deformed, monstrous foetuses.

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[113] Isidore, Etimologías XII.i.60; trans. Barney 250-51.

[114] Nancy Caciola, Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages, Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003) 145, 132.

[115] Albertus Magnus, Quaestiones super de animalibus p.265 (15:11); trans. Caciola, Discerning Spirits 145.

Mind and uterus share another connection in their susceptibility to the influence of the

moon. Isidore comments on menstrual periods that 'they are called "menses" after the

cycle of moonlight in which this flux regularly comes to pass – for in Greek the moon is

called μήνη,' 'Dicta autem menstrua a circuitu lunaris luminis, quo solet hoc venire

profluvium; luna enim Graece μήνη dicitur'.[116] Trevisa, meanwhile, notes that

> þe brayn haþ þis propirte, þat he feliþ and foloweþ þe meuynge of þe mone; for in
> the waxinge of þe mone þe brayn waxiþ, and waneþ in substaunce of vertue in þe
> wanynge of þe mone. For þan þe brayne drawiþ togedres in itself, and is nou3t so
> frelich obedient to þe spirit of felinge. And þat is iseye in lunatik and epilentik
> men þat bene most igreued whanne þe mone is newe and also whanne he is
> olde.[117]

As Trevisa observes, certain types of madness are regulated by the lunar cycle. Isidore

comments: 'Common people call epileptics 'lunatics,' because they think that the

insidious forces of demons follow them in accordance with the course of the moon,' 'Hos

etiam vulgus lunaticos vocant, quod per lunae cursum comitetur eos insidia

daemonum.'[118] This belief is still current in the sixteenth century, as Borde attests:

'Lunaticus is the latin worde. In englyshe it is named for a lunatyke person the whiche

wyl be rauyshed of his wyt ones in a mone, for as the Mone doth chaunge and is

varyable, so be those persons mutable and nat constant wytted.'[119] Madness, then, is

triggered by the same conditions which bring about menstruation.

Menstrual blood – in medieval terms, the matter from which the foetus is nourished, and,

potentially, from which it is formed – is viewed with particular horror in the later Middle

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[116] Isidore XI.i.140; trans. Barney 240.
[117] Trevisa 1:175.
[118] Isidore IV.vii.6; trans. Barney 111.
[119] Borde fol. lxxxv back.

Ages.[120] The female body in any case is considered genuinely disturbing – stories abound

of women deliberately infecting men with burning disease, placing iron traps in their

vaginas to sever the penis, draining men of vital fluids through their voracious sexuality.

The terrifying properties attributed to menstrual blood encapsulate these fears. In medical

texts, menstruation is consistently associated with the unnatural, with filth, and with

monstrosity. Thomas Elyot refuses even to comment on such 'euacuations'. It is 'not

honest, to declare them in the vulgar tongue, but onely secretely'.[121] Trevisa condemns

menstrual blood as 'vile mater and vnstable', writing that it is 'igedred into þe modir as

filþe into a goter'.[122] A commentator on the <u>Secretis mulierum</u> warns that: 'The womb of

a female is like a sewer situated in the middle of a town where all the waste materials run

together and are sent forth; similarly all superfluities in the woman's body run together at

the womb and are purged from that place.'[123]

Menses, itself considered to be pure matter, without form or shape, has an equally

denaturing effect on the objects it touches. Isidore, drawing from Pliny's <u>Naturalis

historia</u>, details the noxious effects of menstrual blood:

> If they are touched by the blood of the menses, crops cease to sprout, unfermented
> wine turns sour, plants wither, trees lose their fruit, iron is corrupted by rust,
> bronze turns black. If dogs eat any of it, they are made wild with rabies. The glue
> of pitch, which is dissolved neither by iron nor water, when polluted with this
> blood spontaneously disperses.
>
> Cuius cruoris contactu fruges non germinant, acescunt musta, moriuntur herbae,
> amittunt arbores fetus, ferrum rubigo corripit, nigrescunt aera. Si qui canes inde

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[120] Helen Rodnite Lemay argues that this fear of menstruation, despite Isidore's warnings, only came to a
head after the rediscovery of Aristotelian writings in the thirteenth century. See Lemay 37.
[121] Elyot fol. 62.
[122] Trevisa 2:298, 154.
[123] Commentator B, Lemay 133-34.

ederint, in rabiem efferuntur. Glutinum asphalti, quod nec ferro nec aquis dissolvitur, cruore ipso pollutum sponte dispergitur.[124]

The effects of menstrual blood centre on formlessness: fruits wither, crops wilt, iron rusts. Things fall apart. In the corrupting action of the menses, we can see matter overwhelming form. It should come as no surprise, then, that menstrual blood causes madness, both within women themselves and, more frighteningly, in those that come into contact with it. Trevisa warns that withheld menstrual blood causes women to become insane: 'for somtime it stuffiþ þe spiritual membres, and somtyme frenesye and oþir eueles þat beþ opunliche iknow, as þat corrupt blood to longe ihold is ischet to diuers place of þe body'. He reports that: 'Ypocras seiþ þat in wommen in þe whiche superfluyte of blood turned to þe pappis [the breasts], it bodeþ madnes.' Worse, however, 'if houndis etiþ þerof he waxiþ wood [mad]'.[125] Michael Scotus concurs: 'Of menstrual blood we say that if a dog eats it he indeed becomes rabid [...] It makes the man to whom it is administered lose his good sense and it renders him a leper,' 'de menstruo dicimus quod si à cane comedatur purum fit radibus [sic] [...] infatuat hominem certa ratione, et reddit leprosum'[126]

One particular concern of medical writers was the probability that conception during menstruation would result in a deformed, monstrous foetus.[127] Another of the anonymous commentators on the Secretis mulierum confirms that 'it is harmful to have sexual intercourse with these women at that time, because children who are conceived at that

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[124] Isidore XI.i.141; trans. Barney 240.

[125] Trevisa 1:153-54, 234, 154.

[126] Michael Scotus, Michaelis Scoti rerum naturalium, perscrutatoris proemium, in secreta natura, in Alberti Magni de secretis mulierum libellus, scholiis auctus, et à mendis repurgatus (Argentorati: Sumptibus Haeredum Lazari Zetzneri, 1637) 211-340, at 225; trans. Niccoli 10.

[127] Peggy McCracken, The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature, The Middle Ages Ser. (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003) 63-64.

time tend to have epilepsy and leprosy, because menstrual matter is extremely

venomous,' 'et tunc est nocivum cum eis coire, quia pueri qui tunc concipiuntur,

inclinantur ad morbum caducum, et ad lepram, quia talis materia est valde venenosa.'[128]

Ambroise Paré, in his 1573 text Des monstres et prodiges, writes:

> As it is written in Esdras the Prophet, […] women sullied by menstrual blood will conceive monsters. Similarly, Moses forbids such coupling in Leviticus. Also, the ancients observed through long experiences that the woman who will have conceived during her period will engender those inclined to leprosy, scurvy, gout, scrofula, and more, or subject to a thousand different diseases: the more because a child conceived during the menstrual flow takes its nourishment and growth – being in its mother's womb – from blood that is contaminated, dirty, and corrupt, which having established its infection in the course of time, manifests itself and causes its malignancy to appear; some will have scurvy, others gout, others leprosy, others will have smallpox or measles, and endless other diseases. The conclusion is that it is a filthy and brutish thing to have dealings with a woman while she is purging herself.
>
> comme il est escrit en Esdras le Prophete, que les femmes soullées de sang menstruel engendreront des monstres. Pareillement Moyse defend telle conjonction au Levitique, chap. 16. Aussi les anciens ont observé par longues experiences, que la femme qui aura conceu durant ses fleurs, engendrera enfans lepreux, tigneux, goutteux, escrouëlleurs, et autres, ou sujets à mille maladies : d'autant que l'enfant conceu durant le flux menstrual prend nourriture et accroissement, estant au ventre de la mere, d'un sang vicieux, sale et corrumpu, lequel avec le temps ayant enraciné son infection, se manifeste et fait apparoistre sa malignité : aucuns seront tigneux, autres goutteux, autres lepreux, autres auront la petite verolle ou rougeolle, et autres infinités de maladies. Conclusion, c'est une chose salle et brutale d'avoir affaire à une femme pendant qu'elle se purge.[129]

If, as we have established, the mind is conceptually similar to the womb, then the mad,

diseased mind bears a striking resemblance to the menstruous womb, unable to carry out

its work of conception.

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[128] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, Alberti Magni de secretis mulierum libellus, scholiis auctus, et à mendis repurgatus (Argentorati: Sumptibus Haeredum Lazari Zetzneri, 1637) 109 (cap. 10); trans. Lemay, Women's Secrets 129, with alterations by the author.

[129] Ambroise Paré, Des monstres et prodiges, in 'Des monstres et prodiges', précédé de 'Des animaux et de l'excellence de l'homme' et suivi par 'Discours de la licorne', ed. Jean-François Malgaigne, rev. Jean-Luc André d'Asciano, Mémoires et miroirs (Paris: L'Oeil d'Or, 2003) 83-234, at 88 (ch. 3); trans. Janis L. Pallister, On Monsters and Marvels (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 5.

As if all this was not enough, menstrual blood also has a particularly disturbing effect on the male body. The same Secretis mulierum commentator cites the advice of 'venerabilis Hypocrates': 'Do not go near a menstruating woman, because from this foulness the air is corrupted, and the insides of a man are brought to disorder,' 'mulierem menstruosam non accedas, quia ex isto foetore aer corrumpitur, et omnia interiora hominis confunduntur.'[130] Once again menses are associated with disorder and corruption, but now they threaten the structure of the body itself. So dangerous is menstrual blood that it affects men who have done no more than enter the vicinity of a menstruating woman:

> When men go near these women they are made hoarse, so that they cannot speak well. This is because the venomous humours from the woman's body infect the air by her breath, and the infected air travels to the man's vocal cords and arteries causing him to become hoarse. It is harmful for men to have sexual intercourse with menstruating women because should conception take place the foetus would be leprous. This also frequently causes cancer in the male member.[131]

Menses, then, make men lose their voice, suffer from cancer of the penis, and produce monstrous offspring. These are all ailments that strike directly at those things – authoritative speech, sexual performance, ability to produce heirs – valorised as integral to secular masculinity. Insanity, the loss of masculine rationality, fits neatly among them.

Despite this fear of the female body, it cannot be entirely separated from the male body. The issue of male menstruation, as we have discussed, is particularly fraught with anxiety. Bleeding from the anus or nose might be necessary in order to stabilise the male body, but such an approximation of a definitive female condition is definitely threatening. If male menstruation exists, then, it is assumed to do so only among those men who are not quite acceptably masculine. Jewish men are thought of as particularly prone to

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[130] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus 51 (cap. 11); trans. Lemay 88-89.
[131] Commentator B, Lemay 130-31.

menstruation. In part, this is because Jews are assumed to have a cold and wet, melancholic temperament, thus leaving them with excess fluid which needs to be expelled from the body.[132] More disturbingly, however, Jewish men are thought to pass blood every Easter, as punishment for their role in killing Christ. Caesarius of Heisterbach includes in his Dialogue of Miracles a story about a Christian man who seduces the daughter of a Jew. The daughter tells him that her father watches over her so closely that the only time her paramour can visit is on Good Friday: 'For then the Jews are said to labour under a sickness called the bloody flux, with which they are so much occupied, that they can scarcely pay attention to anything else at that time,' 'Tunc enim Judaei laborare dicuntur quadam infirmitate, quae fluxus sanguinis dicitur, circa quam occupati, aliis tunc minus intendere possunt.'[133]

Madness, menstruation, and nocturnal emissions, then, are all characterised by fluids which escape bodily boundaries.[134] If madness is, as we have seen, associated with uncontrolled emission of fluids, it fits into a paradigm in which the rational, controlled man endeavours to seal up the boundaries of his body. Things moving out of place are a potent symbol of disorder. Indeed, one of the things medieval writers find consistently disturbing about madness is the chaos it brings in its wake. As Borde notes about intemperance 'it doth let euery thing out of order, and where there is no order there is

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[132] Given that the ideal man is assumed to be hot and dry, this is in itself a clear comment on Jewish standards of masculinity.

[133] Caersarius of Heisterbach, Dialogus Miraculorum, ed. Josephus Strange, (Cologne, 1851), bk 2, ch. 23, p. 92; trans. H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, The Dialogue on Miracles, 2 vols., Broadway Medieval Library (London: Routledge, 1929) 1:102.

[134] Interestingly, a frequently cited, and possibly related, delusion of the insane is one in which they fear to urinate, in case they drown the world. See Neely 62.

horror.'[135] Disorder is at the heart of madness. The body, in its ideal state, has a 'natural'

hierarchical order, which is overthrown by madness. Trevisa, for example, sees the body

as a model of the body politic, in which each part has its role to play:

> þe heed is worþiere and more noble þan alle þe oþir membres, for he is gouernour
> and reulere of alle þe body, and 3eueþ þerto perfeccioun of vertue to do his
> worchinges of felinge. And þerfore þe heed haþ on kynde þe hiest place of þe
> body to reule and despose alle þat ben þerundir by þe order of kynde.[136]

His body is a vision of the ideal Christian, chivalric state, in which everyone helps each

other:

> It is propur to alle þe membres of office to putte hemsilf to perile for þe principal
> membres, as somtyme þe hond puttiþ itself kindeliche wiþouten auisement for þe
> defens of þe heed.[137]

Madness, then, represents a total overthrow of the natural hierarchy, in which the head is

made subject to the whims of the body.

On a similar theme, Borde warns that madness is a frequent consequence of

transgression. Borde repeatedly counsels against acquiring forbidden knowledge,

'runnynge to farre in fantasies or musynge,' 'studyeng of supernatural thynges or of

matters that mannes wytte can nat comprehende.'[138] This can only lead to madness. A

lack of proper male self-control, then, results in the overturning of the order natural to the

male body, and reveals it as strikingly similar to the female body: uncontrolled,

disordered, unknowable. Perhaps the most frightening images of madness depict it as

something hidden within the body, waiting to emerge. Trevisa describes the danger of

being bitten by a mad dog: 'suche venyme is most perilous, for it is longe ihid and

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[135] Borde, Breviary fol. lxxxvi.
[136] Trevisa 1:169.
[137] Trevisa 1:168.
[138] Borde, Breviary fol. lxxxxi; fol. lxxii – fol. lxxii back.

vnknowe and encresiþ and multiplieþ hitself and is somtyme vnknowe anon to þe 3eres

ende. And þanne þe same day and houre of þe bitinge, hit comeþ to þe heed and brediþ

frenesye.'[139]

This image of madness as a latent presence, unknown to the infected person, fits well

with theological interest in the 'limits of the conscious self,' in the words of Peter

Brown.[140] The link between irrationality and original sin is clearly still strong. Man is

always ready to return to a savage, bestial state. The fear of what may occur when he

does so is embodied in classical figures such as Arrons and Tereus, who we see

condemned in Gower's Confessio Amantis, as well as in countless sermons. Even the

Arthurian knight, the acme of civilisation, holds within him the possibility of reversion to

a savage: a wild man haunting the forest.

In the medical texts I have examined, what starts out as a fear of the female body blurs

into fear of the male body itself, and its flaws, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. Those

defects associated with the female other, defects which should be safely excluded from

the male body, are instead recognised as being an inalienable part of masculinity. This

experience of the other within the self parallels the experience of madness, in which the

personality undergoes radical change, while the body remains constant. In both cases, the

language of the female body is employed as a conduit for men's fears about their own

bodies. This use of the female body to denote vulnerability, while perpetuating a gender

binary that equates women with inferiority, also subverts any notion of a clear distinction

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[139] Trevisa 1:430.
[140] Brown 417.

between male and female bodies. Male bodies, in their susceptibility to madness, are revealed to be frighteningly similar to female bodies. As we will see in the next chapter, detailing the threat of demonic possession, this fear of what lies beneath the surface of the body is one that is difficult to shake.

Chapter Three: Demonic Possession

Demonic possession, the taking over of one's body by a demon, is a widely recognised phenomenon in the Middle Ages. In the words of Nancy Caciola, possession is 'an intimate – and violent – invasion of the body.'[1] It is a dramatic loss of identity, in which one's body becomes inhabited by another being. There is a certain amount of conceptual overlap between madness and possession; both denote a state of alterity, in which the personality undergoes radical transformation. However, medieval thinkers make a clear distinction between the two states. Madness is an organic disruption within the body, while possession entails a demon physically entering the body from outside. For the duration of the possession, two beings exist in the same space, share the same voice. As Caciola notes, 'possession is characterised by an unstable sense of deixis, a conception that more than one spirit or 'self' coexisted within a single body and competed for preeminence.'[2] Demonic possession, like madness, raises basic questions about identity, and about the boundaries of the self.

While the demoniac remains the same in appearance, her behaviour undergoes a fundamental alteration. In order to recognise a state of possession, one has to be able to read the behaviour of the possessed as abnormal. Demoniacs adopt an 'extreme behavioural and gestural code.'[3] As Caciola makes clear, the behaviour and condition of the body was held as an indicator of the condition of the soul; 'any person displaying

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[1] Caciola 53.
[2] Caciola 67.
[3] Caciola 53.

immoderate physical behaviours was at risk of being considered demonically possessed.'[4]

These behaviours include violent gestures, immodesty and exhibitionism, as well as

inappropriate speech such as screaming and swearing. In all cases, behaviour is seen as a

reliable indicator of bodily changes; 'frenzies and trances both were viewed as the

eruption, onto the surface of the body, of an otherwise hidden state of disorder.' [5]

As might be expected, theological texts are largely concerned with possession and

medical texts are concerned with madness. However, the definition of both madness and

possession remains constant regardless of genre. Medical writers acknowledge the

possibility of demonic possession, referring sufferers to Church authorities. Theological

texts, too, acknowledge the place of medicine; when sufferers of madness appeal for a

religious cure, it is usually as a case of last resort. While the devil can be complicit in

cases of madness, demonic influence is limited to manipulating the body's natural

functions, as Hildegard of Bingen explains:

> When the aforementioned afflictions [headaches, migraine, vertigo, baldness]
> occur all at once so that they rage simultaneously in a human's head, then they
> drive him to insanity, overpower him completely and let him lose his right
> understanding, just as a ship shaken by storms will burst into pieces. Therefore
> many people will believe that this person is possessed by a demon, which is not
> the case. Demons, though, rush toward the severe affliction and pain and lie in
> ambush, because driving someone insane is part of their function. But they have
> no power over this person's words, because he is not possessed by a demon. Yet
> if by divine permission a demon has power within a person over his words, then
> this demon, taking the place of the Holy Spirit, will be ravaging there until God
> expels him, just as God has driven him out from heaven.'[6]

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[4] Caciola 46.
[5] Caciola 53-54.
[6] Hildegard of Bingen, On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et Cure [sic], trans.
Margret Berger, Library of Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999) 70-71. I was unable to find
a copy of the Latin Liber compositae medicinae from which this extract is taken in time for submission.

There is clearly some overlap between madness and possession in Hildegard's definition:

both are associated with demons. However, in the case of madness the demon is merely

taking advantage of a pre-existing condition; in the case of possession, the demon *is* the

condition.

Demonic possession, in fact, is never a stable definition. Caciola explores the conceptual

similarities between divine inspiration and demonic possession, both seemingly

characterised by penetration of the body by spiritual forces.[7] Holy women such as

Christina Mirabilis, Ida of Louvain and Elizabeth of Spalbeck are frequently rapt in

trances that approximate those characterising demonic possession. As with demoniacs,

inner experiences are enacted on the surface of the body: their bodies bleed, convulse,

stiffen and collapse. Caciola argues that the two forms of possession are closely linked.

Indeed, she suggests that demonic possession acts as a counterweight to divine

possession: 'reports of demonic possession began to proliferate at precisely the same

moment that reports of women claiming divine possession first appeared.'[8] Caciola notes

that, 'although the two categories... were diametrically opposed in abstract moral terms,

in regard to observable behaviours the two categories were largely identical.'[9] It is little

wonder then, that observers are unable to distinguish between the two forms of

possession. Visionary women, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are liable to be read as mad, or

demonically possessed. Caciola cites as an example Ida of Louvain, who although later

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[7] Caciola 15. While the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, like demonic possession, involves an outside force entering into the body, it is phrased in very different terms. While demonic possession is figured starkly in terms of a penetration of bodily boundaries, the influx of the spirit is commonly portrayed in non-invasive terms. Caciola includes accounts of visions in which being inspired by the Holy Spirit is described as feeling light shining on one's body, or even air being blown into one's mouth: the spirit is a presence which permeates the body without ever breaching its boundaries (Caciola 207-211).
[8] Caciola 76.
[9] Caciola 75.

credited as a holy woman, was during her lifetime believed mad by her fellow townspeople, and eventually tied up for her own safety.[10] Caciola looks, in particular, at the suspicion felt by medieval authorities about visionary women. She examines the anxiety felt by male theologians about women's potential to be duped by the devil, to mistake demonic for divine inspiration. As we will see in relation to Margery Kempe, divine inspiration, demonic possession and madness may all involve a similar set of behaviours. A significant amount of energy and anxiety is expended in the effort to distinguish each condition.

In this chapter, however, I will be looking at the employment of demonic possession in a genre that tends towards the straightforward. Exempla and saint's lives are usually definite about the religious causes of misfortune, and equally definite about the presence of possession. Narratives of possession and exorcism can be manipulated to fit the needs of the author, and demonic possession is used in these tales in a variety of ways. In general, however, demoniacs are used to authorise the Church. Sainthood is confirmed through the ability to expel demons; demons reveal the identities of heretics and sinners. Possession gives women and secular men a place within theological discourse. For a short while, their bodies become texts, living testaments to the truth of scripture. 'Let those who doubt the existence of demons wait till they see demoniacs,' Caesarius challenges, 'for in them the signs of his presence are clearly shown, in the way that the devil speaks through their mouths and rages most cruelly in their bodies,' 'Daemon superior, sciens propositionem sibi factam prorsus impossibilem, malitiam suam ostendit;

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[10] Caciola 31.

iste quantum boni perdiderit, verbis quibus valuit declaravit.'[11] Indeed, in Caesarius'

Dialogue, demoniacs often appear merely to confirm the truth of Holy Writ (the demon is

unable to deny God's truth, when forced to speak by a holy man). A favourite use of

demoniacs is to confirm the efficacy of confession. These tales make use of the reputed

ability of demons to know all unconfessed sins; a sinner, about to appear in front of a

demoniac and thus have his sins revealed to all, makes an emergency confession,

resulting in immediate demonic memory loss.

Interestingly, in the account of Hildegard of Bingen given above, power over a person's

words is the defining condition of possession. Demoniacs are, as suggested here, defined

by their speech. Indeed, when the outward appearance of the body does not change, the

difference in speech becomes pivotal to diagnosing possession. Typically, the 'normal'

voice of the person possessed is superseded by the blasphemous, uncontrollable voice of

the demon. C. M. Woolgar comments that 'particular sounds were associated with the

Devil, especially cacchination or cackling, mad and angry voices, mocking and

bellowing.'[12] As we might expect, then, possession is often defined by the loss of

rational, controlled speech. We find in the Golden Legend an account of Saint Longinus'

destruction of pagan idols, which releases the demons within to infest the pagan provost:

'and anon the devils issued out and entered into the body of the provost and his fellows,

and they brayed like beasts and fell down to the feet of S. Longinus.'[13] As the provost

had previously ordered Longinus' teeth to be pulled out and his tongue cut off, from

which he emerges with the power of speech miraculously intact, his own loss of language

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[11] Caesarius bk 5, ch. 12, p. 290; Scott and Bland 1:332.
[12] Woolgar 75.
[13] Jacobus, The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints As Englished By William Caxton 3:71.

is an appropriate punishment. Here, possession deprives Longinus' assailants of speech

entirely: they are reduced to dumb beasts.

An alternative reaction to possession is not the loss of speech, but a distinct change of

voice. Indeed, Lyndal Roper discusses a number of sixteenth-century cases in which the

voice of the possessed actually changes gender. These cases include that of Anna

Bernhauser, through whom the Devil was reported to have spoke "with a coarse and

almost masculine voice," and Michael Roschman's daughter, who when possessed spoke

in a "quite coarse man's voice."[14] Roper goes on to examine the case of Veronica Steiner,

possessed by the devil in 1574 in the castle of Steinberg in Lower Austria, who alternated

between a 'natural, small, feminine and virginal' voice and a voice that was 'strange,

coarse, unnatural, heavy, masculine, snuffling and rasping.'[15] The content of Steiner's

speech alters dramatically, as H. C. Erik Midelfort comments:

> when using her customary voice, she prayed, praised God, admonished others to
> pray, sighed over her own sins, and accepted the Catholic faith. But with her
> devilish voice, she cursed and barked, spat against the Catholic religion and its
> adherents, and sang unchaste drinking songs or perverted psalms.[16]

Swearing, spitting and singing lewd drinking songs are forms of disruptive, specifically

masculine speech. As Roper notes, 'it was principally the disruptions of normal womanly

behaviour that testified to the Devil's presence.'

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[14] Matheus Eisengrein, <u>Vnsr liebe Fraw zu Alten Oetting...</u> (1571) fos. 128 r-v; <u>Eigentliche vnnd
warhafftige verzeichnuss</u> fo. Bir, cited in Lyndal Roper, <u>Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and
Religion in Early Modern Europe</u>, (London: Routledge, 1994) 176. There is clearly a question here as to
what these women are actually experiencing – possession, or something else? As I am only concerned with
representation, however, my study excludes a consideration of the lived experience of these women: I am
more concerned with the behaviours imputed to them, and the reasons given for these behaviours, within
the text.

[15] Khueller, <u>Kurtze Warhafftige... Historia</u>, fos. Aiir-Aivr, cited in Roper, <u>Oedipus</u> 176.

[16] H. C. Erik Midelfort, <u>A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany</u>, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP,
1999) 73.

> Possession becomes a kind of hypermasculine caricature, as she displays all the emblems of the classic male vices – drinking, hunting, swearing and whoring.... The success of the exorcism was proven when the woman resumed her feminine persona... once again chaste, her bodily boundaries were no longer distorted and exceeded, and she spoke modestly.[17]

This restoration of gender is also present in some medieval accounts of exorcism. Jacobus de Voragine tells the story of Saint Apollinaris, who

> came to the city of Clacense, and there he healed a nobleman which was dumb. And as he entered into a house, there was a maid which had an unclean spirit within her, which crying said: Go from hence, thou servant of God, or I shall make thee to be bounden, hands and feet, and to be drawn out of the city; whom anon Appollinaris rebuked, and constrained the spirit to go out and depart from the maid. Then, when he had thus called the name of our Lord upon the dumb man, and had so cured him and delivered the maid of the wicked spirit, more than five hundred men believed in our Lord Jesu Christ.[18]

Here, the man is mute and the woman is stridently vocal, an unnatural reversion of gender roles. Apollinaris is able to restore the natural order, silencing the woman and enabling the man to talk.

In most medieval examples, however, possession does not involve this degree of gender-bending. There is some evidence to suggest that demonic possession gives women access to a degree of clerical authority – demoniacs are authorised to speak on theological matters, and are frequently consulted by clerics themselves. Several female demoniacs attract large audiences to hear them speak, circumventing the usual Church prohibition on female preaching. Some women are even able to read and speak Latin, the language of male clerics, as a result of their possession.[19] As Barbara Newman comments, 'since it was as "unnatural" for a woman to know Latin as it was for her to write, one who

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[17] Roper, Oedipus 191.
[18] Jacobus, The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints As Englished By William Caxton 4:90.
[19] For example, the woman of Siegburg, who can identify references to the Trinity in a missal: Caesarius bk 5, ch. 13, p292; trans. Scott and Bland 1:333.

confounded male expectations had to be inspired by either God or the devil.[20] Indeed, any unusual lay knowledge of spiritual matters may have been associated with demonic influence; when Margery Kempe displays a talent for interpreting the gospels, for example, she is accused of being possessed.[21]

It is important to note, however, that it is not the woman herself who is presented as speaking in these accounts of possession, but the demon inside. Woman is reduced to body without agency. As this suggests, medieval demonic possession narratives act to confirm gender rather than to destabilise it. Indeed, Caciola's extensive work on demonic possession, which focuses almost exclusively on women, confirms this view. She argues that demonic possession reinforces misogynistic views of women, confirming them as weak, unstable, and easily influenced. Caciola comments that in the late Middle Ages women were seen as uniquely susceptible to possession of either kind, but particularly demonic possession. She contends that 'demonic possession was a labile cultural category. The most stable element of the conception was the predominance of female victims: though males could be possessed, women were more common as energumens [subjects of possession].'[22] This predominance, Caciola argues, is due to a variety of physiological and psychological factors.

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[20] Barbara Newman, "More Thoughts on Medieval Women's Intelligence: Denied, Projected, Embodied," Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2005) 231-43, at 234-35.

[21] Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Barry Windeatt, Longman Annotated Texts (Harlow: Pearson, 2000) lines 874-76.

[22] Caciola 53.

In particular, women had 'a less sharply bounded self' than men.[23] Caciola argues that there is a 'degree to which female physiology was believed to predispose women to fantasy states and self-delusion.'[24] Women's bodies, colder and moister than men's, were more subject to impressions, as we have seen.[25] In addition, the cold nature of female bodies 'was associated with a greater need for physical purgation, and this in turn engendered an association between cool bodies and the surface quality of "openness" or "porosity."'[26] In turn, porous bodies 'were especially open to spiritual penetration and exchanges.'[27]

In addition, Caciola argues, the humoural complexions of women predispose them to possession. Female complexions, Caciola argues, are typically either phlegmatic or melancholic, in contrast to choleric or sanguine male complexions. Phlegmatics are 'essentially sleepy, sluggish, and dull'; melancholics, 'self-centred and prone to hysterical delusion.'[28] Melancholics are particularly liable to possession and delusion. I take issue, however, with Caciola's contention that melancholic and phlegmatic complexions are predominantly associated with women. While women are characterised in Aristotelian thought as wetter and colder than men, they are part of a continuum which allows either gender the full range of humoural temperaments. Caciola seems at times to suggest that melancholics were exclusively female – 'Bartholomew the Englishman

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[23] Caciola 130.

[24] Caciola 146.

[25] See chapter two.

[26] Caciola 144.

[27] Caciola 155. It is worth noting that the idea of women as naturally 'open' exists alongside a strong theological emphasis on the female virgin as naturally 'closed.' It is the experience of sex which 'opens' the female body. As we will see, female virgin martyrs, in particular, are the possessors of paradigmatically sealed bodies, and act as a model for male virgins in this respect.

[28] Caciola 143.

describes melancholics (again, read "women")...'[29] Descriptions of the four complexions,

however, make it clear that men fall into each of the complexions, including melancholic

and phlegmatic.[30] Concomitantly, Hildegard of Bingen, author of a rare account of the

complexions directed at women, affirms that the humoural schema is equally valid for

men and women. Women, in her account, are just as likely to be sanguine and choleric as

melancholic or phlegmatic. Indeed, melancholia the illness, which is more likely to occur

in those with melancholic temperaments, is, as we have seen, more often attributed to

men than women. Hoccleve, for example, suffers from both mania and melancholia.

Lovesickness, often thought of as a type of melancholy, occurs in both men and women:

Chaucer's Troilus is perhaps the most famous example of the affliction.

While women are indeed seen as liable to be subjects of possession in exempla, they are

not the only victims of possession. The real picture is more complex. Like Caciola, I

believe that conceptions of demonic possession are used to distinguish and evaluate

bodies. Demonic possession occurs, unsurprisingly, largely in religious texts. These texts

create a hierarchy of bodies, at the bottom of which is the sexualised female body, and at

the top are the controlled, disciplined bodies of monks.[31] In particular, I believe that these

accounts of possession are used in clerically authored texts to distinguish male bodies:

setting apart clerical bodies from those of secular men. Secular bodies, like the bodies of

women, are seen as potentially vulnerable to penetration. Even the bodies of priests are

occasionally vulnerable, particularly when they are placed in proximity to monks, who

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[29] Caciola 148

[30] Particularly Jewish men, as I have argued above.

[31] This hierarchy is not structured entirely by gender: the chaste body of the nun, for example, will outrank the secular male body.

are generally construed as embodying a more perfect vision of holiness. Through these texts, the paradigmatic holy body emerges as a tightly controlled body, impervious to external penetration. As we will see, however, this ideal is not always carried out.

The Demon Within

Caciola argues that descriptions of demonic possession position the demoniac in a feminine position. She points especially to descriptions that liken demonic possession to pregnancy, such as that of a demoniac whose 'womb swelled and she began to spin about, and she was so seriously infested by the demon that she could scarcely be held back by two or three men.' Caciola cites a case in Hildegard of Bingen's hagiography where the demon exits through the woman's 'shameful parts' as evidence that possession is explicitly sexual.[32] Similar paradigms occur, however, regardless of the sex of the demoniac. Caciola herself records that demons are imagined to take up physical residence inside the body: 'demonic spirits most often entered the bowels or viscera, while only the Holy Spirit could enter the heart, seat of the human spirit and soul.'[33] They 'possess mobility through a network of open spaces or concavities existing within the body.' They enter, specifically, inner spaces. Caciola notes that Rupert of Deutz asserted that demonic spirits possess from within the "cavern of the body."[34] Caesarius of Heisterbach, in his collection of exempla The Dialogue on Miracles, testifies to the universality of this concept:

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[32] Caciola 40-41.
[33] Caciola 191.
[34] Caciola 191.

here is the difference between the approach of the Holy Spirit and that of a
wicked spirit, that the Holy Spirit is properly said to pass into the soul, and the
other to inspire it. The Holy Spirit dwelling within the sinful soul in His essence,
power and wisdom, passes into it by grace as if from near at hand. But the evil
spirit, being outside it in substance as we have shown, shoots in it wickedness like
an arrow, by suggesting evil and fashioning the mind to vice.... When the devil is
said to be within a man, this must not be understood of the soul, but of the body,
because he is able to pass into its empty cavities such as the bowels.

haec est differentia inter adventum Spritus sancti et spiritus maligni, quod ille
proprie dicitur illabi, iste immitti. Spritus sanctus exsistens intus in anima
peccatrice per essentiam et potentiam et sapientiam, quasi de prope illi illabitur
per gratiam. Spiritus vero malignus cum extra sit ut dictum est per substantiam,
mala suggerendo et vitiis mentem afficiendo, quasi sagittam, suam immittit
malitiam.... Cum diabolis dicitur esse in homine, non intelligendum est de anima,
sed de corpore, quia in concavitatibus eius et in visceribus ubi stercora
continentur, et ipse esse potest. [35]

If the idea of an 'empty cavity' summons visions of the uterus, this is perhaps because in

medieval thought, as we have already seen, the uterus operates as a model for inner

space. The idea of body as vessel, again, seems a peculiarly female image, invoking as it

does pregnancy and birth. However, it is not only women who are reduced to vessels in

this way. The term 'vessel,' 'vasculo' is used by demons twice in Caesarius' Dialogue to

refer to their hosts – once for a female demoniac, and once for a male.[36] Men, too, are

victims of demonic possession. Caciola observes that 'viscera,' as well as signifying

bowels,

also could be used to designate sexual organs such as the testicles or uterus.
Similarly, the word *venter* can be translated as either womb or bowels, stomach or
anus.... demonic possession sometimes was described in sexualised terms
involving the inflation of the womb into a spiritual pregnancy; and exorcism was
sometimes accomplished by an expulsion either through the "shameful parts" or
through vomiting from the stomach. Thus a series of associations was established
between demons, bowels, and loins, on the one hand, and between the Holy Spirit,
the heart, and the soul, on the other.[37]

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[35] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 15, p. 294; trans. Scott and Bland 1:335.
[36] Caesarius bk. 11, ch. 17, p.286; ch. 20, p. 289; trans. Scott and Bland 2:254, 257.
[37] Caciola 200.

The body itself is a hierarchy: the 'lower' organs – dealing with base impulses such as sexual desire and hunger as well as being placed lower in the body – are opposed to the 'higher' organs which are responsible for faculties such as thought and emotion. This bodily economy, which equates stomach and womb, testicles and bowels, is in fact common to medical texts. Pouchelle comments that 'gestation and digestion are analogous, processes which take place in organs which are structurally identical; both transform matter and eventually expel a finished product: faeces after digestion, a child in the case of human reproduction.'[38]

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The association of demons with the lower organs is longstanding. Woolgar comments on the 'strong association between anal imagery and evil, doubly diabolical in that breaking wind involved both a bad smell and a reprehensible sound.'[39] Pictures of demons frequently conflate mouth and anus: a motif which is made literal in an exemplum in the Alphabet of Tales. The story in question concerns a pagan steward who, ordered by his master Julius the Apostate to commit the blasphemy of urinating in holy vessels, is condemned to excrete solely through his mouth for the rest of his life: 'And with þat sodanlie his mouthe was turnyd into his ars, & efter euer whils he liffid, all þe filthe and þe digestion of his bodie come out at his mouthe, & noght at his nache.'[40] Cuffel notes that

> in excess, faeces and intestines marked their possessor not only as animal but also as evil.... From at least the first century CE onward, ulcerated, rotting, uncontrollable bowels became a symbol of profound wickedness for Pagan,

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[38] Pouchelle 182.
[39] Woolgar 122.
[40] Etienne de Besançon, An Alphabet of Tales: An English Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationum of Etienne de Besançon. From Additional MS 25,719 of the British Museum, ed. Mary Macleod Banks, EETS os 126-27 (London: Kegan Paul, 1904-5) 466-67.

Jewish, and Christian writers, just as bowels that were impervious to decay demonstrated a person's holiness.[41]

Figures of particular impiety, such as Herod and Arius, were noted as dying from ailments of the bowel.[42]

The use of digestion as a motif for possession is particularly interesting as the victims of possession in exempla are usually lower status men, and, in particular, peasants. Peasants, like women, can be reduced to the body. They too, are containers, of food and excrement. Paul Freedman, in his work on the representation of the medieval peasant, links male peasants and women: both represent embodiment. Like women, the peasant 'wallowed in an innate, gross embodiment and materiality.' Unlike the female body, however, the peasant's body was seen as being 'oriented around the digestive system.'[43] Peasants were seen as having monstrous appetites, ungoverned by notions of decorum or taste. Freedman describes their association 'with manure and various forms of animal waste,' serving 'as an emblem of [their] distance from civilization.'[44] Chaucer's Plowman, Freedman notes, is described as having 'ylad of dong ful many a fother.'[45] Fabliaux and anti-peasant satire associate peasants with defecation. Simon Gaunt references Rutebeuf's Le Pet au vilain:

> One day a demon waits beside a dying peasant, holding a bag underneath his posterior to capture his soul. Unbeknown to the demon, the peasant had thought to restore his strength by eating large quantities of an exceptionally greasy beef and garlic stew. The demon thinks the peasant is writhing in his death throes, but he is in fact struggling with excessive flatulence and it is a huge peasant fart that the demon captures in his sack, not a peasant soul. The demon hurries back to hell, but when he opens the bag his colleagues are so disgusted they decide never to let another peasant into hell. As a result peasants can enter neither heaven nor hell.[46]

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[41] Cuffel 38.

[42] Cuffel 38.

[43] Paul Freedman, Images of the Medieval Peasant, Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999) 159.

[44] Freedman 151.

[45] Geoffrey Chaucer, "General Prologue," The Canterbury Tales, The Riverside Chaucer, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) line 530; cited in Freedman 229.

[46] Simon Gaunt, Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature, Cambridge Studies in French 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 238.

An important connection between sexual and digestive organs is the access they allow into the body. Much of the detail of accounts of demonic possession focuses on the question of entrance into bodies. As we will see, a common aim of possession narratives is to distinguish clerical and secular bodies, and this is frequently achieved through a focus on bodily openings. Lower-status figures (and most women) are, in general, attributed more permeable bodies than the upper classes: for example, Link argues that in medieval art, 'kings and nobles rarely (if ever) open their mouths; devils and lower-class figures do.'[47]

As we will see, while possession can occur as a punishment for sexual incontinence, it is more likely to follow unwise eating or drinking. Jacobus, indeed, conflates images of digestion and sexual penetration, demonstrating a fundamental compatibility between their respective imagery:

> There was a maid demanded drink of a servant of her father's, and she gave her drink and said: The devil mayst thou drink, and she drank, and her seemed that fire entered into her body. Then began she to cry and her belly to swell like to a barrel, so that each man saw that she was demoniac, and she was two years in that estate, and after was brought into the tomb of S. Elizabeth, and was made perfectly whole and was delivered of the fiend.[48]

The penetration by fire, followed by the swelling of the belly, fits a pattern of sexual penetration and pregnancy. However, Benigna is possessed due to ingesting an unspecified liquid. Devils can be ingested like food, as Gregory makes clear in his Dialogues:

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[47] Luther Link, The Devil: A Mask without a Face, Picturing History (London: Reaktion, 1995) 64. Obviously there are exceptions depending on genre: the romance hero, as we will see, has a body apt to be wounded.
[48] Jacobus, The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints As Englished By William Caxton 6:228.

> Upon a certain day, one of the Nuns of the... monastery, going into the garden, saw a lettice [sic] that liked her, and forgetting to bless it before with the sign of the cross, greedily did she eat it: whereupon she was suddenly possessed with the devil, fell down to the ground, and was pitifully tormented. Word in all haste was carried to Equitius, desiring him quickly to visit the afflicted woman, and to help her with his prayers: who so soon as he came into the garden, the devil that was entered began by her tongue, as it were, to excuse himself, saying: 'What have I done? What have I done? I was sitting there upon the lettice, and she came and did eat me.' But the man of God in great zeal commanded him to depart, and not to tarry any longer in the servant of almighty God, who straightways went out, not presuming any more to touch her.[49]

Jacobus includes the story of Saint Dominic, called to a lay brother in Bologna who is tormented by the devil. When questioned by the saint, the devil asserts that 'I vex him for he hath deserved it. He drank yesterday in the city without licence of the prior, and made not the sign of the cross thereon, and I entered then in sign of a bubble, to the end that he should drink me with the wine the sooner.'[50] Again, the brother has allowed the devil entry to his body – he has failed to guard his body boundaries properly. His possession is punishment for his greed. Indeed, the moment of possession is phrased as an active movement on the part of the brother: he drinks in the devil.

Caciola argues that 'the construction of male bodies as dense, compact, and *sealed* rendered males more impervious to spirit possession, for their surface could not so easily be breached.'[51] However, I would argue that this only applies to certain male bodies. The bodies of male peasants, as we have seen, were not considered sealed. Indeed, Roper argues that 'male bodies were imagined as constantly breaking their boundaries, polluting

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[49] Gregory the Great. <u>The Dialogues of Saint Gregory, Surnamed the Great: Pope of Rome and the First of that Name. Divided into Four Books, Wherein he Entreateth of the Lives and Miracles of the Saints in Italy and of the Eternity of Men's Souls Translated into Our English Tongue by P. W. and Printed in Paris in mdcviii</u>. 1607. Ed. Edmund G. Gardner. (London: Warner, 1911) 17-18.

[50] Jacobus, <u>The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints As Englished By William Caxton</u> 4:181.

[51] Caciola 156-57.

the world around them with violence and vomit. Female bodies, by contrast, could bring

pollution on society through their sexual openness.'[52] That uncontrolled ingestion and its

consequences are thought of as typically male behaviour is endorsed by Bynum, who

argues that 'the food behaviour especially associated with men was gluttony.... This

concern with greed as a vice of monks... becomes a theme in medieval satire.'[53] William

Langland gives us a male Gluttony who both farts and vomits as a result of his binging:

> ... Glotoun hadde yglobbed a galoun and a gylle.
> His gottes gan to gothly [rumble] as two grydy sowes;
> A pissede a potel in a *pater-noster* whyle,
>
> A blew his rownd ruet [trumpet] at his rygebones ende,
> That alle that herde the horne helde here nose aftur
> And wesched hit hadde be wexed [plugged up] with a weps of breres.
> ...
> Ac Gotoun was a greet cherl and greued in the luftynge [his friends attempt to
> raise him to his feet]
> And cowed vp a caudel in Clementis lappe;
> Ys none so hungry hound in Hertfordshyre
> Durste lape of that lyuynge, so vnlouely hit smauhte.[54]

While the image of bodies as vessels is characteristically feminine, then, the disordered

nature of these bodies may also be seen as typically masculine. The body of the demoniac

seems to conflate female and male characteristics. In its openness and vulnerability to

penetration, it seems female, but in its propensity for uncontrolled vomiting, urination

and ingestion, it appears characteristically male.

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[52] Roper, Oedipus 153.

[53] Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women, The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics 1, 1987 (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1988) 79.

[54] William Langland, Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text, ed. Derek Pearsall, 1994 (Exeter: U of Exeter P, 2008) passus 6, lines 396-402, 411-14.

Indeed, successful exorcisms are often marked by a concomitant expulsion of bodily

fluids.[55] Jacobus includes the story of a possessed man cured by St Genevieve:

> as she was in orisons in a corner in the church of S. Martin... one of the singers
> was so sore vexed with the enemy that he ate his members, which went out of the
> chancel and came straight to the holy virgin. The blessed virgin commanded the
> spirit to issue out. He answered: If he issued, he would issue out by the eye. She
> commanded that he should no longer abide ne dwell there, and then he issued out
> anon wold he, nold he, by the flux of the womb, and left foul enseigns and tokens,
> and the sick man was all whole and in good mind, whereof he thanked the Lord.[56]

Exorcisms of women seem to be especially marked by loss of blood. Jacobus' life of

Saint Peter Martyr includes a description of how he 'helped women possessed by

demons, forcing the evil spirits to come out of the women's bodies with much vomiting

of blood,' 'obsessas a daemonibus martir ipse dejectis illils cum multo sanguinis vomitu

de corporibus liberavit'[57] Caesarius' account of a nun tormented by demons also includes

an expulsion of blood.

> one of the evil spirits came near, and laid his hand upon her breast, pressing it
> with so much violence, that blood was driven in great quantities through her
> mouth and nose; both demons then took the form of dogs and leapt out of the
> window.
>
> unus spirituum malignorum propius accedens, et manum pectori eius imponens,
> ita illud compressit, ut sanguis concitatus per os et nares eius largitur effleuret.
> Sicque daemones illi formas caninas assumentes, de fenestra exsilierunt.[58]

These evacuations mimic both menstrual and lochial fluids: the female equivalent to the

vomit which Roper argues marks the uncontrolled male body.

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[55] Caciola 190.

[56] Jacobus, The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints As Englished By William Caxton 3:301-302.

[57] Jacobus, Legenda aurea 283; trans. Jacobus, The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints 1:260. This story is not included in Caxton's edition.

[58] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 44, p. 330; trans. Scott and Bland 1:379.

Descriptions of exorcisms of demoniacs are also often graphically violent. Demons frequently tear apart the body as they leave. In his account of Saint Peter Martyr's cure of Verbona, a woman from Beregno, Jacobus testifies that 'the demons tore the skin from the woman's neck and breast and went out of her leaving her half dead, but after a while she arose hale and hearty,' 'daemones collum et pectus mulieris excoriantes et inde exeuntes semivivam eam dimiserunt, sed post modicum penitus sanata surrexit.'[59] A possessed earl, eventually cured by Saint Peter's chain, 'tofore all the people... with his own teeth... bit and tare himself.'[60] Possessed people of both genders are frequently at risk of bodily disintegration and fragmentation.

While equal-opportunity possession might be a feature of some narratives, however, others do include gender bias. Men, in general, are assumed to have a greater level of control over the boundaries of their bodies. In some cases, men must give permission for their own possession. In a tale reported by Caesarius of Heisterbach, a knight tricks a demon into leaving a girl he has possessed in order to accompany the knight to tournaments, where the demon can do some real damage. 'But when the devil said: "If you want me to go with you, let me enter into your body," the knight replied: "You certainly shall not enter into me,"' 'Dicente diabolo, si vis ut tecum pergam, sine ut intrem in corpus tuum; respondit miles: Certe non intrabis in me.' The knight eventually agrees to let the devil ride in a hole in his coat, on condition that he agrees to leave when the knight requests. This level of control over the body is an exclusively male attribute. When the knight, on taking the cross, demands that the devil leave him, the devil goes so

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[59] Jacobus, <u>Legenda aurea</u> 287-88; trans. as Jacobus, <u>The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints</u> 1:263. This story is not included in Caxton's edition.

[60] Jacobus, <u>The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton</u> 4:160.

far as to plead: 'I cannot remain with you without your consent,' 'Attamen tecum manere

nisi consentias non potero, quia hoc promisi.'[61]

Another of Caesarius' exempla features a woman who commits incest with her son and

conceives a child. Penitent, she goes on pilgrimage to Rome to seek pardon from the

Pope. She confesses her sin, 'in the hearing of all that were gathered there,' 'cum multa...

oculis,' and, to demonstrate her contrition, the Pope orders her to appear in front of all

there 'in the same garb in which she had gone to her son when she sinned,' 'praecepit ut

in tali veste ibi appareret, in quali venerat ad filium, cum peccaret.' The woman duly

appears in a shift, and the Pope, 'realising that such obedience, such shamefacedness,

such penitence, could outweigh even the foulest sin,' 'considerans... tali obedientiae, tali

verecundiae, tali poenitentiae, nullius peccati poenam posse resistere,' forgives her sin.

However, one of the cardinals objects to such a brief penance. The Pope replies:

> "If I have dealt wrongly with this woman, and if her penitence is insufficient in
> God's sight, then let the devil have power to enter my body and torment me here
> in the presence of you all; but if on the other hand, you are wrong in blaming me,
> let the same thing happen to you." Forthwith the devil began to torment the
> Cardinal, and by his torment God showed openly that the penance of this woman
> was sufficient and acceptable. The Cardinal, healed at length by the prayers of
> all, learnt never again to carp at the bounty of the Divine mercy.

> Si ego iniuste egi cum muliere ista, et insufficiens est eius coram Deo poenitentia,
> potestem habeat diabolus ingrediendi corpus meum, et coram omnibus me vexet;
> si vero tu iniuste me reprehendis, simile tibi fiat. Statim diabolus Cardinalem
> eundem vexare coepit, per cuius vexationem perfectam mulieris poenitentiam
> Deus palam ostendit. Tandem omnium oratione purgatus Cardinalis, didicit in sua
> vexatione, divinae misericordiae de cetero non oblatrare.

The Pope is able to open his own body and that of the cardinal's to demonic possession.

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[61] Caesarius bk. 10, ch. 11, pp.225, 226; trans. Scott and Bland 2:180, 181.

God 'shows openly' through these tormented bodies; they become texts, read by those around them. The cardinal's body needs to be penetrated to prove that the woman's body has regained its pre-incest wholeness.[62]

Jacobus includes the tale of Roba of Meda, who, after losing everything including the clothes on his back at the gaming table, is so depressed by his poverty that 'he called the devils and gave himself to them.' Three demons promptly appear and throttle him until he is unable to speak. They even imitate his voice, pretending to be Roba in order to reassure his neighbours. Finally, his neighbours 'apperceived they well that they were the devils, and fetched the priest, which conjured in the name of S. Peter, the devils, that they should go their way. Then two of them went away and the third abode.'[63] The next day Roba visits Saint Peter's tomb.

> Then there came a friar named Guillaume of Vercelli, and this friar Guillaume demanded what was his name, and the fiend answered: I am called Balcefas; then the friar commanded that he should go out, and anon the fiend called him by his name as he had known him, and said: Guillaume, Guillaume, I shall not go out for thee, for he is ours and hath given himself to us. Then he conjured him in the name of S. Peter the martyr, and then anon he went his way and the man was all whole, and took penance for his trespass, and was after a good man.[64]

Note that Roba himself authorises his possession, himself invokes the demons which possess him. He has a measure of control over the boundaries of his body, aligning him with those figures of male authority, the priest and the friar, who are able to expel demons through their voices alone. In contrast, in the stories of the female demoniacs, the only voice they emit is that of the demon, speaking through them.

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[62] Caesarius bk. 2, ch. 11, pp.77-78; trans. Scott and Bland 1:84-85.
[63] Jacobus, The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton 3:153.
[64] Jacobus, The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton 3:153-54.

Devils are repeatedly granted access to bodies, both male and female, by male speech. In the story of Benigna, given above, she becomes possessed when a servant curses the drink she has asked for. This motif is repeated in the story of the woman of Brisach, who is possessed when she is five years old:

> One day when she was drinking milk, her father, in a temper, said to her: "I wish you might eat the devil in your greediness!" Immediately the child felt his presence and was harassed by him until she was grown up, and only this year was she set free from him by the merits of the apostles Peter and Paul, whose church she visited.

> Die quadam cum lac manducaret, pater eius iratus dixit: Diabolum comedas in ventrem tuum. Mox puellula sensit eius ingressum, et usque ad maturam aetatem ab illo vexata, hoc anno primum meritis Apostolorum Petri et Pauli, quorum limina visitavit, liberata est.[65]

Women are punished for their appetites, for usurping a male privilege of consumption. It is male speech, however, which authorises their possession. A possessed woman testifies that 'her husband had said to her in anger: "Go to the devil," and at that moment she had felt him enter through one of her ears,' 'ad vocem mariti sui in commotione animi sui dicentis: Vade diabolo, quod intrare illum senserit per auriculam.'[66] Caesarius follows this with a story about 'a man, who in a fit of anger told his son to go to the devil; and immediately the devil seized the lad and carried him off, so that he was no more seen,' 'Homo quidam iratus... dixit filio suo: Vade diabolo. Quem mox diabolus rapuit, et nusquam comparuit.' The Monk postulates that

> it may have been that God permitted it to happen for the sake of example, that when men hear of the torture of the husband in his wife's obsession, and the grief of the father in the loss of his son, they may restrain their anger and keep their tongues from foolish speech.

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[65] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 26, p. 309; trans. Scott and Bland 1:353-54.
[66] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 11, p. 291; trans. Scott and Bland 1:332.

> Utrumque fieri permisit Deus propter exemplum, ut dum iracundi in vexatione uxoris, mariti audierint cruciatus cordis, et in raptu filii, patris dolores, animi sui furorem cohibeant et a stultiloquio linguas compescant.[67]

Questions about who should be allowed to speak, and what kind of speech they should use, seem to be central to accounts of possession.

Returning to the story of Roba, it is interesting that Jacobus includes a detailed explanation of Roba's possession. The women whose stories precede him, however, are introduced to us already possessed: 'A woman by the name of Girolda, the wife of James of Vallesana, who for thirteen years was possessed by unclean spirits... A woman named Euphemia, from a place called Corriongo in the diocese of Milan, was tormented by demons for seven years... A woman of Beregno, Verbona by name, was plagued by demons for six years...' 'Matrona quaedam nomine Girolda uxor Jacobi de Vallesana cum per XIIII [sic] annos ab immundis spiritibus fuisset obsessa... Mulier quaedam nomine Euphemia de loco Corriongo Mediolanensis dyocesis septem annis a daemonibus est vexata... Quaedam mulier nomine Verona de Beregno per VI annos a daemonibus agitata ...[68] When men are possessed, there needs to be some explanation; women, by contrast, seem to be naturally open to possession: no explanation is needed. This suggests that the reasons for possession are the key to interpreting instances of male possession.

Jacobus' introduction of gambling as a spur to possession in the story of Roba is particularly interesting. Gambling is used again by Caesarius in a story involving the devil, in the form of a man, playing cards with a compulsive gambler named Thiemon.

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[67] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 12, p. 291; trans. Scott and Bland 1:332.
[68] Jacobus, Legenda aurea 287; trans. Jacobus, The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints 1:263. This story is not included in Caxton's edition.

After the devil has won all Thiemon's money, Thiemon exclaims 'Surely you must be the devil himself!' 'Numquid non diabolus es tu?' In response, the devil

> snatched him up, and dragged him through the roof so roughly, that his bowels were torn out by the broken tiles. What became of his body, or where it was thrown, is not know to this day, either by his son or by any of his acquaintances. But in the morning the remains of his entrails were found clinging to the tiles, and were buried in the cemetery.

> Tollensque illum, per tectum traxit, cuius viscera tegulis retrahentibus miserabiliter excussit. Et quid de eius corpore factum sit, vel in quem locum illud proiecerit, usque hodie tam a filio eius quam a ceteris qui illum noverant, ignoratur. Mane vero viscerum eius reliquiae tegulis inhaerentes repertae sunt, et in cimiterio sepultae.[69]

Gambling is a typically secular male sin. In Chaucer's <u>Pardoner's Tale</u>, gambling is included, along with eating, drinking, blasphemy and fornication, as one of the many typically male sins of his protagonists. Gambling is aligned with excessive consumption as part of the 'superfluytee abhomynable' which characterises the male sinners.[70] It is an excess in itself, a 'wast... / Of catel and of tyme,' and also the cause of verbal excess: 'mooder of lesynges, / And of deceite, and cursed forswerynges.'[71] Gambling seems to take the place that lust and sex hold in tales of female demoniacs, exposing the body to disintegration. Possibly we can read gambling, an 'unnatural' form of producing money, as akin to usury. Usury is itself linked to sodomy, in that both are transactions which occur without producing anything of value: sodomy subverts reproduction, the proper goal of sexuality, just as usury subverts the proper goal of commerce: to increase the amount of goods in society.[72]

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[69] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 34, p. 318; trans. Scott and Bland 1:364-65.
[70] Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale," <u>The Canterbury Tales</u> line 471.
[71] Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale," <u>The Canterbury Tales</u> lines 593-94, 591-92.
[72] Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," <u>Speculum</u> 68.2 (April, 1993): 389-418, at 408. <u>JSTOR</u>, 10 Jan. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

Clerical authors repeatedly use demonic possession to highlight problematic aspects of secular masculinity, and to glorify monastic living. One way in which they are able to do this is to focus on the *reasons* for possession. It is the very behaviours which characterise secular men that leave them vulnerable to possession – sexual aggression, conspicuous consumption, competition with other men. Jacobus, for instance, includes an account of a clerk possessed by a demon, who is cured by Saint Benedict and sent home with the instructions to stop eating meat, and never to take holy orders: 'for what day thou goest and takest orders, the devil shall re-enter into thee.' The clerk, Jacobus writes,

> held him long time without taking any [holy orders], till at last he saw younger than he that went to take orders, and had forgotten the words of S. Benet, and took orders, and anon the deil entered in to his body and tormented him till he died.[73]

The clerk becomes ordained for all the wrong reasons. He takes holy orders, and becomes vulnerable to demonic possession, because of his ambition, his desire to compete with other men. These homosocial pressures, ironically, make his body penetrable, thus disqualifying him from true religious status.

We have already mentioned the use of demoniacs to demonstrate the efficacy of confession. It is worth noting, however, that these cautionary tales usually have a sexual theme. In one, a priest has committed adultery with the wife of a knight. The knight suspects the affair, and so asks the priest to accompany him to a village where 'there lived one who was possessed by a devil so malicious that, when people came into his presence, he would taunt them openly with any sins which had not been blotted out by true confession,' 'quidam obsessus esset, in quo daemonium tam nequam erat, ut coram astantibus improperaret peccata, quae per confessionem veram non fuissent tecta.' The

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[73] Jacobus, <u>The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton</u> 3:87.

priest, panic-stricken, makes a last minute confession to a serving man in the village, and

the demon, when asked if he knows anything about the priest, replies 'I know nothing

about him,' 'Nihil de eo scio.'[74] The story is later repeated, in essence, in relation to a

servant committing adultery with his master's wife; the servant confesses to a man

chopping wood, with the same effect on the demon.[75] Again, a demon torturing a nun

vowed to virginity pauses in his torturing to accuse a man and a girl of sexual sins. After

confession, he is unable to remember their sins.[76] Sexual potency here, rather than being

a source of manly pride, is a potential source of shame, leaving one open to exposure by

an all-knowing demoniac. What appears to assert masculinity is actually a source of

weakness.

While sexual activity is rewritten as weakness, chastity is written as sexual potency.

Jacobus tells the story of 'a piteous woman in Guienne, which was vexed with a devil

that dwelled in her and vexed her marvellously six years during, in using her to his

lechery.' Defying the demon's orders not to visit Saint Bernard, the woman approached

him

> and told to him, weeping strongly, what she suffered. And he said: Take this staff
> which is mine, and lay it in the bed, and if he may do anything let him do it, and
> she did so and laid it in her bed. And he came anon, but he durst not go to his
> work accustomed, ne presumed to approach her bed.[77]

It is the saint's staff, placed in the woman's bed, which prevents the demon penetrating

the woman. The use of the staff suggests that Bernard's phallic potency, despite his

chastity, surpasses that of the incubus. Through the substitution of staff for phallus,

[74] Caesarius bk. 3, ch. 2, p. 112; trans. Scott and Bland 1:125-26.
[75] Caesarius bk. 3, ch. 3 pp. 113-14; trans. Scott and Bland 1:126-27
[76] Caesarius bk. 3, ch. 6, pp. 116-20; trans. Scott and Bland 1:130-33.
[77] Jacobus, The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton 5:25.

Bernard is able to symbolically participate in the sexual structures of secular masculinity.
Male saints, Jacobus seems to suggest, are fully masculine, even judged by the standards
of secular men.

The idea that monastic masculinity is superior to secular is suggested in Caesarius'
Dialogue by the life of Dom Walter of Birbech, who gives up a prestigious career as a
knight in order to become a monk. As a knight, he arrives late at a tournament because he
stopped on the way to hear mass, only to discover that the Virgin Mary has been jousting
in his place, and has secured him the victory. When he gives in to his innate holiness, and
becomes a monk, Walter is given the power to cure the possessed.

> One day when he had placed the psalter upon the head of the possessed man, the
> demon, crying and raging, so bruised and bewildered the man from whom he was
> compelled to depart, that he fell to the ground as if dead. An hour later, he came
> back to himself, crying out that he was delivered from the devil.
>
> Die quadam cum psalterium super obsessi caput posuisset, obsidens clamans et
> furens, in tantum hominem a quo exire cogebatur, turbavit et allisit, ut cadens in
> terram mortuus diceretur. Post horam ad se reversus surrexit, a diabolo se
> liberatum clamitans. [78]

As a monk, then, Walter has a greater power over bodies than he had as a knight. This
power stems from his holy living and chaste body, just as Mary's power to unhorse
knights stems ultimately from her status as virgin. The message is clear: the chaste,
closed body trumps an open, secular body.

Caesarius tells the story of a priest, carrying a sword with him at night for fear of robbers,
who is attacked by a demon. The priest is reproved by a lay-brother: 'if in going to the
Divine Office you had taken a psalm in your mouth instead of a sword in your hand,

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[78] Caesarius bk. 7, ch. 38, pp. 49-57, at 52-53; trans. Scott and Bland 1:510-19, at 514.

these things would not have happened on the road,' 'si ad divina eundo psalmum in os vestrum assumsissetis, non vobis haec in via evenissent.'[79] The priest attempts to ape secular masculinity, carrying a sword in defiance of his status, and is punished. It is significant that priests often figure prominently in these cautionary tales. It is possible that Caesarius, as a monk, is engaging in some masculine rivalry. If masculinity in a clerical context is determined by protecting bodily boundaries, then Caesarius, a Cistercian monk, is implying that priests are not as masculine as monks. We have already viewed the story of the priest committing adultery with the knight's wife. Interestingly, after repenting of his sins, the priest joins the Cistercian order. No further sins occur.

As well as being prone to illicit sexual affairs, priests are also potential victims of possession. Caesarius narrates the story of a priest called Siger, who is present during the holy monk Bernard's sermon, and immediately 'fell headlong to the ground, with contortions of the body as of one possessed, which indeed he was,' 'pronus in terram corruit, et quasi obsessus, sicut revera fuit, omnes sui corporis gestus formavit.' He is carried into a nearby church,

> where the poor wretch poured forth a stream of blasphemies and horrible words against God and against Oliver [scholasticus and friend of Bernard] himself. Then he was fastened to a cart with straps and sent to his friends; and it is said that the devil carried him off on the fifth day in accordance with a previous threat.
>
> ubi multas blasphemias et verba quaedam horribilia miser ille in Deum et in eundem Oliverum evomuit. Tunc coreo ligatus, curruique impositus, ad notos suos deportatus est. Quem, ut aiunt, daemon quinta die, prout ei promiserat, exstinxit.

Caesarius notes that

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[79] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 55, p. 338; trans. Scott and Bland 1:389.

from this man's obsession and death we can see that his preaching was not for the sake of devotion, but rather from ambition. He is said also to have been an apostate, and in some way to have obtained letters from the lord pope, allowing him to enter the province. Others said that he had been in that excommunicated ship, which carried arms to sell to the Saracens at Ceuta.

Ex cuius vexatione seu morte satis datum est intelligi, quod eius praedicatio non fuerit devotionis, sed magis ambitionis. Dicitur et apostata fuisse, et a domino Papa literas, ut eum provincia toleraret, obtinuisse. Alii dicebant, quod etiam fuerit in nave illa excommunicata, quae Sarracenis arma bellica vendiderat in Septia.

Caesarius' speech is here particularly concerned with boundaries. The broken boundaries of the priest's body provoke anxiety about other vulnerable borders. These are geographical – the false priest manages to penetrate into the province under false pretences, and is linked with a ship carrying arms to the Saracens, the enemy Other – but also metaphysical. The story of the priest is followed by a conversation between the Novice and the Monk, in which the Novice comments: 'It astonishes me that the Lord should punish contempt so severely in this man, while there are so many priests today who handle most unworthily the sacred mysteries of Christ, and only preach Him at their convenience,' 'Miror, quare Dominus in isto huiusmodi contemtus tam acriter vindicaverit, cum tales sint hodie plurimi sacerdotes Christi sascrosancta mysteria indignissime tractantes, et tantum per occasionem illum praedicantes.' The Monk agrees: 'I think he was made an example for other priests, both that they should not trouble that pure preaching of the cross, which was being done only for the honour of Christ, and also, because of the merits of Oliver,' 'Ad terrorem arbitror factum aliorum sacerdotum, tum ne fermentarent illam purissimam praedicationem crucis, quae tantum fiebat ad honorem Christi, tum propter merita iam dicti Oliveri.' [80]

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[80] Caesarius bk. 4, ch. 10, p. 182; trans. Scott and Bland 1:206.

The permeable body of the priest, penetrated by demons, is deliberately placed in conjunction with the body of Christ. Bodies here are the foci for themes of Christian identity. It is the body of Jesus which is at the centre of demoniac texts. Each exorcism is authorised, in the end, by the body of Christ. Caesarius describes an abbot questioning a female demoniac:

> When the abbot put questions to her, she refused to answer a word, even when he asked if she would like to send any message to her brother, and remained dumb until he said: "I adjure you, by Him whom I have this day handled in the mass, that you answer me."

> cum Abbas nescio unde eam interrogaret, et illa nihil omnino responderet, subiunxit: Vis aliquid mandare fratri tuo? Illa obmutescente, adiecit Abbas: Adiuro te per eum quem hodie in missa tractavi, et respondeas mihi. [81]

> The demon was abjured by the abbot to go out of the woman, and he replied: "Whither shall I go?" When the abbot said: "See, I open my mouth, enter it, if you can"; he answered: "I cannot enter, because this day the Most High has entered there."

> daemon adiuratus ab Abbate ut exiret, respondit: Quo ibo? Dicente Abbate, ecce os meum aperio, si potes ingredere; ait: Non possum intrare, quia Altissimus hodie intravit.[82]

Christ enters the body in the form of the Eucharist, just as the demon is ingested in the form of a lettuce leaf, or a glass of cursed milk. The two are paralleled. While the demon's intervention opens the body, Christ's presence closes it.

It is the closed body which gives the power to exorcise. This is not solely a masculine prerogative: in addition to the attribution of penetrability to male bodies, the convention of the penetrable female body can itself be reversed. Images of female virgins, as I have noted, are constructed around the idea of the sealed body: this is doubly the case for

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[81] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 29, p. 312; trans. Scott and Bland 1:357.
[82] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 29, p. 314; trans. Scott and Bland 1:359.

female virgin martyrs. In the case of Saint Euphemia, recounted in the <u>Golden Legend</u>, it is the saint's body that is sealed, and the male jailer's that is penetrable. The jailer tries to seduce Euphemia, 'but he might never open the prison which was shut, neither with key ne with axes, till he was ravished with a devil, crying and treating [scratching] himself, that unnethe he escaped.'[83] Here, the virginal body of a saint trumps the lustful body of the jailer, who is punished by the further opening of his body, through both possession and self-inflicted wounds. This trope of the impenetrable female body is repeated in a number of virgin martyr tales, in which the virginal body remains intact despite torture and threats of rape. St Agnes is a case in point: refusing to marry, she is forcibly brought to a brothel, where

> anon as she was unclothed God gave to her such grace that the hairs of her head became so long that they covered all her body to her feet, so that her body was not seen. And when S. Agnes entered into the bordel anon she found the angel of God ready for to defend her, and environed S. Agnes with a bright clearness in such wise that no man might see her ne come to her.... All they that entered made honour and reverence to the great clearness that they saw about S. Agnes, and came out more devout and more clean than they entered.'[84]

As this text suggests, accounts of possession are concerned at least as much with holy bodies as with the bodies of the possessed. The body of the demoniac is only half of the story; the focus is almost equally on the body of the exorcist. Indeed, demonic possession operates as one point of a binary equation – the pervious body of the demoniac, whether male or female, justifies the intact, masculine body of the Church and its clerics. For the intact bodies of the clerics to mean anything at all, they must be measured against other, pervious bodies.

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[83] Jacobus, <u>The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton</u> 2:182.
[84] Jacobus, <u>The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton</u> 5:145

The intactness associated with virginity is appropriated by the bodies of the exorcising clerics. As priests, they are naturally celibate, their bodies free from the sexual incontinence that makes others vulnerable. Their bodies are sealed, closed off to demons. Jacobus' account of Saint Cyriacus' attempt to cure Arthemia, the possessed daughter of Diocletian, makes this clear: the devil declares

> If thou wilt that I issue and go out, give me a vessel where I may enter in, and then answered Ciriacus: Lo! here is my body, enter therein if thou mayst, and he said: Into thy vessel I may not enter, for it is signed and closed on all sides.[85]

Cyriacus' holy body is sealed, impervious to demonic penetration. Arthemia, and the daughter of the king of the Persians, who is later possessed by the same devil, do not have this immunity, nor is it expected that they would. Caesarius' story of an attempted exorcism again is primarily concerned with the body of the (would-be) exorcist:

> A demoniac was once brought by his friends to a monastery of our Order in the hope of his deliverance. The Prior came out, bringing with him a young monk of saintly reputation, whom he knew to be virgin in body, and said to the demon: "If this monk should order you to go out, how would you dare to remain?" The demon replied: "I have no fear of him, because of his pride."'

> Obsessum quendam amici sui ad quoddam coenobium ordinis nostri spe liberationis traxerunt. Ad quem egressus Prior, assumto secum monacho magnae opinionis adolescente, quem noverat virginem corpore, ait daemoni: Si praeceperit tibi monachus iste, ut exeas, quomodo audebis manere? Respondit daemon: Non eum timeo; superbus est enim.[86]

The point of the story is, of course, that the monk's pride in his virginity counteracts its effects. It is significant, however, that the abbot's original presumption is that the demon will be unable to withstand the power of a monk 'virgin in body.'

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[85] Jacobus, <u>The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton</u> 4:206.

[86] Caesarius bk. 4, ch. 5, p. 176; trans. Scott and Bland 1:199-200.

The mouth is at least as important an opening in the body as the genitals. Thus, sexual

continence is only one requirement for would-be exorcists. Exorcists must also regulate

their eating patterns. The Alphabet of Tales includes the story of a saint

> þat had a grete vertue in castynge oute of ffendis, not alonelie when he was
> present, nor in his awn wurd alone, bod somtyme when he was absent, and
> somtyme þurgh þe hem of his hare, and somtyme be his lettres-sengyng. & he
> wulde heale many folk þat war seke, and herefore þurgh all þe wurld þer come
> vnto hym mekull peple. And as it was sayd, he abstenyd hym bothe fro meat &
> drynk.'[87]

This perhaps explains why monks, living on a strict diet, succeed so often in exorcisms

which have defeated their more well-fed clerical brethren. In another of Jacobus' legends,

a man brings his possessed wife to Saint Bernard in Pavia, 'And anon the devil began to

missay him through the mouth of the wretched woman, and said: Thou eater of porret,

ween thou to take me out of mine house? Nay, thou shalt not!'[88] The demon's fixation on

Bernard's eating habits suggest a concern with what passes into the saint's body, with

openings in the normally sealed boundaries of his body. The demon's contemptuous

reaction to Bernard's monastic diet ironically points to the very characteristic, control

over what comes into his body, which authorises his exorcism.

While the ideal clerical male body is constructed as perfectly sealed, this is inevitably an

impossible standard to maintain. Elliott comments that 'the impossible quest for purity,

be it personal or institutional, created a pocket of vulnerability that was ever susceptible

to hostile penetration by the agents of defilement.'[89] As we have seen, the male body is

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[87] Etienne de Besançon 493.
[88] Jacobus, The Golden Legend of Lives of the Saints as Englished By William Caxton 5:24.
[89] Elliott, Fallen Bodies 13.

prone to demonstrating the same lack of control as its female counterpart. The

paradigmatic example of this uncontrol is nocturnal emission. Leyser comments:

> victory over the spirit of fornication involved far more than mere abstention from
> sexual intercourse or from masturbation: the man seeking purity should track
> down sexual desire to its lair in the mind. His success in so doing could be
> indexed in the manner in which he emitted semen during the night. A man who
> seemed, in the daytime, to present the outward signs of holiness, could, through
> nocturnal emission, betray the real contents of his heart.[90]

There is clearly a tremendous amount of anxiety here. Nocturnal emission, indeed, is

linked to the presence of the devil. Caesarius tells the worrying tale of a devil, in the

shape of a nun, kissing a lay-brother asleep in a dormitory who is later found to be 'lying

in a fashion that was both immodest and exposed,' 'incomposite et impudice nudatumque

iacentem.' The lay-brother in question soon dies. Caesarius observes that:

> Seemliness or modesty is the ornament of all virtues, and ought to be observed in
> behaviour as well as in dress. It often happens that as in the night a man gladly
> lets his thoughts turn again to those subjects which have occupied his mind during
> the day, so in his sleep he may make an outward manifestation of the thoughts on
> which he has been dwelling while awake.

> Verecundia sive pudicitia, quae omnium ornamentum est virtutum, non solum
> esse debet in habitu, sed etiam in actu. Frequenter contingit, ut sicut homo interior
> libenter ea quae de die cogitat, nocte per imaginationem retractat, ita exterior illa
> quae vigilans factitat, dormiens frequenter repraesentet.[91]

What is hidden in the body is to be feared. Possession draws attention to just those

features of bodies – openness, permeability, vulnerability to penetration – against which

clerical bodies define themselves. While the sealed body of the cleric is constructed in

response to the open body of the demoniac, however, it is itself prone to slipping into that

same openness.

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[90] Leyser, <u>Authority and Asceticism</u> 50-51.
[91] Caesarius bk. 5, ch. 33, p. 317 trans. Scott and Bland 1:363.

From using demonic possession to highlight female weakness and male control, then, clerical writers move to examining a particular type of masculinity – that of monks and clerics. Clerical masculinity must be clearly delineated, separated from both femininity and secular masculinity. This is done through the medium of the body: bodily openness and lack of control can, depending on the aims of the author, be projected onto either women or secular men. Similarly, male control can be shared by both clerical and secular men, or attributed to clerical men only. As bodily control is constructed as innately masculine, the real issue is often whether 'true' masculinity is shared by secular men, or retained solely for clerics.

The issues which emerge from a study of demonic possession mirror those which characterise madness. As we have seen from medical texts, madness also evokes fears of the male body as vulnerable to outside influences: a vulnerability which in turn suggests a persistent anxiety about the maintenance of masculinity. This anxiety recurs in the next genre of text I will examine: the Arthurian romance. The romance, represented in my thesis predominantly by Malory's Morte Darthur, promotes a distinct model of masculinity, one based around the knight. In this model of chivalric masculinity, a model in which the knight's body is characterised by both resistance and susceptibility to wounding, madness can both confirm and undermine masculinity.

Chapter Four: Thomas Malory's <u>Morte Darthur</u>

Madness is not an uncommon feature of Arthurian romance. Indeed, as Neaman comments, 'in nearly every major European language in which Arthurian romances were written, there is at least one romance which contains a mad hero.'[1] Knights, typically, are driven insane by the breakdown of a heterosexual relationship, and spend time as mad men roaming the forest, discarding their armour and clothing, and scavenging for their food. Madness here is characterised by a loss not only of all sense of self, but of all connection to civilisation: the mad knight lives like a beast. The mad knight is typically only restored to health and sanity by outside intervention, usually provided in the form of supernatural assistance, either magical or religious.

The first mad knight, Chretien's Yvain, establishes this pattern, which is adapted to Lancelot and Tristram in the Prose Vulgate, Prose Tristan, and subsequent Arthurian texts.[2] There are exceptions, however, such as the romance <u>Sir Orfeo</u>, in which Orfeo's wife, Heurodis, falls asleep under an 'ympe tre' and receives a vision in which she is told she will be abducted by the King of Faery. In reaction, Heurodis is 'reveyd oute of hir witt': scratching her face, hands and feet and shredding her clothing.[3] Despite Orfeo mounting a large guard around her, she does indeed disappear with the king as promised, and Orfeo takes to the wilderness to attempt to find her, eating roots and berries and sleeping under leaves. Here we see a distinct variation on the usual pattern of romance

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[1] Neaman, <u>The Distracted Knight</u> 1.

[2] There is a second tradition, seen especially in the Tristan romances, of the knight faking insanity. In the <u>Folie Tristan</u>, Tristan disguises himself as a court fool in order to gain access to Isode. As Tristan is attempting to pass himself off as a natural fool, someone who is without wit since birth, however, this does not come under the scope of my study. See Neaman, <u>The Distracted Knight</u>, for further details.

[3] <u>Sir Orfeo</u>, <u>Middle English Romances</u>, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd, Norton Critical Editions (New York: Norton, 1995) 174-90, at 176.

madness: while the story centres on a broken relationship, it is broken through magic rather than through the actions of either protagonist (except insomuch as we can blame Heurodis for choosing to sleep under a tree at noon, a traditional spot for supernatural encounter in romance). In addition, the characteristics of madness are split between the protagonists: Heurodis, mad with grief, mutilates herself and weeps, while Orfeo, although not mad himself, imitates the traditional departure of the mad knight for the wilderness. Despite its happy ending – the reuniting of Orfeo and Heurodis, and Orfeo's subsequent resumption of the throne – the text remains a puzzling anomaly.

Despite the existence of Heurodis and Orfeo, madness in romance, as Huot points out, is generally restricted to knights in love:

> Subjecthood, in medieval French romance, is a strictly delineated concept: aristocratic, Christian, heterosexual, and most often male. In so far as madness is a disruption of subjectivity, it is something attributed to aristocratic male heroes and generally not, within the romance tradition, to women or to *vilains*.... The madness of the hero is an index of the extent to which he simultaneously transgresses and transcends the law that limits more ordinary knights – let alone peasants – to an existence at once more orderly and more mundane.[4]

Madness, then, Huot indicates, holds a more ambiguous status in romance than in other texts we have looked at. Submitting to madness, as we have seen, usually makes one distinctly unmanly. In romance, however, madness is experienced only by the very best knights – Chretien's Yvain is only rivalled by Gawain for knightly prowess, and in Malory, the Prose Tristan and the Prose Vulgate it is Tristram and Launcelot, those finest of worldly knights, who are stricken with insanity. Within the terms of the romance, these are the knights who are the *most* masculine.

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[4] Huot 91.

Huot concurs: 'ironically, within the framework of the romance world, the capacity to experience despair and even outright madness is an index not of weakness but of greatness, a sign of true nobility.'[5] In part, this is a consequence of an ideology which aligns strong emotion with nobility, as Andrew Lynch points out: 'it is always acknowledged that the best will feel most, and especially feel most for each other, whether "joy" or "sorrow"... That the emotional hierarchy forms part of a natural class system is a commonplace in romance literature.'[6] This holds sway to such an extent that, Lynch argues, 'the capacity for strong feeling, like other knightly features in Malory, comes to be seen as a good in itself.'[7]

Moreover, madness does not seem to undermine masculinity in the world of the Morte as it does in medical texts. After recovery from insanity, both Launcelot and Tristram are restored to their original positions; their madness is never again mentioned, and their identities as the world's best knights remain unchanged. Indeed, madness, according to Sir Dinadan, is part of their *modus operandi* to start with:

> ye fare... 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 knyghtes that ar so wood as ys sir Launcelot and ye, sir Tristram! ... Jesu deffende me... frome such two knyghtys, and specially frome youre felyshyp (508:1-10).

In fact, knightliness seems continually shadowed by madness. Knights fight each other 'as men outraged of reson' (178:11-12), 'as wood men' (469:31-32). They are 'wood wrothe' (911:8-9) when unhorsed or beaten. Madness, it seems, is always a possibility within normal knightly behaviour, and cannot be separated from it. Just as knighthood

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[5] Huot 111.
[6] Andrew Lynch, <u>Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in </u>Le Morte Darthur, Arthurian Studies 39 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) 142.
[7] Lynch 143.

itself is seen at its full potential in knights like Tristram and Launcelot, so too, it seems, is the madness that goes with it. Dorothy Yamamoto, indeed, in her examination of the mad knight as a type of the wild man, argues that 'neither "wild man", nor "knight" are stable terms, for each draws upon the other for confirmation of its identity.... as the two sides skirmish, the boundary between them becomes fluid, and is re-invented as a site of play.'[8]

When madness is an extreme, but seemingly natural, consequence of normal knightly behaviour, the mad knight will necessarily afford us an insight into 'normal' romance masculinity. Indeed, Sylvia Huot, in her study of madness in medieval French romance, attributes madness to the pressure of negotiating conflicting heterosexual and homosocial roles. Knights are placed in a double bind – trapped between the pressures of heterosexuality and homosociality, torn between adhering to the discourses of courtly love or to misogynistic denunciations of women – and the impossibility of their situations is expressed through madness.[9] We can trace this attitude within the <u>Morte Darthur</u>. As critics have repeatedly pointed out, women are a largely threatening presence in the <u>Morte</u>. Whether through active malice – Morgan le Fay, in particular, is keen on imprisoning knights in order to force them to do her sexual bidding – or merely, as with Guinevere and Isode, by coming between knights and their lords, women present a problematic element in the text. Despite this potential for disaster, however, engaging in a heterosexual relationship is an accepted part of knightly masculinity, a means of gaining status and material wealth. Tristram, indeed, goes so far as to state that 'a knyght may never be of proues but yf he be a lovear' (689:5-6). Women may be dangerous, but they

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[8] Dorothy Yamamoto, <u>The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature</u> (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 169.
[9] Huot 97.

are also necessary. As in medical texts, male sexual desire in romance is treated as a

natural but potentially fatal impulse.

Malory's conception of lovesickness is certainly influenced by the medical model.

Madness does affect only the noblest of knights, and is defined as a loss of control over

the self. As we will see, the threat of feminisation hangs over those who suffer from

madness brought on by excessive love. However, the causes of madness in the Morte

Darthur are much closer to those in the model described by Huot, in which homosocial

and heterosexual obligations collide. Malory's knights do not lapse into madness merely

from loving excessively. Gareth's adoration of Lyonesse comes closest to the classical

lovesickness model:

> And the more he loked on her, the more he brenned in love, that he passed
> hymself farre in his reson. And forth towardys nyght they yode unto souper, and
> sir Gareth myght nat ete, for his love was so hoote that he wyst nat where he was
> (331:23-27).

Rather than this burning love leading inevitably to insanity, however, Gareth profits from

his relationship with Lyonesse. He wins not only a wife and her lands, but also an

enviable knightly reputation, thanks to the tournament suggested by Lyonesse. Gareth's

lovesickness is merely a stage in his development as hero, and one which, far from

incapacitating him, spurs him on to defeat all other knights in a tournament for his lady's

hand. Once won, however, Lyonesse quickly disappears from the text, as does Gareth

himself until the final book, where his death is the catalyst for the downfall of the

Arthurian court. Those relationships which have greater longevity are fraught with slightly more difficulty.[10]

As Neaman points out, lovesickness in its true form is not experienced by Arthurian madmen:

> Medically speaking, love-madness is *amor heroicus*, an insanity resulting from the frustration of sexual desire. A careful examination of the madness of the major Arthurian lovers proves that the hero never suffers from *amor heroicus*. Instead, the Arthurian lover suffers from excessive shame, jealousy, or grief because he fears either that he has lost or will lose the love of his lady.[11]

Those knights who become mad do so after the breakdown of previously successful relationships. For both Tristram and Launcelot, the occasion for madness is losing possession of their lady: Tristram because he believes Isode is having an affair with Keyhydyns, and Launcelot because Guinevere rejects him for mistakenly having sex with Elaine. Palomides here is the exception: he never gains possession of his beloved, Isode, to start with. Palomides' recurring episodes of madness are prompted by his despair over ever attaining Isode's love, and by his rage at being constantly surpassed by Tristram. This motive for madness dates back to Chretien's Yvain: Yvain is driven to madness by breaking a promise to his wife to return to her within a given time. When he fails to return, she sends her maiden to accuse him of treachery, and to take back the ring which is a symbol of their love.

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[10] In Chretien's Yvain, the hero profits from his marriage in much the same way as Gareth. Unlike Gareth, however, marriage sparks off the events which lead to Yvain's madness: it is a beginning, rather than, as for Gareth, a conclusion to adventures.

[11] Neaman, Abstract, The Distracted Knight 1-3, at 3.

It seems that the danger is not with love in itself: relationships instead become problematic when the wishes of the lady conflict (or at least appear to conflict) with those of the knight: Yvain stays away from his lady Laudine because of his desire to gain honour through competing in tournaments. What is particularly interesting about Malory's treatment of this motif, however, is his different attitude to the three mad knights: Launcelot, Tristram, and Palomides. While the madness of all three knights is connected in some way with thwarted love, the precise cause differs for each. Launcelot is the victim of women – of the deceit of Elaine, the sorcery of dame Brusen, who through her magic transforms Elaine into the likeness of Guinevere, and finally, of the mistrust and jealousy of Guinevere herself, who refuses to listen to his explanation of events and finally bars him from her court. Tristram's madness, in contrast, is prompted by the actions of his squire Keyhydyns, who, in declaring his love for Isode, puts his own desire for a heterosexual relationship above the homosocial relationship he has already established with Tristram. Palomides' madness, prompted by his inability to establish a heterosexual relationship with Isode and the consequent fracturing of his homosocial relationship with Tristram, combines these two fears.

For both Tristram and Launcelot, madness is, importantly, prompted by misunderstandings. Isode does not love Keyhydyns; Launcelot only slept with Elaine in the belief that she was Guinevere. Palomides, however, is correct in his reading of the situation. Isode will never return his love; Tristram *is* a superior knight. The insecurities of Launcelot and Tristram are, we know, without foundation, and are eventually resolved. It is Palomides who, in his hopeless love and well-founded jealousy, realises those fears

that are quickly suppressed in the cases of Launcelot and Tristram. There is, clearly, a distinct difference between the treatment of Launcelot and Tristram, on the one hand, and Palomides, on the other. This is something I will address in detail later in the chapter. For the moment, it is worth examining Malory's attitude to sexuality and its links to madness in more detail. The <u>Morte Darthur</u> treats sexuality as deeply problematic. As Sir Dinadan, a lone cynical voice, exclaims: 'I mervayle at sir Trystram and mo other suche lovers. What aylyth them to be so madde and so asoted uppon women?' (693:26-28).

We can go so far as to argue that madness in the <u>Morte</u> is a representation of the fears associated with heterosexuality. Madness, deriving from sex and the emotions aroused by it, is shaped by the circumstances which bring it into being. In this context, it is interesting that the onset of madness in both Tristram and Launcelot is connected to the breaking of windows. Keyhydyns flees Isode's chamber by jumping through a window after Tristram accuses him of sleeping with Isode, and Launcelot himself jumps through the window of Guinevere's chamber before fleeing madly into the woods. The image of breaking glass reflects the underlying fragility of the mind, the ease with which sanity can be shattered. Boundaries between inside and outside are abruptly fractured.

Also relevant is that the breaking of glass occurs in the lady's private chamber. Inner spaces in the <u>Morte Darthur</u> are frequently problematic. Dhira Mahoney characterises the bedroom as 'the site of danger and deception... One reason for these associations... is

clearly the identification of the private chamber with women.'[12] Mahoney cites the

entrapment and subsequent imprisonment of Alexander l'Orphelin within Morgan's

chamber as evidence of this danger: once inside a woman's space, it is difficult for a

knight to escape.[13] After defeating another knight, Alexander is wounded to the extent

that he agrees, under duress, to be Morgan's prisoner in return for her healing powers. It

is not long, however, before he is informed by a helpful damsel of the true reason for his

captivity: 'wyte you well that ye be a presonere and wors than ye wene, for my lady, my

cousyn, quene Morgan, kepyth you here for none other entente but for to do hir plesure

whan hit lykyth hir.' (643:19-22). Confinement in this close feminine space is clearly

linked to the threats of close proximity to the female body. Inner spaces, as we have

established, are frequently identified with the female body itself: the knight who finds his

way into a lady's chamber frequently also finds his way into her body.[14] The case of

Launcelot, whose discovery in Guinevere's chamber is universally accepted as proof of

his adultery, amply bears this out.

Another common feature of both sex and madness is the nudity of the mad knight. One of

the defining features of madness is the stripping off of armour and clothes; both

Launcelot and Tristram remove clothing as they enter the forest as madmen. Throughout

the Morte, the two occasions on which knights are noticeably without armour (outside of

the Grail Quest, in which stripping oneself of armour becomes a penitential act) are when

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[12] Dhira B. Mahoney, "Symbolic Uses of Space in Malory's Morte Darthur," Re-Viewing Le Morte Darthur: Texts and Contexts, Characters and Themes, ed. K. S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu, Arthurian Studies 60 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005) 95-106, at 99.
[13] Mahoney, "Symbolic Uses of Space" 99-101.
[14] See chapter two.

engaged in sexual relations, and when mad.[15] The mad Launcelot, despite being dressed in 'his shurte and his breke' (817:27-28), is repeatedly described as being naked, which seems to imply that nakedness here is seen in terms of a lack of armour. In the Morte Darthur, armour is integral to identity. Knights are recognised by their armour – donning another knight's armour renders one incognito, a point which is central to the plot of many a knightly encounter. The loss of armour, then, has obvious connotations for a knight's conception of himself. The mad knight, without armour or weaponry, is without social status or identity. Indeed, Launcelot and Tristram are unrecognisable to the knights they meet in the course of their madness. Without armour or weapons, the mad knight is merely a 'foole naked' (498:25). Only when Launcelot is once more dressed 'lyke a knyght' can Elaine recognise him; Tristram, even washed and dressed, remains unrecognisable to all but Isode's brachet, which operates by smell rather than vision (823:13, 501-502).

As well as indicating the mad knight's separation from his social identity, the stripping off of armour suggests a new-found vulnerability. Knights are no longer impervious to wounds inflicted by non-knights; instead, they are an object of scorn, a frequent target for violence from peasants and townfolk alike. Both sex and madness are characterised by vulnerability, signified not only by the absence of armour, but also by the body's openness to wounding. Dorothy Yamamoto suggests that the descent into madness can be seen in a Bakhtinian sense, as a shift from an opaque, controlled body to one open to

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[15] Knights are, obviously, often seen in places where armour would be inappropriate – at court, for example, or when feasting. However, the removal of armour is never documented – they are generally never seen in the process of unarming as they are when it is a matter of going mad or going to bed.

being wounded and penetrated.[16] Wounds, obviously, are a normal part of knightly

combat. Jill Mann has described the ritual woundings that mark out the relationship

between knights:

> coming together with his fellow-knights, in extreme and violent form, in single
> combat, [the knight] ruptures the bodily integrity of his opponent and loses his
> own; but this rupture on the bodily plane often, paradoxically, leads to fellowship
> and union between the two combatants.[17]

Blood, as Mann has pointed out, is crucial to the Morte Darthur: 'body and blood are...

the central elements of the knightly experience: it is through hazarding his body in

combat and shedding blood – both his own and others – that the knight realises his worth

and that of his fellows.'[18] As Andrew Lynch notes, blood is

> the basic currency of fights and quests, their operative factor as much as their
> issue, and often unrealistically prominent in fights that end without a death.... The
> text acts consistently in a way that literalises blood as the seat of goodness and
> nobility.[19]

Anything which involves blood, then, is highly important to knightly identity. And blood,

as we have seen, is central to medieval conceptions of sex. The man engaged in sexual

intercourse both loses his own blood in the form of semen, and runs the risk of coming

into contact with female blood. It is this exchange of fluids which is key to medieval

concerns. The loss of sperm during sex threatens to dry out the male body, with

potentially fatal consequences. Female bleeding, too, is potentially lethal; the deep-rooted

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[16] Yamamoto 170.

[17] Jill Mann, "Malory and the Grail Legend," A Companion to Malory, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards, Arthurian Studies 37, 1996 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) 203-220, at 209.

[18] Mann 208.

[19] Lynch 60. Female blood is, on one notable occasion during the Morte Darthur, a source of healing: during the Grail Quest, the virginal blood supplied by Perceval's sister cures a sick gentlewoman. Malory's Grail Quest section, however, operates on different rules from the rest of the Morte, and this incident cannot be taken as typical (pp. 1000-1004).

connections between menstruation and madness in medical thought is something we have

already explored.[20]

Blood appears in both of these contexts during episodes of madness. Mad knights are

repeatedly wounded: within moments of going mad, Launcelot scratches himself with

thorns so that he is 'all to-cracched of his vysage and hys body' (806:5).[21] Huot links the

madman as object of violence to Giorgio Agamben's concept of the *homo sacer*, the man

who stands outside the law.[22] Huot summarises the status of the *homo sacer*: 'killing him

is not murder, but neither is it religious sacrifice nor judicial punishment: his exposure to

collective violence, his state of Otherness, is such that he is simply to be exterminated in

an act that has no other implications or consequences.'[23] With the substitution of

'ongoing violent abuse' for Agamben's 'extermination,' Huot argues that this description

perfectly matches the medieval madman. Both Launcelot and Tristram are beaten by

lower-class men – the kind of 'passyng foule carles' who, earlier in the <u>Morte</u>, Launcelot

was happy to casually slaughter for disrespect (271:8-9). Tristram, part of the 'felyshyppe

of herdemen and shyperdis,' is repeatedly wounded by them: 'whan he ded ony shrewde

dede they wolde beate hym with roddis' (496:20-21, 22-23). Launcelot fights not against

knights but against townsfolk:

> And so whan he was entyrde into the towne he ran thorow the towne to the
> castell; and than all the yonge men of that cité ran aftir sir Launcelot, and there
> they threwe turvis at hym and gaff hym many sad strokys. And ever as sir
> Launcelot myght reche ony of them, he threw them so that they wolde never com
> in hys hondes no more, for of som he breake the leggys and armys (822:22-28).

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[20] See chapter two.

[21] As we see with Heurodis, scratching at the face and body is generally a feminine response to grief:
Launcelot's scratched face, then, may be taken as an undermining of his identity as knight.

[22] Huot 71-72.

[23] Huot 71.

Seemingly unmotivated violence and wounding, then, are expected features of medieval stories of madness.[24] It is the particular patterns of wounding in which I am interested.

The wounds inflicted on mad knights are not those usual to knighthood. The way in which knights shed blood outside combat, in the absence of armour, is qualitatively different from combat-derived bloodshed. This disparity is brought into sharp focus by a reminder of the importance of knightly wounds. As Launcelot enters Corbyn as a madman, the wounds on his body are the only token which remains of his previous identity. The knights of Corbyn can read his knightliness from his battle-scarred body: 'Whan they behylde hym and loked uppon hys persone, they thought they never sawe so goodly a man. And whan they sawe so many woundys uppon hym, they demed that he had bene a man of worshyp' (822:30-34). In contrast, the wounds inflicted during Launcelot's period of madness are not the glorious wounds of combat, the wounds which prove his status as a 'man of worship'. Rather, they are accidental wounds, wounds without meaning or status attached.

Peggy McCracken, in her work on bleeding in medieval texts, suggests a structural opposition between male blood, which when shed in battle is valued and meaningful, and female blood, which 'should remain hidden and private.[25] I would contend that Launcelot's bleeding while mad falls under the rubric of female bleeding. Gail Kern Paster notes that 'the male body, open and bleeding, can assume the shameful attributes of the incontinent female body… At such moments, the bleeding male's blood comes to

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[24] For a fuller discussion, see Huot 65-96.
[25] McCracken x.

differ, shamefully, from itself.'[26] Launcelot's bleeding here, meaningless, uncontrolled, is

feminine bleeding. The blood shed here differs, as Paster suggests, from that blood which

defines Launcelot's value as a knight, and which structures Bors' complaint to Guinevere

that 'now have ye loste the beste knyght of oure blood… Alas!... what shall we do that

ben of hys bloode?' (808:7-13).[27]

Two episodes in particular are interesting in terms of 'feminine' bleeding: Launcelot

'hurte[ing] hys hondys sore' breaking through the chains binding him, and being

wounded in the thigh by a boar (820:11, 821). Both wounds have sexual connotations. A

wound to the thigh generally suggests castration or sexual passivity.[28] The wound to

Launcelot's hands, moreover, anticipates the later wounds he will inflict on himself in

breaking through the bars over Guinevere's chamber. On that occasion, Guinevere is

discovered in bed with 'all the hede-sheete, pylow, and over-shyte... all bebled of the

bloode of sir Launcelot and of hys hurte honde,' and promptly accused of adultery

(1132:9-11). This connection between bleeding and illicit sex is found again in an

episode in which Tristram, having been wounded by King Mark on his way to an

assignation with the wife of Sir Segwarydes, bleeds over 'bothe the over-shete and the

neyther-sheete, and the pylowes and the hede-shete' of the marital bed (394:27-28).[29]

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[26] Gail Kern Paster, The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993) 92.

[27] There is also the possibility of reading Lancelot's bleeding here in relation to a different model of male bleeding – that defined by the bleeding body of Christ. However, Paster's theory of bleeding would sharply differentiate the two: Christ's bleeding is intentional and purposeful, and therefore masculine. Lancelot's bleeding, in contrast, is not chosen, and produces no useful outcome.

[28] Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, "No Pain, No Gain: Violence as Symbolic Capital in Malory's Morte D'Arthur," Arthuriana 8 (1998): 115-34, at 123.

[29] A scene which is particularly prominent in Beroul's twelfth-century Romance of Tristan: 'The blood, still warm, was there to be seen on the / flour [sic]. The king saw the blood on the bed. / The white sheets were red with it, / and there on the flour were / drips of blood,' 'Sor la flor, chauz, li sanc parut. / Li rois choisi el

Bleeding during sex clearly evokes both menstruation and defloration: both paradigmatic

forms of female bleeding. Once again, a loss of blood is inexorably linked to a loss of

masculine status.

This effect is also seen in another aspect of madness in the romance, also linked to blood:

the madman's diet. Madness is characterised by the hunt for food. Both Tristram and

Launcelot are forced to survive on the food they find in the woods, on 'fruyte and suche

as [they] myght gete' (817:25). Felicity Riddy has noted the importance of food within

the Morte Darthur, and within chivalric life. 'Feasting was the primary peaceable

communal activity, the centre, in fact as well as in fiction, of the self-celebration of the

noble way of life... feasts take place with the function of asserting the communal ethos.'[30]

The madman is obviously excluded from such celebrations of community. Worse, the

madman is unable to eat as befits a knight. David Sprunger notes the relevance of Claude

Levi-Strauss' classic distinction between raw and cooked food: the raw meat consumed

by the madman signifies his exclusion from civilised society.[31] This consumption of

uncivilised food, however, has a more concrete importance. Yamamoto argues that: 'food

not only ensures physical survival but validates a particular identity.... Since diet sustains

identity, when diet changes identity changes too.'[32] There are good physiological reasons

linking diet to identity. Again, this link is established through blood. As Bettina

Bildhauer comments, blood is seen as manufactured from ingested food – the type of

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lit le sanc. / Vermel en furent li drap blanc, / Et sor la flor en pert la trace / Du sanc.' Beroul, The Romance of Tristan, ed. and trans. Stewart Gregory, Faux Titre 57 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992) pp. 36-7, lines 766-770.
[30] Felicity Riddy, Sir Thomas Malory, Medieval and Renaissance Authors 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1987) 75.
[31] David A. Sprunger, "Wild Folk and Lunatics in Medieval Romance," The Medieval World of Nature, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury, Garland Ref. Lib. of the Humanities (New York: Garland, 1993) 145-63, at 159.
[32] Yamamoto 182.

food determines the type of blood. To act in a knightly manner, one must first eat knightly food, and produce knightly blood. Blood is, once more, the key to identity.

When Launcelot seeks shelter with a hermit, 'the ermyte myght nat fynde hym his sustenaunce, and so he empeyred and wexed fyeble bothe of body and of hys wytte: for defaute of sustenaunce he waxed more wooder than he was aforetyme' (822:14-18). The food suitable for a hermit, or for lower-class men such as the shepherds Tristram associates with, is clearly not the food suitable for a knight. Recovery cannot begin until knights are fed the food appropriate to nobles – indeed, Tristram is cured purely by being clothed, bathed and fed 'tylle they had brought hym well to hys remembraunce' (501:9-10). Again, this is modelled on the experiences of Yvain, whose diet when mad is primarily raw meat and bread he obtains from a hermit, which is 'Baked out of grain worth / A couple of pennies, at most, / Baked from rotten barley / And straw, or more like husks, / Or shells than cake, mouldy / All through, and dry as bark,' 'N'avoit mie .xx. sous cousté / Le sestier dont fu fais li pains, / Que plus estoit surs que levains; / D'orgë iert pertris avec paille. / Avec chë estoit il sans faille / Musy et ses comme une escorche.'[33]

The blood of the mad knight, then, becomes disturbingly close to that of lower status men. Knights suffering from madness have already been identified with women, as we have seen. Madness comes on them within the chamber of their ladies, as a result of excessive heterosexual desire. Typically, the mad knight breaks away from these

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[33] Chrétien de Troyes, Le Chevalier au Lion, ed. D. F. Hult, Romans, ed. Michel Zink, Classiques Modernes ([n.p.]: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) pp. 705-936, lines 2846-51; trans. as Yvain: The Knight of the Lion, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987) 87.

enclosed, feminine spaces, moving instead into the open, masculine space of the woods, the place of combat and adventure. This escape into the wilderness is a repeated trope in descriptions of mad people. Corinne Saunders traces it to the tale of Nebuchadnezzar, transformed into an ox and sent out into the desert: 'The landscape removed from civilization clearly reflects the moral deformities of Nebuchadnezzar, the wilderness within his soul, and was indeed to be viewed as appropriate to the madman.'[34] The mad knight, while in the forest, is condemned to wander restlessly. This pointless journeying reflects the instability implicit in madness. Just as the knight can no longer maintain a coherent identity, he can no longer find a coherent path through the forest, instead running, like Launcelot, 'wylde woode frome place to place' (817:24). Where the normal pattern of events is based on the rhythm of the quest – adventure framed by departure from and return to the court – madness acts as a disruptive force, cutting the knight off from the court entirely.

The forest, while usually associated with knightly adventure, is not an unproblematically masculine space. Elizabeth Edwards has noted that mad knights 'run into classes of people hardly ever encountered elsewhere in the <u>Morte</u>': shepherds, peasants, townsfolk.[35] Tristram's madness, in particular, takes place away from the knightly world. Instead, he is surrounded by inappropriate models of masculinity. He keeps company with herdmen, shepherds and hermits, as well as King Arthur's fool, Dagonet. The similarity between mad knights and the peasants which they encounter has been

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[34] Corinne J. Saunders, <u>The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden</u> (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993) 13.

[35] Elizabeth Edwards, "The Place of Women in the <u>Morte Darthur</u>," <u>A Companion to Malory</u>, ed Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards, Arthurian Studies 37, 1996 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) 37-54, at 42

repeatedly observed by critics. Felicity Riddy has argued that madness makes the knight

threateningly akin to 'the servile antitype by means of which the nobleman defines

himself'; 'the vilain... low-born, ugly, crudely hostile, roughly-spoken and bestial.'[36]

Yamamoto, meanwhile, in defining knighthood as adherence to a principle of *mesure*,

argues that the madman's loss of *mesure* aligns him with those figures defined by their

boorishness and lack of self control – peasants, giants, wild men.[37] In addition, Huot

traces a parallel between the mad knight and the peasant in French romance, both 'coded

as subhuman.'[38] The mad Tristram is taken in by shepherds 'who, like the mad, are

subject to the mockery and physical abuse of the upper classes.'[39]

These encounters with 'subhuman' men conclude in Tristram's defeat and beheading of a

marauding giant (500). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has argued that giants are used in medieval

texts to represent the impulses that men are expected to repress – rage, lust, and the desire

for unrestrained violence.[40] Just as we can see Arthur's earlier defeat of the giant of Mont

Michel as the purging of his own bestial desires and an assertion of his suitability for

kingship, so we can see Tristram's defeat of this giant as a purging of the inappropriate

masculinity it represents. After his sojourn with the lower classes, Tristram must remove

any common ground between himself and the base desires embodied in the peasants and

shepherds with whom he spent so much time. While madness reveals the knight as

dangerously similar to other, lesser men, sanity must come with a concomitant rejection

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[36] Riddy, <u>Sir Thomas Malory</u> 65.
[37] Yamamoto 171.
[38] Huot 84.
[39] Huot 84.
[40] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, <u>Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages</u>, Medieval Cultures 17 (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1999) 66, 78-80

of all but a strictly knightly masculinity. It is surely not coincidental that Tristram regains

his sanity as a direct result of his defeat of the giant. Having heard of the mad man's

achievement, King Mark collects him from the forest and brings him back to Tintagel,

where Tristam is 'brought... well to hys remembraunce.'

Despite the threats posed by madness, the recovery of the mad knight asserts the eventual

triumph of appropriate masculinity. Madness may shake masculinity, but it cannot

overthrow it. Even when mad, both knights still retain their knightly abilities and values:

Launcelot not only defends his lord, sir Blyaunte, against attack from two knights, but

also rides to hunt – which, we recall, is the means of distinguishing 'a jantylman frome a

yoman' (375:27). Tristram defeats Sir Dagonet and beheads a giant. In the end, they are

both still recognisable as knights. Launcelot, even when being chased through the streets,

impresses his rescuers. Malory writes that 'whan they behylde hym and loked uppon his

persone, they thought they never sawe so goodly a man' (822:30-32). His worth can still

be read from his body; his wounds are a concrete record of his 'worshyp.' The

disjunction between his past deeds, read from his body, and his present state of madness

evokes pity. Huot notes that:

> In all these cases of knightly madness...it is in body that the knight can be said to
> retain his socially constructed identity. Even in cases of extreme derangement, the
> body is recognisably a symbolic construct, shaped by such norms as
> "masculinity," "nobility," and "knighthood." As a material record of the
> fashioning of a self, the body provides a crucial locus of continuity when the
> performance that would have staged the self breaks down.[41]

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[41] Huot 188.

As Huot notes, the mad knight typically 'still remembers the forms and gestures of chivalric combat, but has lost all sense of the context that is meant to invest them with meaning.'[42]

Knightly identity in the <u>Morte Darthur</u>, as critics have often pointed out, is innate. Knights are born rather than made. Lamerok and Gaheris advise Arthur to knight the newly arrived La Cote Male Tayle because he 'besymeth well of persone and of countenaunce that he shall preve a good knyght and a myghty' (459:29-31). Knightliness is always already present in the body, unaffected by change in social circumstances. In the case of the mad Tristram and Launcelot, this innate knightliness is cast into doubt only to be confirmed anew. As Bettina Bildhauer comments in relation to sexual threats to masculinity, 'The imaginary threats to their integrity are double-edged, as by challenging the bodily boundaries, they ultimately also confirm those borders; and a crisis successfully overcome will leave the man strengthened and affirmed.'[43] The threats raised, however, do not go away but are merely displaced. The figure onto whom they are projected is the Saracen knight, Palomides.

Palomides is a very different knight from Launcelot and Tristram. While Launcelot and Tristram are normally presented as unproblematically masculine, Palomides is engaged in a continual process of self-construction. He is, as Lynch notes, a liminal figure: as a Saracen knight, he is familiar and yet other.[44] This liminal position in the text enables

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[42] Huot 52.

[43] Bettina Bildhauer, <u>Medieval Blood</u>, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2006) 85.

[44] Lynch 109.

Palomides to act as a locus for anxieties that Malory cannot articulate in connection to other knights; anxieties that come to light through his madness. As we have seen, Palomides' madness is consistent. Unlike Launcelot and Tristram, his madness is not contained within a bounded period of time; he is never 'cured,' but is continually vulnerable to acting 'lyke a man that was oute of his wytt that recked nat of hymselff' (423:20-21). Those conflicts that are resolved in the case of Tristram and Launcelot, remain unresolved for Palomides. While their madness is an experience completely separate from their normal selves, Palomides' madness is woven into his day-to-day existence. A simple unhorsing at a tournament prompts him to 'put his horse from him and... his armoure and wayled and wepte lyke as he had bene a wood man' (762:6-8).

Palomides' propensity for madness can be partly explained by his Saracen identity.[45] Madness, in medical texts, is viewed as terrifyingly other, its onset largely inexplicable. This being so, it is associated with the different, the strange and the foreign. There is also a particular link with Islam – the Prophet Mohammed was said by Christian authors to be epileptic, given to strange fits which proved his demonic inspiration. Borde notes that in many places epilepsy 'is named Morbus Mahometus, for Mahomete (in whome the turkes dothe beleue) had the sayde sicknesse.'[46]

As John Tolan has shown, this association of Mohammed and epilepsy has a long history in the West. In the ninth-century Byzantine chronicle of Theophanes, Mohammed is accused of concealing his epilepsy under the guise of sanctity:

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[45] While Palomides eventually converts to Christianity, he disappears from the text shortly thereafter. It is impossible to tell, therefore, whether his madness is assumed to vanish along with his conversion.
[46] Borde, The Breviary of Helthe fol. liiii back – lv.

> Muhammad had an epileptic seizure, and at this Khadîja became distressed; he soothed her by telling her: "I keep seeing a vision of a certain angel called Gabriel, and being unable to bear his sight, I faint and fall down."[47]

The tradition of Mohammed as epileptic continues throughout the Middle Ages. It is included in the preface to Mark of Toledo's 1210 Latin translation of the Koran, and exists at least until the fifteenth century, finding a place in Lydgate's Fall of Princes.[48] The tradition also appears in the Golden Legend, one of the most frequently circulated texts of the Middle Ages:

> he deceived Jews and christian men, so that he said to them openly that he was Messias that was promised in their law. And after this Mahomet fell oft in the epileptical passion, and when the lady his wife saw him oft fall, she was much sorrowful that she had wedded him. And he thought to please her, and appeased her in this wise, and said that he oft saw the angel Gabriel which spake to him, and that he might not suffer the brightness of him, wherefore he must fall because he might not sustain him, and his wife and others supposed and believed that it had been true.[49]

Saracens, as pagans unable to appreciate the truth of Christianity, are open to being construed as irrational in any case. Tolan comments that 'the bitter experience of thirteenth-century [Dominican] missionaries was that the Saracens were unimpressed by their "rational" arguments; increasingly, they will conclude (as Peter the Venerable did for the Jews) that these Saracens must be irrational.'[50]

As well as being irrational, Saracens are also inappropriately masculine. In Crusader texts and romance Saracens are Othered, forced into a perverted image of Christian ideals of

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[47] Theophanes, cited in John V. Tolan, Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 64.

[48] Tolan 183; See John Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, 4 vols., Ed. Henry Bergen, EETS e.s. 123 (London: Oxford UP, 1924) The story of Mohammed can be found in 9:50-161, pp. 920-23; the reference to Mohammed's epilepsy at 9:86-91 p. 921.

[49] Jacobus, The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints As Englished By William Caxton 7:113-14.

[50] Tolan 251.

manhood. Alexandra Cuffel has explored these depictions of Saracen masculinity in

Christian texts, and vice versa. She argues that,

> rather than feminise each other, Christians and Muslims created a rhetoric of
> hypermasculinity and violence. In crusade chronicles and related texts Muslims
> are depicted as excessively cruel and bloodthirsty, like animals.... Christians had
> long maintained that the Prophet Muhammad and his male followers indulged
> excessively in sex, as evidenced by the four wives allowed to Muslim men and
> the larger number of wives taken by the Prophet himself.[51]

Cuffel concludes that 'in these texts Christians and Muslims were irrational in one

another's eyes because of their bestial, sexual violence rather than their association with

the female body.'[52]

In light of the importance of blood in the Morte Darthur, it is interesting that the

difference between Muslim and Christian men is also linked to blood. The twelfth-

century historian William of Malmesbury explains that:

> It is in fact well known that every nation born in Eastern clime is dried up by the
> great heat of the sun; they may have more good sense, but they have less blood in
> their veins and that is why they flee from battle at close quarters; they know they
> have no blood to spare. A people, on the other hand, whose origin is in the
> northern frosts and who are far removed from the sun's heat, are less rational but
> fight most readily, in proud reliance on a generous and exuberant supply of
> blood.[53]

> Constat profecto quod omnis natio quae in Eoa plaga nascitur, nimio solis ardore
> siccata, amplius quidem sapit, sed minus habet sanguinis; ideoque uicinam
> pugnam fugiunt, quia parum sanguinis se habere norunt. Contra, populus qui
> oritur in Arctois pruinis, et remotus est a solis ardoribus, inconsultior quidem sed
> largo et luxurianti superbus sanguine promptissime pugnat.

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[51] Alexandra Cuffel, Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2007) 118-19.

[52] Cuffel 119.

[53] William of Malmesbury, Gesta regum anglorum: The History of the English Kings, vol. 1, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 4.347.8; cited by Cuffel 185-86.

Saracens, then, are generally known as bestial, sexual predators, behaving in whatever

manner least suits the author's idea of masculinity. So William of Malmesbury can

characterise Saracens as bloodless and cowardly in order to emphasise the proud fighting

ability of Europeans, while other writers construct them as excessively bloodthirsty in

order to construct Europeans as rational and civilised.

Saracens are constructed in ways that precisely oppose the values imbued in the Round

Table, as summed up in the famous Pentecostal Oath:

> never to do outerage nothir morthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy
> unto hym that askith mercy... and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and
> jantilwomen and wydowes socour: strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to
> enforce them uppon payne of dethe (120:1-7).

As a Saracen, then, Palomides exists on the borderlines of both rationality and

masculinity. Interestingly, however, Palomides' Saracen identity does not prejudice his

status as a knight. He is classed among the best Arthurian knights, ranked just behind

Launcelot, Tristram and Lamorak.

This incongruity between Saracen stereotypes and the presentation of Palomides amply

justifies Nina Dulin-Mallory's contention that Palomides is 'without question the most

complex and interesting of any literary Saracen of the period.'[54] Treatment of Saracens in

the rest of the text is not so even-handed. One of the more prominent episodes involves

Palomides confronting the evil Saracen Sir Corsabryne who, acting in the grand traditions

of evil knights, is attempting to seduce the virginal daughter of King Baudas:

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[54] Nina Dulin-Mallory, "'Seven Trewe Bataylis for Jesus Sake': The Long-Suffering Saracen Palomides," Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perceptions of Other, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, (New York: St Martin's, 1999) 165-72, at 165.

> he loved the damesell and in no wyse he wolde suffir her to be maryed. For ever this Corsabryne noysed her and named her that she was oute of her mynde, and thus he lette her that she myght nat be maryed.
>
> So by fortune this damesell harde telle that sir Palomydes ded muche for damesels. And anone she sente hym a pensell and prayde hym to fyght with sir Corsabroyne for her love, and he sholde have her and all her londis, and of her fadirs that sholde falle aftir hym (664:16-24).

Corsabryne, in learning of Palomides' interference, is 'wood wrothe' and loses no time in challenging Palomides, who promptly beheads him (664:30). 'And therewithall cam a stynke of his body, whan the soule departed, that there myght nobody abyde the savoure. So was the corpus had away and buryed in a wood, bycause he was a paynym' (666:13-16).

We can see here a number of tropes traditionally associated with Saracens in medieval romance: the Christian maiden threatened by the sexual appetites of a Saracen predator; the uncontrolled, violent anger of the Saracen when challenged; the foul smell appearing from the corpse which proves the Saracen's unholy nature. The difference, however, is in the role of the maiden's saviour – rather than a Christian knight, as in most romances, the place is taken by Palomides. A particularly interesting aspect in the tale is the role played by madness. Corsabryne prevents anyone marrying Baudas' daughter by spreading rumours about her madness, only to himself become 'wood wrothe' at the overthrow of his plans. This double stress on madness effectively associates insanity with a Saracen knight while distancing Palomides himself. Palomides here occupies the same structural position as the Christian knight: the defender of order and reason against a foe characterised not only by false belief, but a concomitant falsity in word and deed.

Palomides' preferred status in the text, however, is clearly linked to his willingness to embrace Christianity. This is again traditional: as Geert Claessens has noted, the 'good Saracen... in vernacular literature is usually provided with an innate inclination towards Christianity.'[55] Indeed, Palomides' status as Saracen seems throughout the text to be defined merely by the absence of Christianity. Islam itself is never visible as a religion. Even those pseudo-pagan rituals which commonly substitute for Islam in medieval texts are absent from the Morte Darthur. Dulin-Mallory comments that Palomides 'has been, in fact, in every observable way, Christian all along. Or he has been a Saracen only in terms of his distant origins, not in terms of his ethics or behaviour.'[56]

This portrayal of Palomides chimes with Edward Said's claim that 'in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence.'[57] Likewise, the absence of Islam, and Islamic society, in the Morte Darthur ensures that any discussion of Palomides can be structured only in terms of Christian society. Palomides, as a Saracen, is a projection of those tendencies of Christians from which Arthur's knights, and the text itself, need to be distanced.

Indeed, Palomides has often been defined in terms of absence. Huot, in her examination of the Prose Tristan's Palamedes, comes to the conclusion that 'Palamedes comes to experience love itself as a force that has deprived him of wholeness, defining his very

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[55] Geert H. M. Claessens, "Jacob van Maerland on Muhammad and Islam," Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays, ed. John Victor Tolan, Garland Medieval Casebooks 10, Garland Ref. Lib. of the Humanities 1768 (New York: Garland, 1996) 211-42, at 212.
[56] Dulin-Mallory 172.
[57] Edward W. Said, Orientalism, Penguin Classics, 1978 (London: Penguin, 2003) 208.

essence as one of lack and impotence.'[58] Huot's contention still stands in relation to the

Morte, although in light of Malory's devaluation of love within his text, the cause may be

somewhat different. I believe that Palomides' lack of wholeness is written into his

character: he exists *in potentia*: a blank space requiring an identity. He is to a great extent

distanced from the blood-thirsty madness of the Saracen Corsabryne – although his

actions at tournaments, in which his jealousy of Tristram leads him to such unchivalric

actions as decapitating his horse, are certainly typical Saracen behaviour. Crucially,

however, this manic rage is not consistent. Each incident is followed by a period in which

Palomides is overcome by remorse. Palomides, then, is one of the few Malorian

characters who is capable of self-contradictory action. In a text in which, as Lynch notes,

'to be a "character" with psychological motivation is incipiently discreditable and a

potential sign of "unhappiness,"' Palomides is dangerously unstable.[59]

Palomides spends much of the text in a state of envy of Tristram's prowess and of his

consequent possession of Isode, an envy which Arthur treats as symptomatic of a deep-

seated falsity: 'yf he have envy at sir Trystram... and commyth in wyth hym uppon his

syde, he ys a false knyght' (749:17-19). Palomides is 'false' not in the sense normally

attributed to Saracens, but in the sense that he is incomplete: he is not fully masculine,

and is continually envious of those who are. He fails to adhere to Malory's paradigm of

masculinity as being absolute and fully present in the self; not 'naturally' masculine, his

masculinity is always being staged, always falsified.

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[58] Huot 113.
[59] Lynch 112.

Palomides' perpetual, doomed attempts to construct a fully masculine identity are symbolised by his endless pursuit of the Questing Beast, a quest 'characterized by the agonizing impossibility of its object.'[60] The Questing Beast itself is the antithesis of wholeness, being composed of the body parts of different animals, 'a serpentis hede and a body lyke a lybud, buttokked lyke a lyon and footed lyke an harte' (484:4-6). Its disjointed nature is emblematic of Palomides' lack of inner consistency. Unlike Launcelot or Tristram, who are consistently successful, Palomides' worth in combat fluctuates. His inconsistent relationship with Tristram, alternately dominated by love and envy, reflects the instability at the root of his character. Unlike other knights, Palomides is dependent on others in order to be fully masculine, and to achieve his full worth. He can only achieve greatness in the presence of Isode: 'whan he saw her make suche chere he fared lyke a lyon, that there myght no man withstonde hym' (738:10-13). Isode inspires 'the grettyst worship that ever I had or ever shall have'; 'ever she was the causer of my worship-wynnynge' (740:4-5, 770:31-32).[61] Tristram, however, is also necessary to constitute masculinity – Palomides mourns that 'never shall befalle me suche proues as I had in the felyshyp of sir Trystram' (770:33-34). Indeed, the two seem indistinguishable; the loss of one merges with the loss of the other – he mourns equally that 'now have I lost the felyshyp of sir Trystram and the love of La Beall Isode for ever' (770:15-16).

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[60] Corinne J. Saunders, "Malory's Book of Huntynge: The Tristram Section of the Morte Darthur," Medium Aevum 62 (1993): 270-84, at 281.

[61] While the use of a beloved to inspire great deeds is a common trope in Arthurian romance – witness Lancelot's near-miraculous fighting abilities when inspired by Guinevere – Palomides' reaction to the presence of Isode is distinguished by its erratic nature. Isode has no wish to inspire Palomides: indeed, at the tournament at Lonezep she is 'wrothe oute of mesure' with him for attacking Tristram (754:13-14). In a departure from the usual trope, the presence of Isode does not guarantee Palomides victory – rather, he wins the first day of fighting at Lonezep, but is soundly defeated for the remainder of the tournament. Palomides seems to participate only partially in romance conventions, echoing his position in the Arthurian court as part-familiar, part-other.

The reliance on the approval of others which is always a factor in the careers of other knights becomes explicit in the case of Palomides – he needs to be recognised in order to exist. In the absence of the confirming gaze of Tristram and Isode, he becomes unrecognisable. This disconnection comes to a head in the 'mirror scene,' in which Palomides, after spending some time mourning the loss of his friendship with Tristram and Isode, sits next to a fountain, and 'loked into the welle and in the watir he sawe hys owne vysayge, how he was discolowred and defaded, a nothynge lyke as he was' (779:27-29). Palomides addresses himself: 'A Palomydes, Palomydes! Why arte thou thus defaded, and ever was wonte to be called one of the fayrest knyghtes of the worlde?' (779:31-33). Lynch argues in relation to this scene that 'Palamides' [sic] self-analysis brings into consciousness a gap between his existence as "called" by others and as it is now in his own view.'[62] Palomides is prevented by his Saracen identity from ever establishing a knightly identity equal to that of his Christian peers: he exists in the text only in reference to a status he can never attain. Once he has converted to Christianity, after an epic fight with Tristram, he disappears from the text. Madness, for Palomides, is an expression of his otherness, of the impossibility of his existence.

Madness in the <u>Morte Darthur</u>, then, characterises both the paradigmatic and marginal knight: both Lancelot and Palomides. Occurences of madness indicate those moments when the knight is dissassociated from his masculine role – a dissociation which is directly linked to proximity to the feminine. In short, love begets madness. This

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[62] Lynch 128. The 'mirror scene,' in which the madman recognises his own madness, recurs again in Gower's <u>Confessio Amantis</u> and Hoccleve's <u>Complaint</u>, both of which I will examine in subsequent chapters.

association between love and insanity is one which is at the heart of the next text I will examine, John Gower's <u>Confessio Amantis</u>. As we will see, Gower uses tropes from romance – the inaccessible lady, the knight's unrequited love – but fits them to a very different text, and a very different protagonist.

Chapter Five: John Gower's <u>Confessio Amantis</u>

The <u>Confessio Amantis</u>, the only substantial English work by John Gower (c.1330-1408) was extremely popular during the medieval and early modern periods. After being published in 1390, and again in a slightly altered edition in 1392-93, it was printed by Caxton in 1483. Its popularity can be marked by the fact that Ben Jonson's <u>English Grammar</u> (composed c. 1617, published 1640) contains thirty quotations from Gower, as opposed to only twenty-five from Chaucer. Shakespeare not only borrows the plot of Gower's <u>Apollonius of Tyre</u> for his play <u>Pericles</u>, but includes Gower as the narrator.[1] The <u>Confessio</u> is the last of Gower's major works. There is no one unifying pattern of madness in the <u>Confessio Amantis</u>, as we have seen with other authors: rather, madness occurs in a number of different, but interconnected ways. Gower, unique among the authors I examine, uses madness primarily as a political metaphor. However, this use quickly becomes intertwined with those other connotations of madness: bestiality, unrestrained sexuality, gender slippage. If the <u>Confessio Amantis</u> is a hybrid text, part confession, part mirror for princes, part collection of exempla, then Gower's uses of madness are a fitting match for this hybridity.

The text takes the form of a lover's confession, in which Amans, the unsuccessful lover, prays Venus to grant him his lady's affection. In order to force him to prove his devotion, Venus demands that he first be fully shriven by her confessor, Genius. Over the course of the text, Amans is duly instructed in the sins of love, as well as being provided with

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[1] G. C. Macauley, Introduction, John Gower, <u>Confessio Amantis</u>, <u>English Works</u>, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 2 vols., EETS e.s. 81 (London: Kegan Paul, 1900) vii-viii.

plentiful exempla of their occurrence and likely consequences. The text, then, is largely

comprised of stories chosen ostensibly for their suitability in illuminating various aspects

of love, interspersed with often spirited debate between Amans and Genius on the subject

of sin and confession. However, the framing narrative places this disquisition on love in a

very different context. Gower uses his Prologue, in particular, to meditate on the

condition of society, drawing some stark comparisons between an imagined golden age

of the past, and the sadly reduced world of the present.

These comparisons come down to one simple distinction: while the past was

characterised by unity and wholeness, the present is full of division: 'now upon this tyde /

Men se the world on every syde / In sondry wyse so diversed, / That it welnyh stant al

reversed, / As forto speke of tyme ago.'[2] This imagined past wholeness is total. Gower

evokes not only a political unity – 'The citees knewen no debat, / The poeple stod in

obeissance / Under the reule of governance' – but a unity of self (P 106-108). As Isabel

Davis comments, 'in the heroic past the interior self and the body were an indivisible

whole.'[3] There is no division between appearance and reality, no possibility of pretence:

'Of mannes herte the corage / Was schewed thanne in the visage; / The word was lich to

the conceite / Withoute semblant of deceite' (P 111-14).

The division of contemporary society, correspondingly, also reaches into every facet of

life. There is war instead of peace, hate instead of love (P 128-29). Even the clerics, those

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[2] John Gower, <u>Confessio Amantis</u>, <u>English Works</u>, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 2 vols., EETS e.s. 81 (London: Kegan Paul, 1900). I am using the earlier 1390 edition. This reference Prologue lines 27-31. All subsequent references to the <u>Confessio Amantis</u> are from this edition and cited by book and line number.
[3] Isabel Davis, <u>Writing Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages</u>, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 62 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 101.

whose responsibility it should be to spread peace, are instead 'set to make werre and strif' (P 248). Division has reached into the heart of the Church – the Avignon papacy and the spread of Lollardy just two examples of the ways in which the Church has fragmented (P 347-89). More significantly for my purposes, however, any unity of the self has been lost. Deceit and hypocrisy, especially evident among the clergy, have shattered the unity between thought and action. Now 'Betwen the word and that thei werche / Ther is a full gret difference' (P 450-51). Man himself is 'mad upon divisioun': composed of constantly warring humours (P 976). Indeed, as we have seen, it is this division which allows that corruption which leads to death. Body and soul are also divided: rationality struggling to overcome bodily desires (P 995-1001).

Division of self and state are intimately related. Gower envisions the state as a body politic: 'For alle resoun wolde this / That unto him which the heved is / The membres buxom sholden bowe' (P 151-53). The political and the personal are merged. Man's sin impacts on everything else. The very elements are denatured, so that the world is constantly in transformation (P 929-44). Man is a microcosm: 'whan this litel world mistorneth, / The grete world al overtorneth' (P 957-58). As Russell Peck argues, this equivalence between inner and outer worlds is typical for Gower's poetry. Gower 'seems always mindful of man as a double entity, both social and individual. When exploring man's individual psyche he turns to metaphors of state; when criticising the state he conceives of a common body.'[4] This is clearly central for any examination of madness: with man as microcosm, any disturbance of the inner world will have a concomitant

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[4] Russell A. Peck, Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis, Literary Structures (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1978) xxi.

effect on the outside world. Madness has larger resonances than its effect on the

individual. It stands for a sickness within the state itself.

This progressive division of society takes on a concrete image in Gower's retelling of the

story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a statue with a head of

gold, breast of silver, stomach of brass, legs of steel and feet of clay. The feet cannot

support the rest of the statue, and it collapses into dust. The disintegrating statue signifies

the successive ages of the world, which 'waxe lasse worth and lasse' (P 629). At each

transition between ages, the world becomes more and more divided between empires and

kingdoms, until the world is 'now everydiel / Departed' (P 828-29). Division betokens

the end of the world, the point at which the statue comes crashing down.

The problem, Gower concludes, lies in man's inability to act according to reason:

> Bot al this wo is cause of man,
> The which that wit and reson can,
> And that in tokne and in witnesse
> That ilke ymage bar liknesse
> Of man and of non other beste (P 905-909).

This insistence on reason as the defining quality of humanity, and the equation of loss of

reason with bestiality, will be key to Gower's work. At this point in the Prologue,

however, mention of the thin dividing line between human and animal can only recall

another story associated with Nebuchadnezzar: his transformation from man to beast and

back. This story, which Gower includes in Book I, stands as a warning against pride.

King Nebuchadnezzar, to whom 'alle in thilke dawes / Were obeissant and tribut bere, /

As thogh he godd of Erthe were', becomes so vain 'That he ne hadde no memoire / That

ther was eny good bot he' (1:2794-96, 2800-2801). In warning, God sends him a dream

in which a great tree is felled, and a voice announces that the roots of the tree will

undergo transformation: 'every lust he schal forbere / Of man, and lich an Oxe his mete /

Of gras he schal pourchace and ete, / Til that the water of the hevene / Have waisshen

him be times sevene' (1:2842-46). Despite Daniel's correct interpretation of the dream as

a warning against the folly of pride, Nebuchadnezzar ignores his advice to amend his

ways, and is duly transformed into a beast. Reduced to the level of an animal,

Nebuchadnezzar realises that his previous status was wholly due to God. Reduced to a

proper level of humility, at the end of seven years he is transformed back into a man, and

regains his throne.

Rationality is the gift of God, and can be lost: a lesson reiterated by Genius to the

penitent Amans, who is firmly instructed to 'lede thi manhiede, / That thou ne be noght

lich a beste' (1:3044-45). As Doob, in particular, has noted, the story of Nebuchadnezzar

is used in the Middle Ages as a paradigmatic example of the 'sinner who destroys reason,

the image of God, and thereby becomes bestial, mad, and an outcast.'[5] Gower, as Doob

notes, is unusual in making Nebuchadnezzar undergo an actual transformation: the

transition from man to beast is more usually seen as metaphorical, a euphemistic

description of the descent into madness.[6] Regardless of Gower's literality, however, the

tale firmly suggests that madness should be seen as divine punishment for sin, an

interpretation which is indeed utilised by Gower for much of the <u>Confessio</u>.

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[5] Doob 69. For a full discussion, see Doob 54-94.
[6] Doob 70.

Gower ends his Prologue with a vision of the harper Arion 'Which hadde an harpe of such temprure.... that he the bestes wilde / Made of his note tame and milde' (P 1055-58). Arion's music has the power to create unity from chaos: the lion makes peace with the deer, and the common man with the lord. Interestingly, this harmony is defined by the absence of madness – Arion's music has the ability to 'putte awey malencolie' (P 1069). That music, in its perfect harmony, can soothe the chaos of madness, is an oft-repeated maxim of medical writing. Trevisa, for example, advises that 'by swete voys and songes and armonye, acoord, and musik, sike men and mad and frenetik comeþ ofte to hire witt aȝee and hele of body.'[7] In the absence of a modern-day Arion figure, however, 'wisdom waxeth wod, / And reson torneth into rage' (P 1078-79). It is with this vision of madness that the Prologue ends, and the <u>Confessio</u> proper begins.

It is notable that Gower's vision of harmony specifically addresses conflicts between the estates: Arion's music 'the comun with the lord, / And lord with the comun also, / [...] sette in love bothe tuo' (P 1066-68). That social stability is a key part of Gower's vision of harmony, and, by extension, that instability can be viewed as a form of madness, recurs again, as we will see, in the <u>Vox Clamantis</u>. Ironically, Gower's vision of unity seems to depend on the proper maintenance of boundaries. While he decries the harmful effects of division, he also demands that some divisions, for example, those between classes, be strictly maintained.

It is in the concept of the body politic that Gower reconciles these impulses. The body acts as a unit, but each part operates independently, preserving a strict distinction of

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[7] Trevisa 1:213.

function. So should the estates work, each class performing its own role for the common good. Paradoxically, true unity can only come about through this division. As David Aers and Lynn Staley attest, Gower fears, more than anything, the collapse of these divisions. They argue that Book I of the Vox, which describes the 1381 Rising,

> describes the revolt as a chaotic blurring of those boundaries marking distinctions between classes and kinds. For the poem's narrator, the horror lies in the formlessness of his vision: field and city, man and beast, lord and peasants appear not as they were meant to be; even the Tower of London turns out to have paper walls rather than stones.[8]

Madness is deeply implicated in this picture of formlessness. Judith Ferster argues that 'the oppositions between voice and clamour and between godliness and insanity define two important poles for Gower.'[9] Gower characterises the revolting peasants as animals, irrationally attempting to usurp the place of their betters: 'the curse of God suddenly 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 beasts,' 'Ecce dei subito malediccio fulsit in illos, / Et mutans formas fecerat esse feras. / Qui fuerant homines prius innate racionis, / Brutorum species irracionis habent.'[10] As Judith Ferster notes, the defiance of class distinctions in the Vox is straightforwardly equated with insanity.[11] These beast-peasants, transformed into asses,

> were violently wild and untamed, and each which had been useful lost its usefulness. They refused to carry sacks to the city any more and were unwilling to bend their backs under a heavy load. They did not care for the field grasses on the hillsides, but instead they now wanted greater delicacies. They drove others from

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[8] David Aers and Lynn Staley, The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996) 151.

[9] Judith Ferster, Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England, Middle Ages Ser. (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996) 129.

[10] John Gower, Vox Clamantis, The Complete Works of John Gower: The Latin Works, ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902) pp. 3-313, at bk. 1, ch. 2, lines 175-78; trans. as The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The Voice of One Crying and the Tripartite Chronicle, trans. Eric W. Stockton (Seattle, WA: U of Washington P, 1962) 54.

[11] Ferster, Fictions of Advice 129-30.

their homes and wrongfully wanted to get the horses' rightful place for
themselves.... The madness in the air so overruled them that they seemed to be
transformed into monsters.

> Sunt onagrique rudes... violenter, et omnis
> Que fuit vtilitas vtilitate caret.
> Amplius ad villam saccos portare recusant,
> Nec curuare sua pondere dorsa volunt;
> Set neque rurales curant in montibus herbas,
> Ammodo set querunt deliciosa magis;
> A domibus alios expellunt, ius et equorum
> Iniuste cupiunt appropriare sibi.
> ...
> Hos intemperies sic aeris inficiebat
> Quod transformati sunt quasi monstra michi.[12]

In the Confessio Amantis madness is used, as in the Vox, to evoke disorder. However,

this disorder is expanded from the political focus of the Vox into the private sphere.

Social order is a matter of establishing unity through division. Love, or at least the

heterosexual, Church-endorsed love which is Gower's preferred kind, is much the same

thing, a unity founded on gender division and strictly policed roles. Much of the tension

in the Confessio arises from the difficulty of achieving this ideal state. Love is not a

positive force in the Confessio: rather the opposite. Gower, in his persona as Amans, the

lover, appeals to Venus for relief from his suffering: 'For certes such a maladie / As I

now have and longe have hadd, / It myhte make a wisman madd, / If that it sholde longe

endure' (1:128-31). He asks for Venus' help to make him 'hol' (1:163). One can make

the argument that Amans is in fact mad throughout the text, only returning to sanity with

the relinquishing of his aspirations to love. Even Genius, love's clerk, must admit that

'love is of a wonder kinde, / And hath... wittes ofte blinde, / That thei fro mannes reson

falle' (3:1323-25). Love is a form of madness.

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[12] Gower, Vox Clamantis 1:2:191-98, 223-24; trans. Stockton 54-55.

Ideally, marriage, as in society as a whole, involves subduing individual impulses to the common good. However, just as contemporary society is disordered, so are individual relationships. As Davis argues, 'love is no contrast to, but rather an interiorization of this mayhem [in society] and a state "In which ther can noman him reule, / For loves lawe is out of reule" (1:17-18).'[13] It is only once love is safely resolved by marriage that it is reconcilable with reason. Unrestrained by societal regulations, love is much more problematic. Indeed, love is explicitly opposed to reason at a number of points in the text.

Gower's most extensive treatment of madness is at the beginning of the third book, which deals with the sin of anger. The first 'servant' of anger which is examined is melancholy 'which in compaignie / An hundred times in an houre / Wol as an angri beste loure, / And noman wot the cause why' (3:26, 28-31). This description seems, however, to be a more accurate description of frenzy than melancholy. As we have seen, medical writers are quite consistent about attributing anger to frenzy, and sadness to melancholy. While there is always some leeway with medieval diagnoses, this seems an odd association for Gower to make. Gower does, however, consistently conflate melancholy and frenzy: the melancholic Amans 'raves' in anger in typical frenetic fashion, and, in a later example, Eolus behaves in melancholy 'as thogh it were a frenesie' (3:210). It is possible that this confusion can be attributed to the uses Gower makes of madness: in a text which is primarily concerned with the dangers of lack of self-control, anger provides a more

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[13] Davis, Writing Masculinity 100.

convenient object-lesson than mere sadness. Clearly, however, at least for Gower,

categories of madness are not fixed: rather, they flow fluidly into one another.[14]

Melancholy turns the self against itself: Amans is 'with miselven wroth,' 'with miself

oppressed / Of thoght' (3:43, 49-50). Madness is aligned with those forces of division

which Gower abhors. There is a split between the melancholic's inward feelings and

outward appearance: 'thus wexe I withinne wroth, / That outward I am al affraied, / And

so distempered and esmaied' (3:56-58). His time is spent in fruitless dreams of his

beloved.

> I wode as doth the wylde Se,
> And am so malencolious,
> That ther nys servant in myn hous
> Ne non of tho that ben aboute,
> That ech of hem ne stant in doute,
> And wenen that I scholde rave
> For Anger that thei se me have;
> And so thei wondre more and lasse,
> Til that thei sen it overpasse (3:86-94)

Amans' situation is, as we will see, one which recurs in Hoccleve's Complaint. Unlike

Hoccleve, however, Amans' madness is accepted as temporary, a passing aberration. It is

a normal part of a lover's behaviour, if one that should ideally be curtailed. Amans' fits

of raving are linked directly to his mistress' behaviour:

> ... if it so betide
> That I aproche at eny tide
> The place wher my ladi is,
> And thanne that hire like ywss
> To speke a goodli word untome,
> For al the gold that is in Rome
> Ne cowthe I after that be wroth,

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[14] This fluidity is found again in Hoccleve's Complaint, in which Hoccleve appears to suffer both frenzy and melancholy: while it is assumed that the melancholy derives from the effects of a previous attack of frenzy, the two are never perfectly distinguished. See chapter seven.

       Bot al my Anger overgoth (3:95-102)

Love is a disturbing force, always prone to descending into violence. The story of Acis

and Galatea, which Gower sources from the <u>Metamorphoses</u>, is typical. The giant

Poliphemus is infatuated with Galatea, who rejects him in favour of her lover Acis. An

envious Poliphemus discovers them together:

> And whan he sih the sothe cas,
> How Galathee him hath forsake
> And Acis to hire love take,
> His herte mai it noght forbere
> That he ne roreth lich a Bere;
> And as it were a wilde beste
> The whom no reson mihte areste,
> He ran Ethna the hell aboute... (2:156-63)

Poliphemus, after spending some time rushing around 'as he that was for love wod',

finally kills Acis by engineering a landslide. Galatea, in despair, flees to the protection of

Neptune, and Acis, in death, becomes a spring.

Love, as so often in Genius' tales, leads here to jealousy and death. In overturning reason,

love is a catalyst for madness, and the violence and despair which follow. Love, as we

know, also has the potential to destabilise gender roles. Lovesickness, with all its

feminising connotations, is only one danger.[15] As we have seen in the <u>Morte Darthur</u>,

love can equally lead to the excessive masculinity of the wild man. Gower is particularly

concerned with the potential for love to lead to violence. This violence is primarily

carried out by men: either, as above, directed at other men in competition for women; or

directly at the woman herself.

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[15] For a fuller discussion of the dangers of love, see the introduction and chapter two.

The rape of Lucrece, (carried out in Gower's version of the tale by Arrons, the son of Tarquin, rather than Tarquin himself), is a case in point. The tale begins with a competition to decide who has the best wife. Collatin, husband of Lucrece, suggests that they visit each wife in turn. Arrons' wife is busy entertaining herself with 'glad semblant' and without any reference to her husband (7:4798). Lucrece, by comparison, is soberly occupied working and mourning aloud the absence of her husband. Collatin therefore wins the bet, and promptly reveals himself to his wife. At the sight of Lucrece welcoming home her husband, Arrons 'The resoun of hise wittes alle / Hath lost,' and is overcome with lust (7:4850-51).[16]

Arrons, in viewing Lucrece as an object to be possessed, is merely echoing Collatin's earlier attitude. Collatin displays his wife to Arrons like a possession: her devotion reflects and augments his status. It is also Lucrece's devotion to Collatin which initially sparks desire in Arrons: he covets not only her beauty, but 'hou sche spak, and hou sche wroghte, / And hou sche wepte' (7:4883-84). While Arrons' wife clearly has desires of her own, Lucrece only reflects her husband's desires. Her wish to have him home safe from the siege is even prefaced by the rider 'if it scholde him noght displese' (7:4816). Dangerously, the wild rage of rapists such as Arrons can be seen as merely an extreme version of the behaviour expected from medieval men. The main crime of Arrons is in pursuing a desire which is 'noght resonable' (7:4895). His desire for Lucrece goes against

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[16] While on first reading this invocation of madness could be taken as merely a conventionality, I am reading it in the context of similar descriptions equating irrational desire to madness in the stories of Galba and Vitelle, Tereus, and Antiochus (which I examine later in the chapter). All these stories link inappropriate use of authority and inappropriate sexual desire, and all invoke images of madness to characterise these abuses. Given this consistency of imagery, therefore, I believe I am justified in taking each instance of madness as indicative of a larger pattern in Gower's work.

all social rules determining homosocial relations: she already belongs to another man. Arrons' rape of Lucrece is characterised as both madness and betrayal 'As he which was a wylde man, / Upon his treson he began' (7:4905-4906).

A comparison with Chaucer's version of the tale, in his <u>Legend of Good Women</u>, is enlightening. Chaucer's version also stresses Tarquin's madness: he 'caughte to this lady swich desyr / That in his herte brende as any fyr / So wodly that his wit was al forgeten' (LGW 1750-52). Chaucer, too, characterises Lucrece as a 'verray wif': like Gower, Chaucer ensures that Lucrece is never given an independent personality (LGW 1686). Both Chaucer and Gower ensure that Lucrece is unconscious throughout the rape – Gower simply stating that 'sche swounede in his hond, / And, as who seith, lay ded oppressed' (7:4986-87), while Chaucer goes so far as to comment that Lucrece 'loste bothe at ones wit and breth, / And in a swogh she lay, and wex so ded / Men myghte smyten of hire arm or hed; / She feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr' (LGW 1815-18). Their insistence on Lucrece's unconsciousness both downplays the horror of the rape and adds weight to the conception of Lucrece as mere property. Her reaction to the rape becomes depersonalised: she reacts to the *fact* of her rape, and the consequences which it holds for her status as wife, rather than to her experience of it. Indeed, Gower has Lucrece bemoan 'thilke wickednesse / Which was unto hire bodi wroght': a level of detachment which suggests that Lucrece sees the rape as a crime against her body (the possession of her husband) rather than herself (7:5060-61).

Chaucer, unlike Gower, is not particularly concerned with the political ramifications of Lucrece's rape. Although Chaucer states that, as a result of Tarquin's 'oppressyoun,' there has never been another king in Rome, he does not, like Gower, focus on Brutus' revenge (LGW 1868). Chaucer's tale ends with Brutus proclaiming the tale 'openly' throughout the town, a tale proved by the corpse of Lucrece, which is displayed equally 'openly' (LGW 1865-66). This double exposure, of Tarquin's deed and Lucrece's corpse, seems to be sufficient conclusion. As we have seen, however, sexual transgression is never, in the <u>Confessio Amantis,</u> without wider connotations.[17] As Diane Watt notes, 'Genius consistently couples uncontrollable or uncontrolled desire with corrupt rule.'[18] Arrons' irrational desire signifies his and his family's unsuitability to rule. Watt comments on Gower's version of the Lucrece tale that 'the domestic sphere is almost crudely reduced to a metaphor for the body politic. The rapists and their avengers stand for tyrant and their opponents, and the female victims in their innocence come to represent the king's subjects, with whom the poet and his narrator identify.'[19] The madness of Arrons, in which his reason is temporarily overthrown, leads inevitably to his own overthrow as the head of state.

We have seen that madness is often used by Gower as a euphemism for illegitimate rule; Genius also offers us an example of rulers who are 'witles' through drink.[20] Galba and Vitelle, who, 'thurgh her drunkenhiede / Of witles excitacioun / Oppressede al the nacion,

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[17] For a fuller discussion, see Diane Watt, who argues that in the <u>Confessio,</u> 'sexual transgression underlies all other forms of division (linguistic, ethical, even political).' Diane Watt, <u>Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics,</u> Medieval Cultures 38 (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2003) 89.

[18] Watt, <u>Amoral Gower</u> 119.

[19] Watt, <u>Amoral Gower</u> 126.

[20] As I will argue later in the chapter, Gower consistently relates madness and drunkeness.

/ Of Spaigne' are particularly despicable (6:566-69). While their irrational state derives from drunkenness rather than more organic causes, they nonetheless behave in the characteristic fashion of all Gower's madmen, in that their madness is displayed most prominently through sexual predation: 'Ther was no wif ne maiden there, / What so thei were, or faire or foule, / Whom thei ne token to defoule' (6:572-74). Their inability to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable women – between wife, virgin, fair, foul – is in itself characteristic of the blurring effect of madness. Madness, as we have seen, disorders the body. Just so, those overwhelmed by lust are equally disordered; their lust leading them to betray not only the boundaries of their own bodies, but also those of the innocent women they attack. What should be kept separate becomes fatally intertwined. It is all the more interesting, then, that Gower's approach to incest, that most disturbing example of category confusion, is not so straightforward.

Genius follows Amans' own confession of melancholy with the initially surprising choice of the story of Canace and Machaire. This story of brother and sister incest, in which Canace and Machaire fall inevitably under the sway of 'the lawes of nature' until Canace is made pregnant, demonstrates the fatal consequences of acting in a fit of madness (3:157). Madness, however, is not attributed, as might be expected, to those committing incest, but to their father, Eolus, who upon discovering that Canace has given birth, falls 'Anon into Malencolie, / As thogh it were a frenesie' (3:209-10). Acting in 'wilde wode peine / Whanne al his resoun was untame' he orders Canace to kill herself, and, as a final act of 'horrible crualte,' causes her baby, found bathing in its mother's blood, to be

exposed (3:244-45, 235). Eolus acts as he does because he 'hath knowe of love bot a lite'

– madness, again, is opposed to love (3:333).

While Canace and Machaire act, in Genius' view, according to the promptings of nature,

Eolus, in destroying his children and grandchild in one fell swoop, ends the natural line

of succession. As Yeager argues,

> For Gower the sole criminal in "Canace and Machaire" is, from first to last, the unnatural father who repeatedly attempts to thwart procreative nature, first by caging two healthy young creatures away from suitable marriages and then by destroying his own offspring in unnatural fury.[21]

The moral of the story, 'Let nevere thurgh thi Wraththe spille / Which every kinde

scholde save,' positions madness clearly against nature, identified with the urge to

reproduction (3:342-43). Natural desire, in fact, seems to be an overriding imperative in

the Confessio: 'What nature hath set in hir lawe / Ther mai no mannes miht withdrawe'

(3:355-56). Genius, although taking the normal priestly role of confessor, is, crucially, a

priest of Venus, not Christ. His morals, therefore, are distinctly skewed. Although he

vows to 'Noght only make my spekynges / Of love, bot of othre thinges, / That touchen

to the cause of vice,' he admits that 'of conclusion final / Conclude I wol in special / For

love, whos servant I am' (1:239-41, 249-51). In Genius' tales, love is the ultimate moral

authority.

It is only in the context of the framing narrative as a whole that it becomes clear that this

morality is fatally limited. Even in the tales themselves, we can see that the rationale of

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[21] R. F. Yeager, John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion, Publications of the John Gower Society 2 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990) 255.

love over all often leads to madness. Incest is a case in point. Genius defines incest as a

bestial desire:

> love, which is unbesein
> Of alle reson, as men sein
> Thurgh sotie and thurgh nycete,
> Of his voluptuosite
> He spareth no condicion
> Of ken ne yit religion,
> Bot as a cock among the Hennes,
> Or as a Stalon in the Fennes
> Which goth amonges al the Stod,
> Riht so can he nomore good,
> Bot takth what thing comth next to honde (8: 153-63).

As we have seen, use of bestial imagery to characterise antisocial behaviour is typical of

Gower. Here, as well as implying the essential bestiality, the irrationality of those who

commit incest, these images also emphasise their selfishness. They are unnatural because

they prevent women from circulating normally: like stallions or cocks, they monopolise

women. There is only one stallion to a herd; one cock to a flock of hens. This

monopolisation strikes at the key role of women as social counters, to be exchanged

between men. It is a direct threat to society.

A particular target of the Confessio is the unnatural father. In a work which is especially

concerned with reproduction, the role of the good father is to enable his children to marry

and beget children in their turn. The unnatural father, in contrast, removes his children

from the marriage market. Such behaviour, in its determined opposition of what is natural

and desirable, is madness. The tale of Leucothoe is an excellent example of this.

Leucothoe, daughter of Orchamus, despite being 'withoute pier' in beauty, is 'warded

streyte / Withinne chambre' (5:6738, 6722-23). Despite this confinement, she attracts the

attention of Phoebus, who desires her 'out of mesure' (5:6740). Unable to reach her any

other way, he appears to her in her chamber 'and stall / That thing which was to him so

lief' (5:6750-51). Her father, upon hearing about the loss of his daughter's virginity, is

'for sorwe welnyh wod' (5:6762).[22] Unable to punish Phoebus, he has his daughter buried

alive 'So that these Maidens after this / Mow take ensample, what it is / To soffre her

maidenhed be stole' (5:6767-69). The punishment chosen, burial alive, echoes

Orchamus' earlier attempts to encase Leucothoe within her chamber – she is sealed away

from the world, the intactness of her containment mirroring the wished-for intactness of

her virginity.[23]

That most unnatural of fathers, the incestuous father, is the focus of the final tale in the

Confessio, "Apollonius of Tyre." The tale begins with Antiochus, a 'tirant' whose

political despotism, an urge to keep all power for himself, is reflected in his

unwillingness to pass on his daughter to another suitor (8:463). The rape of his own

daughter is another attempt to gather all power to him, rather than to disperse it among

others. That such behaviour is ultimately self-defeating is clear from the images of self-

consumption which accompany it: 'The wylde fader... devoureth / His oghne fleissh'

(8:309-10). The description of Antiochus as a 'wylde' man devouring flesh both suggests

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[22] Again, while this invocation of madness may seem conventional, it needs to be seen as part of a larger pattern of references: unnatural parents – Eolus, Orchamus, Antiochus, Medea, Saturn, Procne – are repeatedly described in terms of madness. Each image of madness, seen in this context, gains a larger resonance.

[23] Gower finds the story of Leucothoe in Metamorphoses 4:190-270. Gower simplifies the story, leaving out the role of Clytie, who aspires to Phoebus' love and spreads the story of his seduction of Leucothoe out of jealousy. Clytie herself becomes mad, 'her love turned to madness,' 'dementer amoribus,' and is tranformed into a heliotrope (4:259). In Gower's version, the blame lies entirely on the father.

the animality of his desires and characterises him as a madman akin to those we encounter in romance, placed firmly outside society.

While Apollonius himself flees Antiochus and the danger of his corrupt court, he does not escape the threat of incest entirely. Indeed, he very nearly repeats Antiochus' crime. After many adventures, he and his daughter Thaise are reunited, neither knowing each other's identity. Summoned to entertain the mysterious stranger (Apollonius) who has arrived in Mitelene, where Thaise has taken up residence after being kidnapped by pirates, Thaise attempts to question him about his past. However, Apollonius

> ... wolde noght o word ansuere,
> Bot as a madd man ate laste
> His heved wepende awey he caste
> And half in wraththe he bad hire go (8:1686-89)

Thaise refuses, and tries instead to touch him: he hits her and 'whan sche him fond / Disesed, courtaisly sche saide, / "Avoi, mi lord, I am a Maide"' (8:1694-96).

Apollonius 'His herte upon this maide caste, / That he hire loveth kindely, / And yit he wiste nevere why' (8:1706-1708). This 'kinde love' could easily degenerate into something less natural. Thaise's insistence on making clear to Apollonius her status as virgin both makes clear her reading of the situation as potentially sexual, and places her in the same position as Antiochus' daughter at the beginning of the story. That Apollonius has been described as acting 'as a madd man' again propels the story towards incest: as we have seen, incest is the acting out of insanity. As Yeager comments, 'it is a

scene [which] Gower plainly intends to remind us of, and be read against, the pride and "unkindeliche" lust of Antiochus.'[24]

Apollonius, however, passes the test: he recognises Thaise as his daughter, and preserves the structures of exogamy by immediately marrying her off to Athenagoras, the king of Mitelene. Shortly thereafter, he is reunited with his own wife, and is restored to his rightful throne. Apollonius is rewarded for his furtherance of matrimony, while Antiochus and his daughter are obliterated by a fortuitous stroke of lightening. Gower leaves us with final praise of Apollonius' virtues, and the happy ending they have ensured:

> Honesteliche as forto wedde,
> Honesteliche his love he spedde
> And hadde children with his wif,
> And as him liste he ladde his lif (8:1994-98).

It is notable that this vision of morally upright happy-ever-after includes the presence of children. Reproduction, once again, is a key part of a stable society. The follow-up story to "Canace and Machaire," that of Tiresias, also warns against preventing reproduction. Tiresias is punished for going against nature: his crime is to strike out at two mating snakes, 'and for he hath destourbed kinde / And was so to nature unkinde, / Unkindeliche he was transformed' (3:373-75). For his transgression, Tiresias is turned into a woman.[25]

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[24] Yeager, John Gower's Poetic 219. For a fuller discussion, see Larry Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest: John Gower and the Problem of Medieval Sexuality," Re-Visioning Gower: Papers Presented at the Meetings of the John Gower Society at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, 1992-1997, ed. R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 1998) 93-127.
[25] I discuss Teresias in chapter one.

It is interesting that this tale of gender transformation follows directly from the discussion of melancholy/frenzy. The tale of Tiresias seems to add gender transformation to the list of unnatural behaviours associated with madness. Indeed, the very next example given by Genius, this time to demonstrate the sin of 'cheste' or the use of angry words, is the tale of Socrates' wife (3:417). Socrates desires to develop his skills of patience, and so marries a 'wickid wif' (3:649). One day, having been out to fetch water from the well, she sees him sitting reading a book by the fire, and, infuriated that he is failing to do his fair share of the housework, falls into a 'wode rage' (3:662). After berating Socrates to no effect, she ends by throwing the water over his head. Apparently unconcerned, Socrates notes that this is unsurprising: rain always follows wind. This is in many ways an unsurprising reference to madness: Socrates' wife is not herself mad, but rather possessed by temporary rage which drives her into acting in a mad fashion. She is the emotional woman with an uncontrollable temper; Socrates, the rational, self-possessed man. However, there is an element of gender disturbance here. Socrates, while able to snub his wife with an erudite reference, is unable to control her behaviour. Moreover, there is the disturbing inference that his wife expects him to play a role in the running of the house, a role which is very definitely feminine. The passivity shown by Socrates contrasts with the model of masculinity advanced by the text. Passivity is a feminine characteristic; the male lover should, as Genius attempts to make clear to Amans, be a man of action. Even Genius, who cites the story in the first place as an example of patience, comments uncomfortably that: 'I not if thilke ensample yit / Acordeth with a mannes wit, / To soffre as Socrates tho dede' (3:699-701).

The association between madness and gender transgression reoccurs with the story of Ulysses' attempts to avoid the Trojan war. In an attempt to persuade Nauplus, who has been sent to recruit him, that he is ineligible for warfare, Ulysses pretends madness, staring around him 'as he which feigneth to be wod', and finally harnessing a plough to foxes, and sowing his fields with salt (4:1833). His plan is foiled, however, when the cunning Nauplus fetches Ulysses' infant son and places him in the path of the plough. Ulysses, unable to kill his son, turns aside the plow, and thus reveals his sanity. A true madman, one can infer, would have continued to plow, regardless of the death of his offspring. Once again, madness is at least partly defined by the threat it poses to offspring. Indeed, the form Ulysses chooses to demonstrate his fake madness, the parodic ploughing which makes the land infertile rather than fruitful, strengthens the notion that insanity is an inability to successfully carry out reproduction.

It is also worth noting that, again, madness, even when faked, involves a disruption of gender roles. The reluctance to go to war which sparks Ulysses' decision to feign insanity is figured as unmanly. Nauplus berates him 'That thou for Slouthe of eny love / Schalt so thi lustes sette above / And leve of armes the knyhthode, / Which is the pris of thi manhode' (4:1876-80). The failed 'ploughing,' however contrived, suggests an inability to perform masculinity. Given that 'ploughing' is a common medieval sexual metaphor, Ulysses' failure to perform it correctly suggests his own impotence.

The twin of this tale – a warrior who uses deception in an attempt to evade the Trojan war – occurs in Book Five of the Confessio. Thetis, the mother of Achilles, tries to protect

him by sending him to the court of Lichomede disguised as a woman. Achilles' disguise
being successful, Lichomede unwisely decides to have him room with Deïdamie, 'the
eldeste, / The faireste and the comelieste / Of alle his doghtres,' with predictable
unfortunate consequences (5:3047-49). Achilles is revealed to be a man as a result of a
strategy devised by Ulysses: he lays out a variety of gifts, 'the moste riche aray, / Wherof
a womman mai be gay,' alongside a suit of armour, sword and shield (5:3105-3106).
While the other women of Lichomede's court flock to the more gender-appropriate
presents, Achilles heads for the armour. His secret is out. Once in possession of
appropriate male garb, 'thilke aray which that belongeth / Unto the wommen he forsok,'
and 'armeth him in knyhtli wise, / That bettre can noman devise' (5:3174-75, 3181-82).
Thus revealed as a knight, he is taken to war amidst near-universal rejoicing, the only
abstainers being the deceived Lichomede, and the now-pregnant Deïdamie.

The parallels with the story of Ulysses above are interesting. While Ulysses pretends to
be mad, Achilles pretends to be a woman. Gender slippage is once more associated with
madness. While Ulysses' fake madness is very definitely associated with infertility,
however, Achilles' fake femininity is not. Despite his disguise, he manages to impregnate
Deïdamie. Ulysses' feigned madness, ostensibly preserving his masculinity, in fact, as we
have seen, suggests unmanly impotence. Achilles' transvestism, despite changing his
appearance to that of a woman, seems better to preserve his masculinity – his male
sexuality is attested through his relationship with Deïdamie, and, unlike Ulysses, his
essential masculinity is never questioned. Indeed, such is the structure of the test Ulysses

devises that it is actually affirmed: Achilles' choice of armour over women's clothing is

instinctive – his true desire cannot be faked.

Achilles, crucially, is willing to abandon Deïdamie for the masculine pursuit of war.

Genius helpfully includes examples of those men who are unable to take such a rational

attitude to love. Unsurprisingly, their fate is bleak. A particularly inspiring example is

Sardanapalus, who

> thurgh the slouthe of his corage
> Falle into thilke fyri rage
> Of love, which the men assoteth,
> Wherof himself he so rioteth,
> And wax so ferforth womannyssh,
> That ayein kinde, as if a fissh
> Abide wolde upon the lond (7:4317-23)

He obeys women's commands, and, worse, begins acting like a woman: braiding lace,

threading necklaces, weaving. Naturally, this unnatural behaviour has its comeuppance:

his kingdom is invaded, and the king is summarily evicted. Watt comments that

> *luxuria* (lust, or in a broader sense, inordinate desire and intemperance) threatens
> masculinity.... the only solution is for a man to 'love streite' (VII.4280) and then
> he will not be bound by women.... Immoderate desire – or love that is not
> 'streite' – is literalised by male cross-dressing; a travesty of masculinity, like all
> forms of effeminacy it is a symptom of ethical misgovernance.'[26]

Watt argues, with reference to the tale of Sardanapalus, that

> Genius begins to discuss love in terms of kinde or natural law. He asserts that 'It
> sit a man by weie of kinde' to love, but 'it is noght kinde,' it is unnatural for a
> man to lose his wits for love (VII.4297-99). [27]

There is, then, a nexus of destabilised categories which stems from the madness of

excessive love. Gender is merely one of them.

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[26] Watt, <u>Amoral Gower</u> 71.
[27] Watt, <u>Amoral Gower</u> 70.

Gower's treatment of Jason and Medea's relationship is particularly illuminating for a discussion of these destabilised categories. At 982 lines, this is one of Genius' longer tales. The tale is ostensibly told as a warning against the dangers of false witness, 'what thing it is to be forswore,' illustrated by Jason's betrayal of Medea (4:3229). Medea, then, is presented from the first as a victim. This startlingly one-sided portrayal is made plausible by Gower's omission of the more grisly episodes in Medea's story – the dismemberment of her brother and the murder of Peleus. Medea is, instead, the heroine of the tale, singlehandedly enabling Jason to achieve his quest for the Golden Fleece, and remaining true to him until his betrayal. Episodes of violence are simply eliminated. Rather than scattering the pieces of her brother in the ocean to delay her father's pursuit, as in the classical tales, Gower's Medea simply flees. And although Medea ends by murdering Creusa and her own children, she does so in direct response to Jason's faithlessness. The responsibility for the deaths, it seems, is not Medea's but Jason's: 'Thus miht thou se what sorwe it doth / To swere an oth which is noght soth, / In loves cause namely' (4:4223-25).

Medea's identity as sorceress is introduced gradually. It is Jason who begs her to use her magic to give his father back his youth; Medea agrees only because she 'was toward him trewe' (5:3950). The darker consequences of Medea's sorcery, her brutal murder of Peleus, is passed over with the brief and ambiguous: 'King Peleüs his Em was ded, / Jason bar corone on his hed, / Medea hath fulfild his wille' (5:4187-89). Medea rejuvenates Aeson out of love, the same motive which has governed her actions

throughout the tale. Her use of sorcery becomes one more instance of her devotion: 'Lo,
what mihte eny man devise, / A womman schewe in eny wise / Mor hertly love in every
stede, / Than Medea to Jason dede?' (5:4175-78)

Regardless of the harmless motive for Medea's sorcery, however, it is nonetheless a
disturbing process. Indeed, it is perhaps in the description of Medea's sorcery that we get
a glimpse of the darker side which Gower usually attempts to suppress. Far from being a
hapless victim, Medea is suddenly revealed as a figure of near limitless power, able to
achieve that which 'semeth impossible': 'Sche was, as who seith, a goddesse, / And what
hir liste, more or lesse, / Sche dede, in bokes as we finde, / That passeth over
manneskinde' (5:4027, 4107-10). The sheer length of the enchantment scene – 217 lines
out of a total of 982 – in itself suggests an importance beyond a mere desire for spectacle.
Medea's magical rituals are suggestive of an alien quality, a difference which sets her
irrevocably outside normal society. Indeed, they suggest a fluidity of form which
transcends boundaries of gender and indeed humanity. Her first act is to 'glod forth as an
Addre doth': an uncanny shedding of all human semblance (5:3967). This fluidity is
echoed by a mobility which sees her shift easily across national boundaries during the
course of the ritual. Medea's summoning of a dragon-drawn chariot, able to carry her
'among the Skyes' to whichever land she requests, is one of the more spectacular aspects
of Gower's retelling, and one which is unusual among medieval versions of the story
(5:3993).[28]

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[28] My thanks to Katherine Heavey for pointing this out. To compare Gower's version with Seneca's <u>Medea</u>,
see chapter one. Gower probably sources his version of the Medea story from a combination of Benoît de
Sainte-Maure's twelfth-century <u>Roman de Troie</u> and book seven of the <u>Metamorphoses</u>, although he
considerably expands the section on Medea's magical ability. Both Benoît and Ovid play down Medea's

Medea's use of sorcery puts her in a state akin to madness: 'Ther was no beste which

goth oute / More wylde than sche semeth ther: / Aboute hir schuldres hyng hir her, / As

thogh sche were oute of hir mynde / And torned in an other kynde' (5:4080-84).

> Sche made many a wonder soun,
> Somtime lich unto the cock,
> Somtime unto the Laverock,
> Somtime kacleth as a Hen,
> Somtime spekth as don the men:
> And riht so as hir jargoun strangeth,
> In sondri wise hir forme changeth,
> Sche semeth faie and no womman (5:4097-4105).[29]

The madman who cackles like a hen is a standard example of derangement in medical

texts, as we saw earlier. The description of Medea's changing voice, and her emission of

'many a wonder soun,' closely echo many of the accounts of madness found in medical

and other texts. [30] Again, the possibility of gender transformation emerges – Medea

'spekth as don the men' and 'semeth... no womman.' As we have learned from Lyndal

Roper's account of possession narratives, such gendered ventriloquism is a clear

indication of derangement.[31] Watt, who argues that for Gower rational speech is strongly

associated with the masculine, comments that:

> it would seem that language and reasonable speech are even more alien to Medea,
> as a woman whose excessive and uncontrollable desire for her man is so typical
> of her sex, than is the cacophony of the birds. It is in fact at the moment when she

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magical ablty, attributing her success to years of study (Benoît) or to the herbs she uses (Ovid) rather than to her own innate power (See Katherine Heavey, "'As Meeke as Medea, as Honest as Hellen': English Literary Representation of Two Troublesome Classical Women, c. 1160-1650," Diss. (Durham University, 2008-2009) 100).

[29] The reference to Medea as 'faie' seems to abruptly move the text into a romance register. While Medea is commonly positioned as otherworldy, she is usually done so in language which evokes the classical rather than Celtic tradition. The reference to her as 'faie' is perhaps intended to evoke comparisons with Arthurian villainesses such as Morgan le Fay: another woman who uses magic in order to seduce men.

[30] A fuller discussion of the fantasies of the insane can be found in chapter two.

[31] See chapter three for a fuller discussion of these gendered voices.

speaks like a man that her 'jargoun strangeth' – and, by implication, her transformation – reaches its ultimate realisation.[32]

The madness hinted at in Medea's sorcery is not the only incidence of madness in the tale. Medea's father Oëtes reacts to her disappearance 'as a wod man' (5:3912). Oëtes' madness occupies that place in the story normally taken up with the death and dismemberment of Medea's brother Apsyrtus. Madness substitutes for death; mental violence for physical. Gower uses the madness of Medea's sorcery to substitute for those aspects of Medea he would prefer not to include. The unnaturalness of Medea's transformations hint at those unnatural deeds – the murder and dismemberment of kin – that Gower omits.

Katherine Heavey argues that Medea's access to power is gained at the loss of a stable identity: 'as she becomes supremely powerful, she is no longer human, no longer a woman, no longer mortal.'[33] Indeed, the cost of this fluidity is an abandonment, to some extent, of the traditional character of Medea. Despite her many crimes, the medieval Medea is almost always depicted as sane.[34] Even her most unforgivable deed, the murder of her own children, is rationally planned. Gower's sudden, unprecedented switch from Medea as ideal romantic heroine to Medea as deranged sorceress is suggestive of his discomfort with a woman unnatural enough to kill her own children in cold blood. In ensuring that Medea's sorcery appears indistinguishable from madness, Gower succeeds in sidelining her as a powerful force in the text. Her entire role, indeed, is as the vehicle for a lesson aimed at men: her brief moment of triumph is quickly eclipsed in favour of

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[32] Watt, <u>Amoral Gower</u> 43-44.
[33] Heavey 143.
[34] My thanks to Katherine Heavey for pointing this out.

the moral it contains: 'Thus miht thou se what sorwe it doth / To swere an oth which is noght soth, / In loves cause.' As Heavey concludes,

> The limitations of Medea's power, over Jason and over her own literary representations, are brought home as Amans promises to take on board the moral of the well-known story, assuring the Confessor "I have herde it ofte seie / Hou Jason tok the flees aweie / Fro Colchis" (5.4231-3). Despite Gower's attempts to outline Medea's powers, and the extent of her help, it appears that the story of the Fleece remains Jason's story.[35]

While Gower may undermine the image of Medea as powerful sorceress, his Medea is certainly a step up from the helpless victim who appears in Chaucer's Legend of Good Women. Chaucer's extremely brief retelling of Medea's story (combined for convenience with that of Hypsipyle, both women being victims of that 'false fox,' Jason), presents a Medea 'so wis and fayr / That fayrer say there nevere man with ye' who 'wex[es] enamoured' with Jason, and is haplessly betrayed (LGW 1393, 1599-1600, 1610). Her 'enchauntement' emerges only in order to save Jason's 'lyf and his honour; / And gat hym a name ryght as a conquerour'; when abandoned, Medea's only recourse, as in Ovid's Heroides, is to write a letter of complaint (LGW 1648-49). Chaucer outdoes Gower not only by omitting Medea's dismemberment of Apsyrtus and Peleus, but also by excising any hint of her revenge on Jason.

The conclusion of Medea's story is one of several instances in the Confessio Amantis in which parents destroy their offspring. Prevention of reproduction, in a text ostensibly directed by a priest of Venus, is clearly a dire sin. The most abhorrent status, however, is reserved for those who devour their own children. This is true insanity. The archetypal example of this is Saturn, father of the gods, 'he which stod / In frenesie, and was so wod,

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[35] Heavey 144-45.

/ That fro his wif, which Rea hihte, / Hise oghne children he to plihte, / And eet hem of his comun wone' (5:847-51). In punishment, Jupiter cuts off Saturn's genitals (incidentally causing Venus to be born, an origin which, combined with Venus' later amorous exploits, is clearly of some embarrassment to her priest). Revisiting a now familiar motif, madness here is synonymous with disruption of the natural order, both through the elimination of offspring and gender disturbance. The castration which Saturn's murderous frenzy invites (and the generation of Venus from the severed testicles, an usurpation of the feminine prerogative of birth) positions him outside the masculine.

The devouring of one's own children occurs again with the story of Procne and Philomela. Here, Procne kills her own children and feeds them to her husband Tereus, in revenge for his rape of her sister Philomela. Tereus' rape of Philomela is cited as a direct result of madness – 'he was so wod / That he no reson understod' (5:5639-40). His lust is both mad and bestial: 'in a rage on hire he ran, / Riht as a wolf which takth his preie' (5:5632-33). Tereus' bestiality is stressed again and again – he is compared to a goshawk hunting prey, a 'Lyon wod' and a 'wode hound' – these bestial descriptions being, as Yeager notes, Gower's own addition to his Ovidian source (5:5644, 5684, 5701).[36] Tereus becomes less than human: 'Qua wolf, Tereus no longer can distinguish a sentient girl from a dish of flesh and, as he rages, she is reduced to "preie". In the end, he falls on

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[36] In Ovid, it is Philomela who is described using bestial imagery – 'She trembled like a frightened lamb, which, torn and cast aside by a grey wolf, cannot yet believe that it is safe; and like a dove which, with its own blood all smeared over its plumage, still palpitates with fright, still fears those greedy claws that have pierced it.' 'illa tremblit velut agna pavens, quae saucia cani / ore excussa lupi nondum sibi tuta videtur, / utque columba suo madefactis sanguine plumis / horret adhuc avidosque timet, quibus haeserat, ungues.' 6:527-30.

her not even sexually, but as a beast on meat.'[37] As Yeager points out, images of animality have a particular connotation in the light of Gower's use of them in the <u>Vox Clamantis</u>:

> Reason – the faculty overcome in Tereus by "rage", or madness – separated man from brute beasts... From the onset of his mad infatuation, Tereus is to be understood as a person wholly different from the "noble kniht" of the opening lines, a man unlike his comfortable, unselfish and rational former self. The split, in Gower's version, is calculated and thorough. Tereus dehumanizes himself completely, thereby illustrating how dangerous an emotion is love.[38]

Procne's revenge for Tereus' crimes is fitting: Tereus' unnatural behaviour is punished by the supremely unnatural act of ingesting his own child: 'thus his oughne fleissh and blod / Himself devoureth ayein kinde' (5:5904-5905). Procne is 'mad / Of wo' to the extent that she is 'Withoute insihte of moderhede,' has 'Foryat pite and loste drede' (5:5891-92, 5893, 5894). It is only through this loss of her true identity as mother that she is able to murder her own child: in her madness, she is entirely alienated from her self. The preparation of her son for consumption, the details of which Gower dwells on with gleeful horror – 'Sche slou, and hieu him al to pieces: / And after with diverse spieces / The fleissh, whan it was so toheewe, / Sche takth, and makth therof a sewe [*sic*]' – is particularly subversive of her role as mother (5:5897-5900). A gross perversion of her housewifely skills – the prosaic detail of her son's flesh being simmered with 'diverse spieces' being an especially keen blending of the normal and grotesque – the act of cooking her son's flesh has a deeper resonance. As Diane Watt points out, 'women are

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[37] Yeager, <u>John Gower's Poetic</u> 154.
[38] Yeager, <u>John Gower's Poetic</u> 154.

frequently depicted as offering both figuratively and literally their own bodies to supply the needs and wants of their husbands and children.'[39]

In the context of Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre", Watt argues that 'women who pervert the maternal role, who kill rather than nurture, are... represented as monsters with uncontrollable appetites.'[40] If 'appetite' is considered in a wider sense than merely the literal, this can be usefully extended to both Procne and Medea. Both are driven by desire – Medea for Jason, Procne for the presence of her sister – and both are betrayed by the conflicting desires of their male lovers. In insisting on the fulfilment of their desires, they exceed the bounds of the roles allotted to them as dutiful daughters and wives. Once those boundaries are breached, there is a certain inevitability to their complete collapse. Both Medea and Procne conclude their stories as outcasts from society, having shed their previous identities entirely. Indeed, Procne and Philomela are transformed into birds: their human forms lost along with their rejection of human mores.[41]

Madness and Masculinity

Just as Tereus suffers madness suddenly, so too can any man. The omnipresent threat of madness becomes clear during Book VI, in which Gower issues a condemnation of

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[39] Diane Watt, "Consuming Passions in Book VIII of John Gower's <u>Confessio Amantis</u>," <u>Consuming Narratives: Gender and Monstrous Appetites in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance</u>, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Teresa Walters (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2002) 28-41, at 33.

[40] Watt, "Consuming Passions" 33.

[41] Chaucer's version of the Philomela story in the <u>Legend of Good Women</u> omits, as one might expect, any mention of Procne's revenge. Rather, Chaucer ends the tale with Philomela and Procne's reunion, with the brief, misleading statement 'the remenaunt is no charge for to telle.' Geoffrey Chaucer, <u>The Legend of Good Women</u>, <u>The Riverside Chaucer,</u> gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) line 2383.

drunkenness that aligns it specifically to madness: 'Men sein ther is non evidence, /

Wherof to knowe a difference / Betwen the drunken and the wode, / For thei be nevere

nouther goode' (6:551-54). Drunkenness, like madness, is transformative: 'He can make

of a wisman nyce, / And of a fool, that him schal seme / That he can al the lawe deme'

(6:18-20). In fact, drunkeness appears to echo many of those instabilities of madness

which Gower has gone to some lengths to condemn. To start with, drunkenness

eradicates class boundaries, at least in the imagination:

> And thus he makth a gret clerk sone
> Of him that is a lewed man.
> Ther is nothing which he ne can,
> Whil he hath Dronkeschipe on honde,
> He knowth the See, he knowth the stronde,
> He is a noble man of armes,
> And yit no strengthe is in his armes (6:24-30)

Under the influence of drink, men are in fact unable to comprehend any distinctions. In

their inability to grasp categories, they become little different from beasts:

> ...he wot nevere what he doth,
> Ne which is fals, ne which is soth,
> Ne which is dai, ne which is nyht,
> And for the time he knowth no wyht,
> That he ne wot so moche as this,
> What maner thing himselven is,
> Or he be man, or he be beste. (6:41-47)

The madness of drunkenness is expressed, finally, through total loss of status: 'He

drinkth the wyn, bot ate laste / The wyn drynkth him and bint him faste, / And leith him

drunke be the wal, / As him which is his bonde thral / And al in his subjeccion' (6:71-75).

Since drunkenness is closely associated with masculinity, this is problematic. Lyndal

Roper, in her examination of drunkenness in sixteenth-century Germany towns,

concludes that the three 'archetypal male sins' are 'excessive drinking, violence and frittering away... goods,' and this is certainly applicable to medieval culture.[42] Drinking is a central part of masculinity. Drinking together is 'an important part of male conviviality,' a means of creating and cementing bonds and establishing social relationships.[43] While social drinking clearly has a part to play in maintaining order, however, drinking to excess is a very different matter. Drunkenness disorders the male body, causes it to exceed its boundaries, to pollute itself with vomit, blood, and faeces.

> Man is understood as a creature who is always breaking through the boundaries of his own body, to the point that he threatens social order. He is a volcano of drives and fluids which constantly threaten to erupt, spilling outwards to dirty his environment through ejaculation, bloodshed, vomiting, defecation. Drinking, which, in the view of the preachers, released all social inhibitions, gave free rein to lusts.[44]

Lack of control over one's own body is, as we have seen, incompatible with the hegemonic discourse which associates masculinity with dominance and authority. Roper makes the important point that this discourse does not exist unchallenged: she identifies a struggle between orthodox discourses demanding strict bodily control, and the realities of lived experience for German townsmen. In these conflicting versions of masculinity, we can see an echo of the same issues which structure discourses of madness. Indeed, irrationality and loss of control are closely connected. Roper comments that 'man, who is actually the most rational being, is understood as a creature whose rational capacities can only master his polluting body with the greatest of difficulty... [who] threatens to

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[42] Roper, <u>Oedipus and the Devil</u> 109.
[43] Roper, <u>Oedipus and the Devil</u> 110.
[44] Roper, <u>Oedipus and the Devil</u> 112.

transform himself into an irrational, piglike creature at any moment.'[45] As we have seen in the case of Galba and Vitelle, above, drunkenness swiftly leads to vice and madness.

Endemic drunkenness is, happily, a sin which is attributed to the middle and lower classes: it does not find a place in the self-presentation of the Court. As a characteristic of urban masculinity, a means of social bonding between members of guilds and companies, it is safely distant from Gower's chosen aristocratic audience. Gower, however, moves from simple drunkenness to talk of love-drunkenness, which is almost a mirror-image of its namesake. Under the influence of love, one loses one's wits. Amans, sick with love, admits that 'So drunke I am, that mi wit faileth / And al mi brain is overtorned, / And mi manere so mistorned, / That I foryete al that I can / And stonde lich a mased man' (6:128-32). Love-drunkenness extends the pernicious effects of drunkenness to even the highest of classes: Genius' list of sufferers includes such luminaries as Solomon, Samson, David, Virgil and Aristotle. As Genius sagely remarks, 'ther is no whyt / That mai withstonde loves miht' (6:317-18). Even Tristram and Isode, that most noble of couples, are merely another example 'Of drunkeschipe forto drede' (6:479). Of course, given that their relationship famously stems (at least in the French works) from the consumption of love-potion, Tristram and Isode can be said to be the victims of a literal love-drunkenness.[46]

Love-drunkenness, too, has the potential for class disruption: under its influence, Amans compares himself to a common labourer. 'It makth me drawe out of the weie / In soulein

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[45] Roper, Oedipus and the Devil 112.

[46] Malory, while including the love-potion episode, does not attribute the same importance to it as do his French sources. In the Morte Darthur, Tristram and Isode are already in love: the potion merely enhances their mutual devotion.

place be miselve, / As doth a labourer to delve, / Which can no gentil mannes chere'
(6:134-37). There is, then, a distinct threat in extending metaphors of drunkenness to
include Gower's aristocratic audience. Love is, after all, a vital part of courtly identity, at
least as presented in the rest of the <u>Confessio</u>. Isabel Davis has explored Amans' position
in relation to the courtly world in which the <u>Confessio</u> locates itself. She argues that the
Confessio 'is sentimental about the masculine model of the knight-errant,' and that
Genius' speeches are targeted to just such an imaginary audience.[47] Genius does indeed
map out a programme for the hopeful lover which includes knightly fighting in foreign
lands, a clearly inappropriate choice of activity for the clerkly Amans who is the apparent
recipient of such advice (4:1621-47). The company representing young lovers, which
Amans sees while lying in his swoon, may sing songs only of love, but 'The moste
matiere of her speche / Was al of knythod and of Armes, / And what it is to ligge in
armes / With love, whanne it is achieved' (8:2496-99). Lovesickness is clearly properly
the domain of the aristocracy.

Gower, then, is a distinctly inappropriate sufferer: not only on grounds of his age,
although this, as we will see, is the ultimate disqualifier; but also on account of his status.
Amans, Davis argues, is 'representative of a new masculine modality: a dubious,
homeless, undetermined and sometimes transgressive, indeed errant masculinity.'[48] Davis
sees this disjunction between the status of audience and protagonist as reflective of
Gower's insecurity about his own status as clerk:

> Gower's life writing becomes most interior and subjective at the moment when it
> measures its narrator against culturally desirable models of masculine labour and

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[47] Davis, <u>Writing Masculinity</u> 82.
[48] Davis, <u>Writing Masculinity</u> 78.

finds him wanting. In a post-Black Death society, attempting to police a labour force that was increasingly mobile and self-confident, the narrator's nervousness about his occupation becomes as natural a subject of confession as sexuality.[49]

As a secular clerk, Gower exists outside the three estates structure: neither religious, knight, or peasant. He has, to use Davis' term, a 'quasi-clerical' status: employed in a position traditionally held by a cleric, but without being bound to the Church, or, more pertinently, to a rule of celibacy.[50]

While Gower is able to marry (and indeed does, marrying Agnes Groundolf, probably his second wife, in 1397), his role is one which is frequently constructed without reference to women. Love-drunkenness, then, is something which is attributed to a class other than his own. As Gower's reference to Tristram and Isode makes clear, love-madness is part of a romance world of which Gower can never hope to be part. To return to the fraught question of love-drunkenness, then, Gower is clearly once again drawing parallels between love and irrationality. Love, like drunkenness, is a temporary madness. It disturbs the order of not only the body, but of the natural order of society. Using Amans, a clerk whose position in society is ambivalent at best, as a vehicle for exploring this disturbance, ensures that this critique is only ever obliquely addressed to his courtly audience. Davis argues that Amans is in many ways a parody of the courtly lover, embracing 'the indolence and heightened affectivity of the aristocratic lover... whilst leaving behind the military identity.'[51] His status as parody means that he is both

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[49] Davis, <u>Writing Masculinity</u> 82.
[50] Davis, <u>Writing Masculinity</u> 94. This liminal status is, as we will see, also shared by Thomas Hoccleve. See chapter seven.
[51] Davis, <u>Writing Masculinity</u> 97-98.

reflective of and safely different from the aristocratic audience who are Gower's real target.

In the end, Gower avoids the need to resolve the issue of Amans' status, conveniently disqualifying him from participating in the game of courtly love on the grounds of age.[52] Like Palomides and, as we will see, Hoccleve, Amans must see himself in a mirror to understand his true condition: he is an old man unsuited to the delights of love (8:2820-81). This revelation, which firmly puts paid to his romantic dreams, is figured as a return to reason. His love is nothing more than 'sotie' (8:2759).

> I was out of mi swoune affraied,
> Wherof I sih my wittes straied,
> And gan to clepe hem hom ayein.
> And whan Resoun it herde sein
> That loves rage was aweie,
> He cam to me the rihte weie,
> And hath remued the sotie
> Of thilke unwise fantasie,
> Wherof that I was wont to pleigne,
> So that of thilke fyri peine
> I was mad sobre and hol ynowh. (8:2859-69)

In this passage we can see a number of motifs which will recur in the autobiographical writings of Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve (which I will move on to examining in the last two chapters). The admission that 'I sih my wittes straied, / And gan to clepe hem hom ayein' creates a dynamic of movement, used by both Hoccleve and Margery, in which madness becomes an absence of reason, sanity a return. Moreover, the Gower who is left 'sobre and hol ynowh' conflates wholeness and sanity, with the concomitant

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[52] See also Davis: 'The narrator's discovery of his old age in Book VIII of the Confessio is a convenient one; his retirement mitigates the narrator's admission of his sloth and his romantic failures.' Writing Masculinity 103

pairing of madness and fragmentation (an association drawn upon in particular by

Hoccleve).

It is only at this point that Venus finally names Amans as John Gower (8:2908). His

identity is now fully restored. The divisive nature of romantic love needs to be rejected

for the perfect love of 'charite' that is 'Withinne a mannes herte affermed' (8:3164,

3163).

> My muse doth me forto wite,
> And seith it schal be for my beste
> Fro this day forth to take reste,
> That y nomore of love make,
> Which many an herte hath overtake,
> And ovyrturnyd as the blynde
> Fro reson in to lawe of kynde;
> Wher as the wisdom goth aweie
> And can nought se the ryhte weie
> How to governe his oghne estat,
> Bot everydai stant in debat
> Withinne him self, and can nought leve (8:3140-51)

Gower rejects the unattainable lady for the one woman compatible with reason, (and the

one woman entirely under his control), his poetic muse. The unruly feminine, source of

all madness, is finally excluded in favour of the male world of rational thought and

writing.

Chapter Six: Margery Kempe

Madness, as we have seen, has multiple resonances, and can be interpreted in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. For those who have suffered from madness, however, questions of interpretation become much more urgent. Lived experience of madness poses problems of identity that are difficult to overcome. In the next two chapters, I will look at two authors, Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve, who succeed in translating their experience of madness into text. Their autobiographical accounts play with the various ramifications of madness. Both use madness to further their authorial intent, in much the same way as do authors such as Gower and Malory, but always with the coda that their use of madness impacts on their identity beyond the text.

In this chapter, I will examine the Book of Margery Kempe, the autobiography of Margery Kempe of King's Lynn, which chronicles her transition from housewife to holy woman. I will argue that Margery's experience of madness, while in itself taking up only a small portion of her text, is crucial to this transformation, and to the narrative which follows. Her madness, in overturning the social roles of bourgeois wife and mother which define her at the beginning of the Book, provides her with an opportunity to reinvent herself. For Margery, madness opens a space in which she can rewrite her identity, and reposition herself within society. Not only does Margery's madness create the possibility of a new identity as mystic, however, it also shapes that identity. As we will see, the way in which Margery's body is presented in her madness – open, bleeding, wounded –

dominates her conception of not only the mystical body, but the body of Christ himself. It is Margery's madness which provides the template for her mysticism.

Margery Kempe was born circa 1373, the daughter of John Brunham, five times mayor of King's Lynn.[1] Her Book begins after her marriage to John Kempe when she was twenty 'or sumdele mor,' and after the birth of her first child.[2] Soon after childbirth, Margery experienced a loss of reason, and was subsequently cured by divine intervention.[3] After her return to sanity, Margery remained in her role as a wealthy merchant's wife, bearing thirteen more children, and taking up brewing and milling, ultimately unsuccessfully. Somewhere between five to ten years later, Margery was woken from sleep by 'a sownd of melodye so swet and delectable, hir thowt, as sche had ben in paradyse' (325-26). This heavenly melody prompted Margery's desire for a life of chastity, prayer, and penance. After several years of prayer, her husband agreed to a chaste marriage in 1413. Margery then adopted white clothing, and embarked on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Rome, where she first experienced involuntary fits of crying aloud at the thought of Jesus' Passion. She returned to England in 1415, making a pilgrimage to the shrine of St James at Santiago de Compostela in 1417, and then undertaking further travel around England in 1417-18. Margery remained at Lynn until 1433, when she accompanied her widowed daughter-in-law back to her parents' home in Danzig, and travelled on to Wilsnack, Aachen and

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[1] In this and the following passage, I am indebted to Barry Windeatt's chronology in his edition of Margery's Book. See Kempe vii-viii.

[2] Kempe line 175. All subsequent references to The Book of Margery Kempe are from the Windeatt edition and cited by line number.

[3] There has been much critical discussion concerning whether to refer to Margery as 'Margery' or 'Kempe.' I have chosen, in this work, to refer to Margery by her first name, following Sarah Salih's argument that 'Margery' is the name by which Christ refers to her throughout the Book, and that 'to adopt this name for her is to accept the offer of intimacy which the Book makes to its readers.' (Sarah Salih, Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001) 173). For consistency, however, I will refer to her as 'Kempe' when referencing the text.

Calais before returning home. She was admitted to the Lynn Guild of the Trinity in 1438, and her name is mentioned in Guild records in 1439: the last record we have of Margery Kempe.

Margery initially resists attempts to get her to write down the story of her life. It is only 'xx yer and mor' after her initial revelations that she receives a command from God to record her life, 'that hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle the world' (83, 87). The initial version of the book, Margery tells us, was drafted by 'a man dwellyng in Dewchlond,' who lodged with Margery, along with his wife and child, and who has been tentatively identified as Margery's son (89-90). This writer died shortly after completing a badly written draft, and Margery was forced to apply to another scribe, a priest who, after some difficulty in reading his predecessor's work, wrote the <u>Book</u> as we know it in 1434-36.[4]

The account of Margery's conversion from wife and mother to misunderstood holy woman, then, is written approximately forty years after her initial experience of madness. The narrative does not proceed chronologically; rather, as the priest testifies, 'lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and the ordyr whan thyngys befellyn' (135-37).

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[4] There has been much discussion about the authorship of the <u>Book</u>; critics remain divided over the extent to which authorship can be attributed to Margery, or to the priest who transcribed her narrative. The strong personal voice which characterises the text, along what appears to be a deeply personal description of madness (one which is strikingly different from the standardised accounts in medical textbooks) argue for the text being Margery's own, with minimal involvement from her amanuensis. Other details, such as the lack of any structured chronology, also suggest this. Given this, I will be assuming that the text is Margery's own, and referring to the author(s) as 'Margery' throughout.

The fact that Margery nonetheless chooses to open her <u>Book</u> with her experience of madness, then, demonstrates its importance to her. Indeed, in a text that is, in essence, a defence of Margery's right to class herself as a holy woman, any issue that affects her identity is crucial.

Interestingly, reception of Margery's <u>Book</u> has also focussed on madness. The full <u>Book</u> remained unknown until 1934, when the only existing manuscript copy was found in the library of Colonel Butler-Bowden. Before this time, Margery Kempe was only known from those selections of her work printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1501, and again by Henry Pepwell in 1521. The excerpted sections are notable for their exclusion of any of the more problematic aspects of Margery's life. Pepwell goes so far as to refer to Margery as a 'deuoute ancres of Lynne,' indicating a desire to regularise Margery's life, which, as Liz McAvoy points out, is already present in Margery's <u>Book</u> in the form of the monk who wishes aloud that she 'wer closyd in an hows of ston, that ther schuld no man speke wyth the' (870-71).[5] The passages Pepwell and Wynkyn de Worde extract largely consist of Jesus' words to Margery. Margery herself is relegated to a 'comparatively unremarkable and disembodied voice': marginalised within her own text.[6]

The discovery of the full text, then, revealed a very different Margery Kempe. Critical reactions were not entirely positive. R. W. Chambers, in his introduction to Butler-Bowdon's 1936 translation, described Margery as a 'difficult and morbid religious

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[5] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "'Closyd in an Hows of Ston': Discourses of Anchoritism and <u>The Book of Margery Kempe</u>," <u>Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages</u>, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2005) 182-94, at 182-83.

[6] McAvoy, "'Closyd in an Hows of Ston'" 183.

enthusiast.'[7] Thomas Coleman asserted in 1937 that Margery 'is surely to be variously labelled as eccentric, neurotic and psychopathic.'[8] W. R. Inge, in his 1947 book Mysticism in Religion, commented reprovingly that 'this hysterical young woman calls herself a poor creature, and a poor creature I am afraid she was.' Inge continued the trend of ascribing medical reasons for Margery's religious enthusiasms, opining that 'these results of unrestrained emotionalism belong rather to psychology and psychopathy than to religion.'[9] Since Inge, Margery has been variously diagnosed as 'a hysteric, if not an epileptic,' 'a very hysterical woman,' and as 'quite mad – an incurable hysteric with a large paranoid trend.'[10] More recently, Richard Lawes, in an article published in 2000, diagnosed Margery with a depressive psychosis of the puerperium, in conjunction with temporal lobe epilepsy.[11]

Regardless of the diagnosis, issues of madness have been long recognised as being at the heart of Margery's Book. Margery's madness enables her to rewrite herself, and to enable her transformation from bourgeois housewife to holy woman. Margery also appears to view her madness in the light of a providential experience: the proem emphasises the role of God in both inducing and curing her madness, stating that Margery was 'towched be the hand of owyr Lord wyth grett bodyly sekeness, wherthorw sche lost reson and her

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[7] Cited in Clarissa W. Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1983) 197.

[8] Cited in Sandra J. McEntire, Introduction, Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays, ed. Sandra J. McIntire, Garland Ref. Library of the Humanities 1468, Garland Medieval Casebooks 4 (New York: Garland, 1992) x.

[9] W. R. Inge, cited in Marea Mitchell, The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism (New York: Lang, 2005) 79.

[10] Edmund College, cited in Atkinson 200, n. 10; David Knowles, cited in McEntire, Introduction, Margery Kempe xi, and Donald R. Howard, cited in Atkinson 210.

[11] Richard Lawes, "Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse in Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve," Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2000) 217-43, at 229.

wyttes a long tym tyl ower Lord be grace restoryd her ageyn' (29-31). Margery's

madness is meaningful because it is both induced and cured by God. It occurs at a pivotal

moment in her narrative: it is madness, and her subsequent recovery, which inspire

Margery's conversion. At the beginning of the text, Margery's identity is fixed as that of

housewife and mother. Madness, in overturning these social roles, provides an

opportunity to reinvent the self. For Margery, madness opens a space in which she can

rewrite her identity, and reposition herself within society.

Indeed, Margery's experience of madness is in itself closely related to her identity. The

confusion and instability of madness resembles Margery's pre-conversion life:

> evyr sche was turned ayen abak in tym of temptacyon – lech unto the reedspyr
> whech boweth wyth every wynd and nevyr is stable les than no wynd bloweth –
> unto the tyme that ower mercyfulle Lord Cryst Jhesu, havyng pety and
> compassyon of hys handwerke and hys creatur, turnyd helth into sekenesse,
> prosperyte into adversyte, worshep into repref, and love into hatered.
>   Thus alle this thyngys turnyng up-so-down, this creatur, whych many
> yerys had gon wyl and evyr ben unstable, was parfythly drawen and steryd to
> entren the wey of hy perfeccyon... (17-25)

The moral instability of Margery's secular existence can only be cured by things 'turnyng

up-so-down.' From the upheaval of madness, paradoxically, comes stability.

Concomitantly, Margery's recovery from madness is described as being 'comen ageyn to

hir mende'; she is 'stabelyd in hir wyttys and in hir reson as wel as evyr sche was beforn'

(253-54, 237-38). If madness is movement and instability, sanity is adherence to a fixed

point. Madness is an absence; sanity a return.[12]

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[12] This expression of madness in terms of movement recurs, as we will see in chapter seven, in Hoccleve's
Complaint.

The description of Margery's experience seems to pinpoint it as half madness, half demonic possession. Margery does not explicitly refer to her experience as madness. Indeed, her experience is never given a positive definition, but is instead characterised by what is absent: Margery is 'owt of hir mende,' has 'lost reson and her wyttes' (199, 30-31). Margery's loss of reason, like everything else in her Book, is presented in a religious context. Her madness is, as we shall see, characterised by demonic temptation, and by a renunciation of her Christian identity. While demons play a large part in Margery's madness, however, we cannot characterise it as possession. Margery is tempted by demons, and obeys their instructions, but still remains a separate being. There is clearly still a self to be tempted, whereas in cases of possession the demon takes over the body entirely and speaks in place of the possessed subject. In addition, the reaction of Margery's household accords with madness rather than possession; Margery is restrained and assigned 'kepars' for her own safety, but no attempts are made to seek exorcism (224). Given all this, then, I will refer to Margery's experience as madness, but with the corollary that it is a form of madness defined in relation to theological rather than medical models.

The onset of madness follows Margery's attempts to confess a 'thing whech sche had so long conselyd' (194-95). Although we are never given details of the 'thing,' critics have variously regarded it as connected to either sex or heresy.[13] It must be a grave offence, as

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[13] See, for example, Liz Herbert McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, Studies in Medieval Mysticism 5 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004) 34-35. This unconfessed sin (which is never revealed to us) leaves a lacuna at the heart of Margery's text. In so much as it is a work built around an absence, Margery's Book is comparable to Hoccleve's Complaint, which, as we will see, is itself structured around a madness which is never actually described. Both works suggest that there is something to madness which can never be fully articulated.

Margery refuses to confess it until she fears for her life. As she is lying ill after childbirth,

she summons a confessor,

> in ful wyl to be schrevyn of alle hir lyfetym, as ner as sche cowde. And whan sche
> cam to the poynt for to seyn that thing... hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye and
> gan scharply to undyrnemyn [to reprove] hir, er than sche had fully seyd hir
> entent, and so sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he mygth do (192-97).

Margery's madness occurs when the confessor prevents her making a full confession.

After Margery's confession is abruptly halted,

> anoon, for dreed sche had of dampnacyon on the to syde, and hys scharp
> reprevyng on that other syde, this creatur went owt of hir mende and was
> wondyrlye vexid and labowryd wyth spyritys half yer, viii wekys and odde
> days (197-201).

That Margery's madness comes about in response to the intervention of her male

confessor suggests that it is at some level a reaction to the patriarchal discourse of the

Church. Indeed, Liz McAvoy, one of the few critics to examine Margery's madness in

detail, argues that it is the confessor's interruption of Margery's attempts to articulate

herself in accordance with the dictates of her society which prompts her recourse to 'a

new monstrous language': her madness. It is this monstrous language 'which will

eventually be redeemed in the form of her pious weepings and uncontrollable bodily

contortion and [which will] constitute an utterance to which only the spiritually

privileged or the genuinely holy will comprehend.'

> The entire episode thus provides a model within the Book whereby the
> inadequate, unimaginable rationale of masculinist rhetoric... is thoroughly
> interrogated and supplanted by an articulate, triumphant and wholly redeemed
> expression of the hitherto monstrous feminine which is heard, responded to and
> cherished by God himself. In turn, this will be redeployed in order for the author
> to break down accepted boundaries and binaries and promote her insistence upon

the feminine as an alternative – indeed preferable – means of attaining spiritual and worldly authority.'[14]

While interpreting Margery's madness in terms of language is intriguing, I find aspects of this reading problematic. While her madness and subsequent conversion (which, as I will demonstrate, is structured throughout in terms of specifically feminine imagery) may well be in part a reaction to a patriarchal society, and to the confessor who is the representative of that society, I believe that the connections between Margery's madness and her subsequent holiness are in fact more complex than McAvoy suggests. While both madness and holiness are experienced primarily through the body, this is not enough to suggest a simple correspondence between the two. Indeed, McAvoy's reading seems to be based on an association between women and madness which is simply not applicable to the Middle Ages. McAvoy's description of Margery's madness as a 'monstrous re-enactment of the traditionally female protestations of "hysteria" and "self-harm,"' for example, is based rather on nineteenth-century models of madness than on medieval beliefs.[15] As I have argued above, there is no tradition of hysteria in the Middle Ages, nor was mental illness linked to self-harm, or considered particularly feminine.[16] While I agree that madness allows Margery the opportunity to write her own narrative, I believe that assuming Margery's move away from spoken language to bodily experience is a straightforwardly positive one is a mistake. As David Aers has argued, to assume that

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[14] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Monstrous Masculinities in Julian of Norwich's A Revelation of Love and The Book of Margery Kempe," The Monstrous Middle Ages, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2003) 55-74, at 66.
[15] McAvoy, "Monstrous Masculinities" 66.
[16] See chapter two.

bodily experiences are somehow more 'authentically' female is deeply problematic.[17]

Indeed, Julia Long argues that,

> tempting as it may be to see these manifestations as a liberating, alternative 'female' discourse, it should be borne in mind that a condition of its existence is that the woman becomes a spectacle, and as such can be viewed, judged and named by men – as indeed has been the case for Margery Kempe – whether they have been clerics or literary critics.[18]

The very existence of Margery's <u>Book</u> surely proves that her bodily gestures are insufficiently readable without interpretation.

Margery's inability to complete confession, however, certainly prompts her madness. Confession, required to be a full and complete account of a person's life, can be seen as a mapping out of the self through narrative. Margery's failure to finish her confession, then, has direct ramifications for her sense of self. In the words of Sarah Salih, it is this 'failure to produce a narrative of the self which is both complete and unified' that precipitates her descent into insanity.[19] Madness is the physical manifestation of her failed narrative. Concomitantly, Margery's composition of her <u>Book</u> denotes

> the reclamation of the authority to tell of the self. Margery was alienated from herself in her madness; by making in the <u>Book</u> the account of her life that she was unable to make to her confessor, she is able to regain control over her story.[20]

Madness, then, does not exclude Margery from written communication. Rather, in its prompting of Margery's conversion, it allows her to participate in a (largely male) literary

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[17] See David Aers, "The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Orthodox Late Medieval Representations," Aers and Staley 15-42. For McAvoy's response to this, see <u>Authority and the Female Body</u> 29-30.

[18] Julia Long, "Mysticism and Hysteria: The Histories of Margery Kempe and Anna O," <u>Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect</u>, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London: Routledge, 1994) 88-111, at 102.

[19] Salih, <u>Versions of Virginity</u> 177.

[20] Salih, <u>Versions of Virginity</u> 180.

tradition which dates back to Augustine's <u>Confessions</u>.[21] As we will see, Margery is

aware of the literary conventions governing her chosen role as mystic, and deliberately

engages with them.[22]

Margery and Motherhood

Margery's madness, however, is not only linked to her experience of confession. Her

experience of insanity follows the birth of her first child, and, as I will argue, is structured

by her experience of motherhood.[23] Significantly, as McAvoy points out, Margery's

madness lasts eight months and 'odde days': 'almost the same length [of time] as a full-

term pregnancy.'[24] Images of pregnancy and childbirth are prominent in her experience

of madness. Her description of being 'labowryd wyth spyritys' is particularly interesting,

echoing as it does her description of childbirth: 'sche was labowrd wyth grett accessys tyl

the chyld was born and than, what for labowr sche had in chyldyng and for sekenesse

goyng beforn, sche dyspered of her lyfe' (177-80).[25]

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[21] Salih, <u>Versions of Virginity</u> 171.

[22] We know that Margery's confessor reads her 'many a good boke of hy contemplacyon' including mystical works by St Bridget of Sweden, Walter Hilton, pseudo-Bonaventure, and Richard Rolle (4818).

[23] McAvoy also links Margery's madness to her experience of the 'hideous and isolating trauma' of marriage, sex, and motherhood. McAvoy goes on to argue that Margery's madness is 'a bodily articulation of the unconfessed and sinful condition which has been deeply underscored by her transformation from virgin to wife to mother' (<u>Authority and the Female Body</u> 36). While McAvoy's argument centres on Margery's madness as an attempt to cope with the sin of sexuality and 'her own sense of self as polluted, sexual being,' however, I am more concerned with reading it as a response to childbirth rather than sex itself (<u>Authority and the Female Body</u> 37). Indeed, I would argue that in reading the <u>Book</u> we are left with a sense of Margery's pre-conversion delight in sexuality, rather than any sense of shame: the post-conversion Margery bemoans that herself and her husband had formerly 'dysplesyd God by her inordynat lofe and the gret delectacyon that thei haddyn eythyr of hem in usyng of other' (357-59).

[24] McAvoy, <u>Authority and the Female Body</u> 36

[25] 'Labowr' here is not equivalent to our modern English 'labour,' referring as it does to pain in general, rather than the pains of childbirth in particular. Margery's repeated use of the term, however, does suggest that she strongly associates it with her experiences of childbirth.

The experience of pregnancy, in which two beings occupy the same body, might be expected to disturb a unitary sense of self. In this way, Margery's pregnancy can be seen as prefiguring her madness. Indeed, pregnancy is frequently used as a model for descriptions of demonic possession, which also involves one being inhabiting another's body. While we have established that Margery's experience does not follow this pattern, her sense of self is nonetheless threatened and almost overwhelmed by demonic pressure. Moreover, as in pregnancy, Margery no longer has complete control over her body:

> And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys [flames] of fyr, as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in, sumtyme rampyng [pawing] at hyr, sumtyme thretyng her, sumtym pullyng hyr and halyng [hauling] hir bothe nygth and day duryng the forseyd tyme.... Sche wold a fordon hirself many a tym at her steryngys and a ben damnyd wyth hem in helle, and into wytnesse therof sche bot hir owen hand so vyolently that it was seen al hir lyfe aftyr. And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body ayen hir hert wyth hir nayles spetowsly, for sche had noon other instrumentys, and wers sche wold a don, saf sche was bowndyn and kept wyth strength bothe day and nygth that sche mygth not have hir wylle (202-21).

The demons paw and pull at her like demanding children. Margery's fears of being swallowed up surely relate not only to a metaphorical loss of self, but to a more literal consumption. Her body, through pregnancy and lactation, has been food for her child, and this pattern of consumption continues into her madness. Not only do demons threaten to swallow her, but Margery bites into her own flesh in a move that suggests a desire for self-consumption. Her attempts to harm herself associate madness, like childbirth, with the violent loss of bodily integrity, the release of blood and the breaking of skin. This conflation of images suggests that pregnancy is, like madness, a radical disruption of the self. In both, also, this disruption is played out on the body, through visible alterations, visible wounds. Her body is 'wytnesse' to a battle between opposing identities – the foetus inside her, like the demons outside, seems a threat to stable selfhood.

Threats to Margery's bodily identity are paralleled by threats to her social identity.

Margery's demons induce her to forsake her friends, family and religion:

> And also the develys cryed upon hir wyth greet thretyngys, and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam, hir feyth, and denyin hir God, hys modyr, and alle the seyntys in hevyn, hyr goode werkys and alle good vertues, hir fadyr, hyr modyr, and alle hire frendys. And so sche dede. Sche slawndred hir husbond, hir frendys, and her owyn self; sche spak many a reprevows worde and many a schrewyd worde; sche knew no vertu ne goodnesse; sche desyryd all wykkednesse; lych as the spyrytys temptyd hir to sey and do, so sche seyd and dede (206-14).

Social and religious identities are conflated here in a way quite alien to Margery's later way of thinking. In the rest of the book, Margery defines her religious identity in opposition to social mores; in her madness, however, they seem to be indivisible. Margery's conception of self within her madness is clearly still modelled on the expectations of society; she has not yet made the break with convention with which we come to identify her.

Indeed, social status plays a large part in Margery's experience of madness. Madness, in general, is an antisocial illness, one which isolates the sufferer from her community. Margery experiences not only this isolation, but also a more general overturning of previous hierarchies. She sums up her experience of madness by saying that:

> ower mercyfulle Lord Cryst Jhesu, havyng pety and compassyon of hys handwerke and hys creatur, turnyd helth into sekenesse, prosperyte into adversyte, worshep into repref, and love into hatered.
> Thus alle this thyngys turnyng up-so-down, this creatur, whych many yerys had gon wyl and evyr ben unstable, was parfythly drawen and steryd to entren the wey of hy perfeccyon (20-25).

Margery characterises madness in terms of being outcast from society, of falling from

'helth into sekenesse, prosperyte into adversyte, worshep into repref, and love into

hatered.' Margery, however, is able to use this in her favour. As a period in which social

identity is suspended, madness provides an opportunity to rewrite the self. This radical

loss of identity allows Margery, on her recovery, to reposition herself in the social

hierarchy, and write herself a new identity. From her declaration, on 'comen ageyn to hir

mende,' that 'sche was bowndyn to God and that sche wold ben his servawnt,' Margery

opens the way to a new role for herself as holy woman and prophet (253-55).

Initially, however, Margery returns to her former identity as housewife. It is notable that

Margery's first sane act, after she is 'stabelyd in hir wyttys and in hir reson' is to request

'the keys of the botery to takyn hir mete and drynke as sche had don beforn' (237-40). By

this act, as P. H. Cullum points out, she reclaims her place in the household, and in turn,

in her community.[26] By asking for the keys to the buttery, Margery asserts her right to

control both her food consumption, and that of the household. Concomitantly, her maids

and keepers advise her husband not to hand over the keys, 'for thei seyd sche wold but

yeve awey swech good as ther was, for sche wyst not what sche seyde, as thei wende'

(242-43). This, like Margery's earlier association of insanity with 'adversyte,' judges

sanity on the ability to manage goods. Indeed, the legal test to determine madness

regularly included questions on economic ability.[27] Deborah Ellis cites the case of Emma

de Beston of Lynn, who, after being certified an idiot, was in 1388 the subject of an

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[26] P. H. Cullum, "'Yf lak of charyte be not ower hynderawnce': Margery Kempe, Lynn, and the Practice of the Spiritual and Bodily Works of Mercy," A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004) 177-93, at 186.

[27] Matthew Boyd Goldie, "Psychomatic Illness and Identity in London, 1416-1421," Exemplaria 11 (1999): 23-52, at 31.

attempt by the king's agent to claim her property. The mayor's counter-argument,

asserting the town's sole responsibility for managing its sick and insane (and thus their

property) asserts traditional rights over anyone 'of unsound mind so as to be unable to

manage himself, his lands or chattels.'[28] P. H. Cullum elaborates on the difficulty of

reconciling extravagant charity with contemporary Lynn social mores:

> Whatever Margery's own views at this time, she could not behave like an
> Elizabeth of Hungary or Frances of Rome, two examples of contemporary holy
> women who did make extravagant almsgiving gestures, as this would have made
> her servants think, not that she was holy, but that she was mad. In practice it
> seems unlikely that she was actually trapped between charity and madness. The
> lack of reference to heroic acts of charity of this nature performed by her within
> the Book suggests that she probably acquiesced in this conservative and bourgeois
> attitude to helping the genuinely needy, in which one provided what could be
> afforded out of one's own goods, rather than giving them all away.[29]

This economic assessment of sanity recurs again in Margery's later career, when she

again earns the disapproval of society by giving not only all her money, but the money of

others, to the poor: 'And hir frendys seyden to hir: "Why have ye yovyn awey yowr good

and other mennys also? Wher schal ye now have so meche good as ye owe?"' (3489-91).

This demonstration of her inability to manage her finances surely contributes to the

disdain in which she is held, and to a belief that she is ill, or possessed, or otherwise

incapacitated.

In addition to her assumption of economic responsibility, Margery's return to sanity is

also marked by her return to normal eating patterns:

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[28] Deborah S. Ellis, "Margery Kempe and King's Lynn," Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays, ed. Sandra J. McEntire, Garland Ref. Library of the Humanities 1468, Garland Medieval Casebooks 4 (New York: Garland, 1992) 139-63, at 149.

[29] Cullum 186.

> And sche toke hyr mete and drynke as his bodyly strength wold servyn hir, and knew hir frendys and hir meny, and all other that cam to hir to se how owyr Lord Jhesu Cryst had wrowt hys grace in hir... (245-48).

It is particularly appropriate that Margery's sanity is measured by eating, given that her insanity was characterised by fears of being consumed. Eating re-establishes Margery's bodily boundaries, and, most importantly, reasserts that control over her body which has been lost during madness. Just as Margery's body is 'wytnesse' to her madness, it seems as if it is also a witness to her sanity. While her madness causes her to try to destroy herself, sanity begins with self-preservation, with feeding herself.

Lynn Staley has argued that, 'considering the extraordinary attention many devotional writers and biographers paid to the subject of food when describing female piety, The Book of Margery Kempe is surprisingly free of what can seem a morbid fascination with physicality.'[30] While Margery certainly does not use food in the same way as many Continental mystics – there is no emphasis on miraculous abstinence or subsistence on the Eucharist alone – I would argue that, in fact, food and feeding are central to Margery's Book, and also central to Margery's conception of madness. Feeding, as Caroline Walker Bynum has demonstrated, is a particularly feminine activity; 'food formed the context and shape of women's world – of their responsibilities and privileges – more fundamentally than it did the world of men.'[31] Margery's normal social role as wife and mother is intimately associated with the provision of food, and this provision

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[30] Lynn Staley, Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994) 50.

[31] Bynum, Holy Feast 208.

also becomes a central feature of her life as a holy woman.[32] As Staley herself notes, 'rather than focus upon fasting as a token of Margery's otherworldliness, Kempe uses food as a signifier of both Margery's private and public communities.'[33]

The framework of food, of eating and feeding, structures Margery's experience of life as both holy woman and mad woman. Bynum asserts that 'to medieval women, "feeding" was a basic religious commitment, a transitive and intransitive verb. Medieval women fed others (*pascere*); they also fed on God (*pasci*).'[34] To Margery, Bynum adds, 'food practices and food images were fundamental.'[35] Even on a basic level, Margery's narrative is structured around instances of feeding. Food consumption marks not only the end of her madness, but also such crucial moments as her adoption of a vow of chastity, which she and her husband mark by 'etyn and dronkyn togedyr in gret gladnes of spyryt' (790-91). Relationships are expressed and mediated through food. When Margery goes on pilgrimage, her rejection by other pilgrims is expressed through their refusal to let her share their food.[36] Concomitantly, her friendships with women such as Margaret Florentyne are articulated, as McAvoy points out, 'by means of the traditional female offering of food and drink.'[37] Margery's relationships with her community, good and bad, are also defined through food. Rejection is normally phrased in terms of withdrawal of

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[32] McAvoy sees Margery's request for the keys to the buttery in terms of gender performance, arguing that Margery readopts her roles as wife and mother in order to destabilise them, to exploit their 'potential for a subversion of patriarchal hegemony' (Authority and the Female Body 39). While I believe this is largely true, I would add that Margery is certainly not the first to do so. Indeed, as Bynum argues, the female mystical tradition as a whole draws much on this destabilisation of traditional roles. (See Bynum, Holy Feast, especially 277-06).

[33] Staley, Dissenting Fictions 50-51.

[34] Bynum, Holy Feast 130.

[35] Bynum, Holy Feast 186.

[36] For example Kempe 2136-45, 2382-87.

[37] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "'Aftyr Hyr Owyn Tunge': Body, Voice and Authority in the Book of Margery Kempe," Women's Writing 9 (2002): 159-76, at 167. Informaworld, 10 July 2007, <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/subjecthome~db=jour>.

food and drink: 'thei that beforntyme had yovyn hir bothyn mete and drynke for Goddys

lofe, now thei put hir awey and bodyn hir that sche schulde not come in her placys, for

the schrewyd talys that thei herd of hir' (3481-84). Margery's relationship with the Holy

Family, too, is characterised by her provision of food. She undertakes to provide the child

Mary with good mete and drynke, carries 'a potel of pyment and spycys therto' for Mary

and Joseph, and begs meat for Mary and the baby Jesus (550-51, 567, 683-84). Her

attempt to cheer Mary after her son's crucifixion even revolves around making her a hot

drink (6560-61).

As we have seen in her experience of madness, images of feeding, whether positive or

negative, are integral to Margery's conception of her self, and to her interactions with

others. Adapting the negative imagery of feeding which characterises her madness,

Margery characterises her role as holy woman also in terms of consumption. Jesus

instructs her that she will 'ben etyn and knawyn of the pepul of the world as any raton

knawyth the stokfysch' (515-16). Criticism of Margery is described in terms of feeding;

those who condemn her are described as consumers of her flesh. Extending the

experiences of her madness, Margery seems to phrase attacks on her self as a literal

devouring of her body. Interestingly, these images of consumption are also linked to

accusations of demonic possession:

> For summe seyd that sche had a devyl wythinne hir, and summe seyd to hir owyn
> mowth that the frer schulde a drevyn to develys owt of hir. Thus was sche... etyn,
> and knawyn of the pepil... (5181-84).

Ironically, the very people who accuse Margery of being demonically possessed are

themselves compared to the demons which devoured her in her madness. Indeed,

Margery's demons and her critics are connected through their opposition to Margery's religious vocation. They both seek to force her to renounce Christ and to deny her own identity.

However, as Staley remarks, the above metaphor has a dual meaning: 'where *knawyn* implies Margery's figurative dismemberment by the world, *etyn* connotes her nurture of the world. Similarly, Margery is at once rejected by her world and an active means of joining the fragmented sections of the social body.'[38] Woundedness and the ability to feed seemingly go hand in hand. As Bynum comments, 'like body, food must be broken and spilled forth in order to give life.'[39] Just as Margery needs to undergo the trauma and dissolution of madness to gain an intact sense of self, so her ability to feed is intrinsically tied to her motherhood, itself involving a violent breaching of the body. Images of Margery being consumed by the people are notable for the violence involved. Christ's commendation of Margery's charity to her fellow Christians focuses on her willingness to 'ben hakkyd as smal as flesche to the potte for her lofe, so that I wolde be thi deth savyn hem alle fro dampnacyon' (6892-93). Holiness becomes intrinsically associated with feeding, and with bodily harm. Christ comments approvingly that Margery 'clevyst as sore onto me as the skyn of stokfysche clevyth to a mannys handys whan it is sothyn [boiled.]' (2980-82). Margery, like the stockfish whose skin has been peeled away, becomes food through a process of bodily disintegration.

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[38] Staley, <u>Dissenting Fictions</u> 100.
[39] Bynum, <u>Holy Feast</u> 30.

The holy body, then, is one which feeds, suffers, gives birth and is consumed. Crucially, those qualities are the precise bodily attributes of a woman who has had sex and has given birth. In a cultural landscape in which the normative holy female body is virginal, Margery is making a case for her body to be holy precisely *because* of its sexual nature, and its consequent capacity to give birth and lactate. As McAvoy argues, 'this endorsement of maternity reassures on a literal level that Margery's sex and marital status does not preclude an achievement of an *imitatio Christi* but is actually *privileged* by it.'[40] This is a radical statement. Conveniently for Margery, however, it is endorsed by Christ, who praises Margery's holiness precisely in terms of motherhood: 'thu art to me a very modir and to al the world, for that gret charite that is in the' (2976-77). Christ assures Margery that, although virginity is more highly prized by the Church,

> trow thow rygth wel that I lofe wyfes also, and specyal tho wyfys whech woldyn levyn chast, yyf thei mygtyn have her wyl, and don her besynes to plesyn me as thow dost, for, thow the state of maydenhode be mor parfyte and mor holy than the state of wedewhode, and the state of wedewhode mor parfyte than the state of wedlake, yet, dowtyr, I lofe the as wel as any mayden in the world' (1568-74).

As we have seen, Margery's motherhood and madness operate according to the same paradigm, in which bodily openness and vulnerability are closely aligned to the capacity for holiness. Both body and mind must be broken open in order to become fruitful.

Margery's construction of her body as food, begun during her madness, links her own flesh with that of Jesus. Christ's body, as present in the Eucharist, is also regarded as food, and, more specifically, food that unites the Church and all Christian worshippers. Indeed, God is repeatedly presented in terms of feeding in the Book: 'than was hir sowle

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[40] McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body 49.

so delectabely fed wyth the swet dalyawns of owr Lorde' (3239-40). Even Margery's

conversion is framed in terms of an exchange of foods. Jesus instructs her to

> forsake that thow lovyst best in this world, and that is etyng of flesch. And instede
> of that flesch, thow schalt etyn my flesch and my blod, that is the very body of
> Crist in the sacrament of the awter. Thys is my wyl, dowtyr, that thow receyve my
> body every Sonday, and I schal flowe so mych grace in the that alle the world
> schal marvelyn therof (509-14).

Margery must exchange the food valued by her society for the food provided by Christ:

his own body. As Bynum notes, the fact that in the Eucharist Christ's body is regarded

and valued primarily as food aligns his body with the female body.[41] As we have noted,

feeding is a female attribute. Female bodily fluids – milk and menstrual blood – are food;

male bodily fluids, with the single exception of Christ's, are not. Margery makes much of

this comparison. Her relationship with Christ is, in fact, phrased in terms of fluids – she

consumes his blood, as he 'flows grace' in her. The anchorite whom Margery approaches

for advice endorses this particular understanding of Christ's body: 'Dowtyr, ye sowkyn

evyn on Crystys brest' (535-36).[42]

The construction of the relationship between Margery and Christ in terms of a

consumption of fluids is particularly interesting when viewed in light of Margery's

similar description of her relationship with her husband. While the exchange of fluids

between Margery and Christ is described in a purely positive way, Margery sees the

sexual relationship between herself and John in decidedly negative terms. Post-

conversion, Margery likens sexual intercourse to forced consumption of filth from the

gutter:

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[41] Bynum, <u>Holy Feast</u> 260-61.

[42] The anchorite Margery consults at this point is a man living in Lynn: not, therefore, Julian of Norwich.

> sche had nevyr desyr to komown fleschly wyth hyre husbonde, for the dette of matrimony was so abhominabyl to hir that sche had levar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn the wose [ooze], the mukke in the chanel, than to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng, saf only for obedyens (346-50).[43]

The image aptly suggests Margery's disgust at the nature of her husband's sexual desire. McAvoy notes that sex, to Margery, becomes aligned with the 'polluting agents and detritus of the human body, the abject which must be expelled in order to ensure survival.'[44] Sex, like madness, is here associated with inappropriate feeding. While madness involved Margery attempting to consume her own flesh, sex is likened to consumption of waste. Both are self-defeating attempts at feeding, in which the body, rather than being nourished, is only harmed.

Indeed, Margery seems to associate sex with the same loss of self which she experienced during her pregnancy and madness; both involve a loss of not only autonomy but also bodily integrity. Sexual desire is experienced by Margery (post-conversion) as a type of possession. Perhaps the most notable example of this is Christ's decision to punish Margery for her inability to accept the notion of eternal damnation. This punishment comprises a series of visions of naked, demonic priests:

> Sche sey, as hir thowt veryly, dyvers men of religyon, preystys, and many other, bothyn hethyn and Cristen, comyn befor hir syght, that sche myth not enchewyn hem ne puttyn hem owt of hir syght, schewyng her bar membrys unto hir. And therwyth the devyl bad hir in hir mende chesyn whom sche wolde han fyrst of hem alle, and sche must be comown to hem alle.... Hir thowt that he seyd trewth; sche cowde not sey nay; and sche must nedys don hys byddyng, and yet wolde sche not a don it for alle this worlde.... Wher sche went er what so sche dede, thes cursyd mendys abedyn wyth hir (4866-78).

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[43] Pre-conversion, however, is another story. As I have argued, there is no sense that Margery detests sex before her madness: indeed, rather the opposite.

[44] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Virgin, Mother, Whore: The Sexual Spirituality of Margery Kempe," Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture: The Word Made Flesh, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 121-38, at 125.

This vision has a striking resemblance to those inflicted on Margery during her madness.

Both involve Margery succumbing to demonic instructions against her will. More

importantly, Margery's body is central to both episodes; both focus on the transformation

of Margery's body into an object to be manipulated by others, and from which Margery

herself is alienated. In Margery's madness, her body is pushed and pulled by the demons

surrounding her; here, the transformation of Margery into a sexual object suggests a

concomitant loss of bodily agency.

Even in a less dramatic context, sexual desire takes on the same characteristics as

possession. Margery is tempted by more prosaic sexual impulses two years after her

conversion, when she is overwhelmed by her desire for a man she meets in church, and is

nearly tempted into committing adultery. Thoughts of sexual desire seemingly come from

outside herself; as in her madness, she is powerless to control her own mind. Instead, her

thoughts are governed by demonic persuasion:

> The devyl put in hir mende that God had forsakyn hir, and ellys schuld sche not
> so ben temptyd. She levyd the develys suasyons and gan to consentyn for because
> sche cowde thynkyn no good thowt. Therfor wend sche that God had forsake
> hir (446-49).[45]

The word 'labowr,' which we have already identified as being connected in Margery's

text with pregnancy and madness, is used repeatedly in connection with these adulterous

desires:

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[45] While the idea of the devil putting temptation into a person's mind is a doctrinal commonplace (see, for example, Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale": 'atte laste the feend, oure enemy, / Putte in his thought that he sholde poyson beye, / With which he myghte sleen his felawes tweye') it takes on particular meaning in the context of Margery's experiences of madness (Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale," The Canterbury Tales lines 844-46). As we have seen, Margery's experiences of mental alienation (including her experience of madness) often appear to be patterned on demonic possession, and I am reading Margery's phrasing here in that context.

> This creatur was so labowrd and vexyd... that sche wyst nevyr what sche mygth do. Sche lay be hir husbond, and for to comown wyth hym it was so abhomynabyl onto hir that sche mygth not duren it, and yet was it leful onto hir in leful tyme yf sche had wold. But evyr sche was labowrd wyth the other man for to syn wyth hym in-as-mech as he had spoke to hir (453-59).

The recurrence of the word 'labowr' suggests that there is a conceptual link between Margery's experience of sex, pregnancy and madness. All three involve some form of bodily penetration, and a concomitant alienation from a body which has become the property of another. All three are also connected with forms of unproductive feeding.

This association with food arises again after Margery consents to adultery, only to be roundly rejected by her intended partner, who exclaims that 'he had levar ben hewyn as smal as flesch to the pott' than sleep with her (463). In this image sex is again associated with a destructive force acting on the body and again connected with images of feeding and eating. However, it is important to note that the image is here put forward precisely as an alternative to sexual intercourse; here it is chastity that is defined by its ability to feed and nourish others, in contrast to the harmful consumption associated with sex. In the image of meat being chopped up for the pot, the ability to feed is again associated with breaches in the boundaries of the body, with its capacity to break down and split open. Margery's vision of chastity, then, seems to be defined by a productive permeability, in which the absence of bodily intactness is crucial. This stands in direct opposition to the medieval ideology of virginity, in which the intactness of the (imaginary) hymen is vital, and represents the purity of the body as a whole.

Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich

Margery, in fact, consistently links the permeable body and holiness. Her madness, which prompts her vision of Christ and subsequent conversion, is characterised by bodily openness, and this permeability is a model for all subsequent appearances of Margery's body in the text. Margery is able to tap into a vein of mystical writing which treats illness and bodily weakness as a means to access God. Weakness, and the negation of the self which this implies, is thus an accepted means to a new identity. The experience of illness sets the self apart from society, and allows the possibility of self-transformation. It is interesting, in this context, to examine Julian of Norwich's <u>Showings</u>, in which Julian's spirituality also emerges from illness. Julian actually prays for illness as a means to get closer to God. In much the same way as Margery uses the motifs of her madness to articulate her new, holy identity, so Julian employs her illness as the basis for her theology. McAvoy comments that 'for both women, illness is represented as a self-initiated and transformative experience which sets in motion the process which ultimately leads to writing.... it heralds their emergence into an agency first enacted by means of the text of their own suffering bodies, and later translated into the written word on the page.'[46]

Undergoing suffering is also a means by which the female mystic can replicate the experience of Christ: his suffering and death on the cross. For Margery, madness is a

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[46] McAvoy, <u>Authority and the Female Body</u> 10.

route to identification with Christ. Julian, too, undergoes a conversion marked by a period of 'raving':

> Thann comm a religiouse personn to me and asked me howe I farde, and I sayde that I hadde raued þat daye. And he lugh lowde and enterlye. And I sayde: The crosse that stode atte my bedde feete, it bled faste; and with this worde the personn that I spake to wex alle sadde and meruelande.[47]

The suffering that madness brings in both texts, although not a positive experience in itself, is necessary to carry out positive self-transformation. Madness opens the self to inspiration, and indeed, in its distancing of the self from mundane reality, has something in common with the more traditional conversion. The conversion underwritten by madness is particularly marked by a radical altering of bodily meaning: it is now the open, bleeding, wounded body that is valorised because of its resemblance to the crucified body of Christ.

The wounded body of Christ is indeed at the centre of both Julian's and Margery's texts, and acts as a focus for both women's sense of self. As a consequence, perhaps, both Julian and Margery see Christ in the context of the feminine.[48] As Bynum notes, this is a common way of perceiving Christ in the Middle Ages: 'Both men and women described Christ's body in its suffering and its generativity as a birthing and lactating mother and may at some almost unconscious level have felt that woman's suffering was her way of fusing with Christ because Christ's suffering flesh was "woman."' [49]

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[47] Julian of Norwich, The Short Text, A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich, 2 vols., ed. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, Studies and Texts 35 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978) 1:266.
[48] See McAvoy, "Monstrous Masculinities" 58.
[49] Bynum, Holy Feast 260-61.

One feminine characteristic particularly stressed by Margery is the way in which Christ's body mirrors the female body in its propensity to bleed and give birth. Christ's wounded body aligns him with both Julian and Margery: with what Laurie Finke has described as the 'grotesque bodies' of mystical discourse, bodies 'that open up and spill forth their contents – blood, milk, excrement – bodies that endure wounding and mutilation.'[50] Margery portrays Christ's crucifixion, in particular, in a manner akin to childbirth: 'and than owr Lordys body shakyd and schoderyd, and alle the joyntys of that blisful body brostyn and wentyn asundyr, and hys precyows wowndys ronnyn down wyth reverys of blood on every syde' (6476-79). Christ's body, like that of a pregnant woman, and like that of Margery, must 'brost' in order to give new life. Once again, it is the ability of the body to open and bring forth life that also gives it the ability to feed. It is when Christ's side is pierced that he is able to bring forth blood and water 'for hir lofe and hir salvacyon' (2275). The frequent use of the pelican, which tears its flesh in order to feed its young with its own blood, as a symbol for Christ in medieval culture, bears out this paradigm of wounding and feeding. Likewise, Margery's own body must suffer (through both pregnancy and subsequent madness) in order to feed.

Julian, too, employs a feminine, open Christ. Indeed, Sandra McEntire argues that Julian 'goes much further than other female mystics by representing the divinity as having a female body that groans and moans, endures wounding and torture. Translating her own grotesque body onto that of the divine, she sees the divinity assume the grotesque female

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[50] Laurie A. Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision," <u>Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics</u>, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1993) 28-44, at 38.

body.'[51] In particular, as McAvoy argues, in the Short Text 'Julian's vision of the

crucified Christ is dominated by the shedding of his blood.'[52]

> I saw beholdyng the body plentuous bledyng in semyng of the scoregyng, as thus. The feyer skynne was broken full depe in to the tendyr flessch, with sharpe smytynges all a bout the sweete body. The hote blode ranne out so plentuously that ther was neyther seen skynne ne wounde, but as it were all blode.[53]

This emphasis on blood, which Julian shares with Margery, is central to their texts. We

have already examined Margery's use of madness as a catalyst for self-transformation,

and her use of fluids, including blood, as a positive means of identification with Christ. In

Julian's conversion, too, it is Jesus' blood which acts as a guarantee of Julian's speech, a

counter to her self-accusations of madness: 'I sayde: The crosse that stode atte my bedde

feete, it bled faste; and with this worde the personn that I spake to wex alle sadde and

meruelande.'[54]

As we have seen, excessive bleeding is both characteristically feminine and largely

negative. The paradigmatic feminine bleeding is of course menstruation, which in its

excess 'comes to resemble the other varieties of female incontinence – sexual, urinary,

linguistic – that served as powerful signs of woman's inability to control the workings of

her own body.'[55] The links between madness and menstruation have already been fully

explored: we have noted, also, that both Margery and Julian's experiences of madness are

characterised by blood.

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[51] Sandra J. McEntire, "The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's Showings," Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays, ed. Sandra J. McEntire, Garland Ref. Library of the Humanities 2034, Garland Medieval Casebooks 21 (New York: Garland, 1998) 3-33, at 18.
[52] McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body 80.
[53] Julian, Long Text 2:342.
[54] Julian, Short Text 1:266.
[55] Paster 83.

While medical texts present both madness and excess bleeding in purely pathological

terms, however, Margery and Julian rewrite their significance, asserting the

transformative effect of blood and insanity. Not only are bleeding and madness

beneficial, they make the female body more like Christ's. Jesus' body, as we have seen,

is portrayed as 'all blode.'[56] Julian's description of the blood itself is also interesting:

> Beholde and see the vertu of this precious plenty of hys dere worthy blode. It descendyd downe in to helle and brak her bondes, and delyuerd them all that were there which belongh to the courte of hevyn…. The precious plenty of his dereworthy blode ascendyth vp into hevyn in the blessed body of our lorde Jesu Crist, and ther is in hym, bledyng, preyeng for vs to the father, and is and shal be as long as vs nedyth. And ovyr more it flowyth in all heauen, enjoying the saluacion of all mankynd that be ther and shall be, fulfylling the number that faylyth.[57]

Jesus seems not to shed blood actively; instead, the blood streams out of him. Gail Kern

Pastor has argued that male and female bleeding are clearly differentiated in medieval

texts. Male bleeding is an active process; men choose to shed blood, and the blood shed is

meaningful. Female bleeding, in contrast, is entirely passive; women's bleeding is given

no significance, and is regarded as nothing more than a product of the body.[58] While

Christ's blood is decidedly meaningful, and thus belongs to the category of masculine

bleeding, Julian's decision to present Christ as passive in his bleeding also locates it as

feminine.

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[56] McAvoy also argues that Jesus' bleeding can be seen as characteristically feminine, stating that the <u>Showings</u> contains a 'subtext which equates Christ's precious blood with a specifically female blood-loss, whether ruptured hymen, menstrual flow, or blood-loss associated with childbirth' (<u>Authority and the Female Body</u> 80). See <u>Authority and the Female Body</u> 80-81 for a fuller discussion.

[57] Julian, <u>Long Text</u> 2:344-45.

[58] Paster 97.

While bleeding is here equated with life, dryness, in contrast, is associated with death. Christ's face, as he hangs on the cross, is dry and bloodless: 'me thought the dryinge of Crystes flesche was the maste payne of his passionn and the laste.'[59] Dryness is associated with distance from God, and from spiritual comfort; Julian worries that 'we ere nou3t sekare that god almyghtty hyeres vs, as vs thynke for oure vnworthynesse and fore we fele ryght nought; fore we ere als barayne and als drye oftymes eftyr oure prayers as we ware before.'[60] After her initial revelation, Julian

> as a wrech heuyed and mourned for the bodely paynes that I feled, and thou3t grete irksumnes that I schulde langere lyffe. And I was als barane and drye as 3if I hadde neuer had comfort before bot litille, for fallynge to my paynes and faylynge of gastelye felynge.[61]

This is particularly interesting with reference to the humoural scheme, in which dryness is both associated with the male body and considered a superior quality. Julian seems to be deliberately reversing traditional assumptions about male and female bodies, and their associated qualities. McAvoy notes the same negative connotations of dryness, pointing out that 'loss of fluid and the resultant thirst, of course, are experiences which are integral to the birth experience.'[62]

The alignment of Christ with the feminine allows for a more complete identification on the part of the female mystic. Margery's Book contains what Sarah Beckwith has described as an 'extraordinary continuity of [Margery's] life and Christ's... a continuity

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[59] Julian, Short Text 1:233.
[60] Julian, Short Text 1:259.
[61] Julian, Short Text 1:266.
[62] McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body 81.

of shared fleshliness.'[63] Margery's suffering body, as Rosemary Voaden among others

has argued, is explicitly imitative of Christ's.[64] In passages describing her contemplation

of the Passion, for example, Margery's emotional identification with Christ merges into a

bodily identification:

> Sche had so very contemplacyon in the sygth of hir sowle as yf Crist had hangyn
> befor hir bodily eye in hys manhode... hys precyows tendyr body – alto-rent and
> toryn wyth scorgys, mor ful of wowndys than evyr was duffehows of holys,
> hangyng upon the cros wyth the corown of thorn upon hys hevyd, hys blysful
> handys, hys tendyr fete nayled to the hard tre, the reverys of blood flowyng owt
> plentevowsly of every membre, the gresly and grevows wownde in hys precyows
> syde schedyng owt blood and watyr for hir lofe and hir salvacyon – than sche fel
> down and cryed wyth lowde voys, wondyrfully turnyng and wrestyng hir body on
> every syde, spredyng hir armys abrode as yyf sche schulde a deyd, and not cowde
> kepyn hir fro crying and these bodily mevyngys, for the fyer of lofe that brent so
> fervently in hir sowle wyth pur pyte and compassyon (2265-80).

This drive to identify Margery's body with Christ's occurs throughout the text. Margery's

body is mapped onto that of Jesus; indeed, Jesus declares to Margery that 'thow art

wretyn in myn handys and my fete' (954). Notably, both Christ's and Margery's are

suffering bodies, unable to contain what is inside them; Jesus' holy bleeding, like

Margery's responsive cries and roars, cannot be restrained. Finally, Christ's and

Margery's bodies become indistinguishable: Jesus assures Margery that

> thei that worshep the, thei worshep me; thei that despysyn the, thei despysen me,
> and I schal chastysen hem therfor. I am in the, and thow in me. And thei that
> heryn the, thei heryn the voys of God (700-702).

Karma Lochrie specifically links Margery's suffering to her imaginative interaction with

Christ's body. Margery's 'reading of the damaged body of Christ produces a bodily

wounding of her own.' Lochrie suggests an imaginative link between Margery and

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[63] Sarah Beckwith, Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings (London: Routledge, 1993) 81.

[64] Rosalynn Voaden, God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries (York: York Medieval P, 1999) 118.

Christ, in which Margery's body takes on aspects of the crucified body of Christ: 'the spectacle of Christ's body becomes transferred to Kempe's, as she weeps and roars so that "the church wondered at her body."' [65]

Margery's potentially transgressive body is authorised by its similarity to Christ's. This radical reading of Margery's body, however, is strongly contested by those around her. As John Arnold argues, 'what got Kempe into trouble was hermeneutics: the problems that people had, in the context of religious fears, of deciding on how to "read" the interior person from the exterior shell.'[66] While Margery argues that her body is holy, spectators see instead an out-of-place secular body. Many of the accusations of madness directed at Margery stem from just such a conflict over how to read her body. The difference in perception between Margery and the rest of the world understandably gives rise to the belief that Margery must be mad. Her body is open to being read as insane, or demonically possessed. Spectators criticise her crying and weeping, 'not levying it was the werk of God, but rather sum evyl spiryt, er a sodeyn sekenes, er ellys symulacyon and ypocrisy, falsly feyned of hir owyn self' (2713-15).

The same behaviour which Margery intends to be read as holy, for example, is instead interpreted as evidence of epilepsy:

> Sum seyde that sche had the fallyng evyl, for sche, wyth the crying, wrestyd hir body, turnyng fro the o syde into the other, and wex al blew and al blo, as it had ben colowr of leed. And than folke spitted at hir for horrowr of the sekenes, and sum scornyd hir and seyd that sche howlyd as it had ben a dogge, and bannyd hir,

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[65] Karma Lochrie, <u>Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh</u>, New Cultural Studies Ser. (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991) 174.

[66] John H. Arnold, "Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent." <u>A Companion to</u> The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004) 75-93, at 90.

and cursyd hir, and seyd that sche dede meche harm among the pepyl. And than thei that beforntyme had yovyn hir bothyn mete and drynke for Goddys lofe, now thei put hir awey and bodyn hir that sche schulde not come in her placys, for the schrewyd talys that thei herd of hir (3475-84).

As Margery's recovery from madness is defined by renewed consumption of food, so accusations of sickness are marked by a refusal to share food with her. Margery, however, is able to employ these accusations of madness in her own interests. As critics have pointed out, she redefines her neighbours' criticism as persecution, which enables her to take the role of a martyr:

> And many seyd ther was nevyr seynt in hevyn that cryed so as sche dede, wherfor thei woldyn concludyn that sche had a devyl wythinne hir, whech cawsyd that crying. And so thei seyden pleynly, and meche mor evyl. And al sche toke pacyently for owr Lordys lofe, for sche wist wel that the Jewys seyd meche wers of hys owyn persone than men dede of hir. And therfor sche toke it the mor mekely (3468-74).[67]

Margery goes to great lengths to portray her crying as an involuntary force. Her definition of holiness rests on an inability to assert control over her body: 'sche cryid, sche roryd, sche wept as thow sche schulde a brostyn therwith. Sche myth not mesuryn hirself ne rewlyn hirselfe, but cryid and roryd that many man on hir wonderyd' (5858-61). This is, perhaps, a specifically feminine form of holiness, couched in terms of submission and uncontrol. As McAvoy points out, 'like some monstrous progeny, the sounds "brekyn owte... merueylowslyche &... ful hedowslyche."'[68] Indeed, Margery links her crying, like her madness, to the process of childbirth:

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[67] For Margery deliberately conforming to patterns of martyrdom, see Gail McMurray Gibson, The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1989) 48. For Margery creating a marginalised role for herself, see McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body 106.

[68] McAvoy, '"Aftyr Hyr Owyn Tunge"' 160. On Margery's reaction here mirroring childbirth, see also McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body 54, and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy and Iconography, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2007) 50.

> And therfor, when sche knew that sche schulde cryen, sche kept it in as long as sche myghth and dede al that sche cowde to withstond it er ellys to put it awey, til sche wex as blo as any leed, and evyr it schuld labowryn in hir mende mor and mor into the tyme that it broke owte. And whan the body myth ne lengar enduryn the gostly labowr, but was ovyrcome wyth the unspeakabyl lofe that wrowt so fervently in the sowle, than fel sche down and cryed wondyr lowde (2254-61).

Once again, the holy body is one which participates in the processes of birth. The love which 'gives birth' to her crying is 'unspeakabyl': it can only be articulated, then, through means of the body. The passage suggests that her crying can be seen as a type of birth (the use of the word 'labowr' echoing Margery's use of this general term for pain in her description of her own experience of childbirth) while, concomitantly, the inability to cry is figured as being 'bareyn' of tears (6721). This alignment of suffering with childbirth is not original to Margery, but has some textual precedent: Lochrie notes that that the Middle English version of the *vita* of Marie d'Oignies portrays her as being 'constrained to cry loud in the manner of a woman travailing of child.'[69]

Images of childbirth, while essential to Margery's representation of her own holiness, are still linked with madness. Margery includes the stories of two women suffering from demonic temptation and madness, both of which are linked to childbirth. The two women are near doubles of Margery, paralleling her experience with madness and social alienation. Indeed, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen identifies one of the women as 'Margery Kempe's doppelgänger, a semblance of what she once was and might have remained.'[70] This woman has, like Margery, become mad following childbirth. She, like Margery during her madness, is alienated from her community, and actively tries to hurt herself.

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[69] Lochrie, Translations of the Flesh 192.
[70] Jeffrey J. Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines, Medieval Cultures 35 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003) 172.

Her husband appeals to Margery to help, telling her that his wife 'knowyth not me, ne non of hir neyborwys. Sche roryth and cryith so that sche makith folk evyl afeerd. Sche wyl both smytyn and bityn, and therfor is sche manykyld on hir wristys' (5966-69). A mad woman who makes people 'evyl afeerd' because she 'roryth and cryith,' also suggests a distinct resemblance to the post-madness Margery, as seen by her neighbours. When Margery visits the madwoman, the woman welcomes her, saying that she can see 'many fayr awngelys' about her (5978-79). In contrast,

> whan other folke cam to hir, sche cryid and gapyd as sche wolde an etyn hem, and seyd that sche saw many develys abowtyn hem. Sche wolde not suffryn hem to towchyn hir be hyr good wyl. Sche roryd and cryid so, bothe nyth and day for the most part, that men wolde not suffyr hir to dwellyn amongys hem, sche was so tediows to hem (5981-86).

We can, then, identify a number of themes from Margery's madness reappearing here. A link is made once again between madness and inappropriate eating. This madwoman wants to devour those who attempt to help her. Visions of devils again parallel Margery's experience, as does the woman's rejection of her friends and neighbours. Margery here plays the interventionary role which Jesus performed in her own madness, praying for the madwoman 'tyl God yat hir hir witte and hir mende ayen. And than was sche browt to chirche and purifiid as other women be, blyssed mote God ben!' (5998-6000). The priest recording Margery's Book adds that,

> It was, as hem thowt that knewyn it, a ryth gret myrakyl, for he that wrot this boke had nevyr befor that tyme sey man ne woman, as hym thowt, so fer owt of hirself as this woman was, ne so evyl to rewlyn ne goveryn, and sithyn he sey hir sad and sobyr anow – worschip and preysyng be to owr Lord wythowtyn ende for hys hy mercy and hys goodnes, that evyr helpith at nede (6001-6006).

Gibson comments that Margery 'by triumphing over the perils of childbirth has both

enacted her qualifying miracle of sainthood and fully asserted her own spiritual health.'[71]

This woman acts as Margery is frequently accused of acting – 'evyl to rewlyn ne

goveryn,' 'alienyd of hir witte,' 'roryng and crying' (6003-6004, 5974-75, 5984). She is

Margery's evil double – and Margery is able to subdue her. Margery emerges as the

representative of order, a defender of societal standards she is normally accused of

flouting.

Margery visits a further potential double, a female leper whose experiences of demonic

temptation echo her own:

> the oo woman had so many temptacyons that sche wist not how sche myth best be
> governyd. Sche was so labowryd wyth hir gostly enmy that sche durst not blissyn
> hir, ne do no worschep to God, for dreed that the devyl schuld a slayn hir. And
> sche was labowryed wyth many fowle and horibyl thowtys, many mo than sche
> cowde tellyn. And as sche seyd, sche was a mayde. Therfor the sayd creatur went
> to hir many tymys to comfortyn hir and preyd for hir, also ful specialy that God
> schulde strength hir ageyn hir enmye, and it is to belevyn that he dede so, blissyd
> mote he ben! (5950-59).

This woman is 'labowryd wyth hir gostly enmy' and 'wyth many fowle and horibyl

thowtys' just as Margery was previously 'labowryd wyth spyritys.' The use of the word

'labowr' is again reminiscent of the language Margery employs in connection with her

own experience of childbirth and subsequent madness. However, as Margery makes a

point of mentioning, the woman is 'a mayde.' While Margery is thought of as possessed

for asserting her holiness in defiance of her sexual status, this woman, ironically, is

demonically assaulted in spite of her virginity. Margery seems to be suggesting that the

type of body one has, sexually experienced or virginal, does not affect one's propensity

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[71] Gibson, Theater of Devotion 65.

for holiness, or for demonic temptation. Indeed, despite her virginity, the woman's

demonic troubles are described, like Margery's, in terms which recall childbirth.

In addition to those madwomen who echo her own experience, Margery is shadowed by

another person lacking reason, in the form of her husband John. After hitting his head in a

fall, John becomes an invalid who relies on Margery's care, and eventually loses his own

wits:

> Than sche toke hom hir husbond to hir and kept hym yerys aftyr, as long as he
> levyd, and had ful mech labowr wyth hym; for in hys last days he turnyd childisch
> ayen and lakkyd reson, that he cowd not don hys owyn esement to gon to a sege,
> er ellys he wolde not, but as a childe voydyd his natural digestyon in hys lynyn
> clothys ther he sat be the fyre er at the tabil, whethyr it wer, he wolde sparyn no
> place (6066-72).[72]

John's lack of reason, like Margery's own insanity, is referenced in bodily terms – he

cannot control his own excretions. John loses control over his own body, and particularly

over the boundaries of his body. This lack of bodily control becomes particularly

interesting in the context of his earlier relationship with Margery, and her struggle to

maintain her chastity in the face of his sexual desires. John's attempt to gain access to

Margery's body by denying her control over her own bodily boundaries has now

rebounded upon him. Indeed, McAvoy relates John's loss of bodily control to Margery's

earlier description of sex as 'so abhominabyl to hir that sche had levar, hir thowt, etyn or

drynkyn... the mukke in the chanel,' noting that, 'just as Margery had previously

identified John Kempe's masculinity as synonymous with the teratological excrement

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[72] John's loss of reason is portrayed very differently to Margery's earlier madness. It is clear that John's
reversion to a childlike state is a result of a blow to the head, and the subsequent illness: it is thus not true
madness, of which the causes are far more mysterious. While Margery retains a sense of self, albeit
distorted, throughout her madness, there seems no hope that John will regain his reason. In this sense, he is
much more like a natural imbecile, a man born without wits, rather than a madman who may expect
eventually to come to his senses.

flowing in the sewer, so now all traces of this masculinity flee his body in a stream of that same monstrous waste' (347-49).[73]

After a relationship in which her husband has held most of the power, the positions are now reversed, and Margery has complete control over John's actions. Once more, madness is the frame for a dramatic shift in power and social status. Indeed, there seems to have been something of a reversal in gender; McAvoy notes that John's association with qualities of childishness and unreason are just those qualities 'which were very often associated with the feminine during the Middle Ages with its perceived ontology of incapacity and dependency.'[74] However, John's depiction in terms of childishness naturalises Margery's authority over him, while at the same time confining her to the role of mother, a role that she has already rejected.[75] The use of 'labowr' to describe Margery's care of John, as we have discussed, carries additional negative connotations of childbirth and madness, both implying a harmful loss of autonomy and self-control. Margery explicitly sees her role as carer for John as threatening to her identity as holy woman and confidant of Christ, initially refusing to take it on: 'Nay, good Lord, for I schal than not tendyn to the as I do now' (6053-54). However, Jesus conflates both roles: 'I prey the now kepe hym for the lofe of me' (6058-59). The domestic, as in so much of Margery's Book, becomes sacred; John's suddenly vulnerable, uncontrolled and pervious body becomes assimilated to that of Christ.

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[73] McAvoy, "Monstrous Masculinities" 68.

[74] McAvoy, "Monstrous Masculinities" 68.

[75] Aers also notes that John's return to childhood is the only way in which 'such power [is] ever available again to a woman in relation to an adult male.' However, I cannot entirely agree with Aers that Christ undergoes a comparative infantalisation; rather, as I have previously argued, I believe that Christ instead takes on the position of the mother. David Aers, "The Making of Margery Kempe: Individual and Community," Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430 (London: Routledge, 1988) 73-116, at 106.

Margery and Her Critics

Margery, then, has several strategies for dealing with criticism. One, as seen above, is to attack and undermine those categories which exclude her. Another of her characteristic responses is to turn criticism against the critic. We have already seen Margery's propensity for reversal in her insistence on privileging motherhood over virginity, the pervious over the closed body. Margery's experience of a madness which leads to true sanity – to the realisation that her previous, 'sane' life privileged worldly pleasures over religious truths – surely plays a role in her employment of such strategies. The accusations of others, who still judge Margery insane although in her openness to Christ she is saner than they, create a dynamic in which notions of truth and falsity are open to debate.

In response to accusations that her crying is excessive and hypocritical, Margery argues that it is in fact the only rational response to Christ's passion. Crying for the sins of the world, she argues, is sanity; it is grieving over material losses which constitutes true insanity. Those who 'wyl cryen and roryn and wryngyn her handys as yyf thei had no wytte ne non mende, and yet wetyn thei wel inow that thei displesyn God,' are the real madmen (2286-88). Concomitantly, the madness of which Margery is accused is rewritten as the only appropriate response to a true vision of the crucifixion: 'than the creatur thowt that sche ran al abowte the place as it had ben a mad woman, crying and roryng' (6500-6501). And again, when Christ's body is kissed by Mary, her sisters and

Mary Magdalene: 'And the sayd creatur thowt that sche ran evyr to and fro, as it had be a woman wythowtyn reson, gretly desyryng to an had the precyows body be hirself alone' (6522-24).

This is a strategy that Margery pursues throughout the text, reversing and redirecting the arguments made against her, redefining what is mad, what is sane. She pursues the same policy when attacked for wearing white clothes, the colour traditionally worn by virgins. Having, at the urging of her confessor, and as a test of obedience, temporarily switched to black clothes, she is accosted by a priest 'that was hir enmye,' who 'enjoyid gretly that sche was put fro hir wille and seyd unto hir: "I am glad that ye gon in blak clothyng as ye wer wont to do."' Margery, in return, insists that 'owyr Lord wer not displesyd thow I weryd whyte clothys, for he wyl that I do so' (2774-78).

In insisting on her right to wear white clothes, Margery is making a claim for her body to be seen as holy, as equivalent in status to a virgin body. The priest refuses to see her body in these terms. At Margery's insistence on the holy nature of her body in the sight of the Lord, the priest retorts:

> 'Now wote I wel that thu hast a devyl wythinne the, for I her hym spekyn in the to me.'
> [Margery replies:] 'A, good ser, I pray yow dryveth hym away fro me, for God knowyth I wolde ryth fawyn don wel and plesyn hym yf I cowde.'
> And than he was ryth wroth and seyd ful many schrewyd wordys; and sche seyd to hym:
> 'Ser, I hope I have no devyl wythinne me, for yyf I had a devyl wythin me, wetyth wel I schuld ben wroth wyth yow. And, sir, me thynkyth that I am nothyng wroth wyth yow for nothyng that ye can don onto me.'
> And than the prest partyd awey fro hir wyth hevy cher (2779-89).

The priest's attempts to attribute Margery's disturbing speech to a possessing spirit come to nothing. Margery, in immediately inviting him to exorcise the demon, challenges his authority: as the exempla tell us, exorcism can be performed by only those with intact bodies.[76] Margery, then, shifts the focus away from her body, and instead questions the holy nature of the priest's own body. His reaction, consisting as it does of 'wroth and... schrewyd wordys,' displays, ironically, the emotional lability characteristic of demoniacs. Margery, indeed, stresses this point, attributing wrath as a defining characteristic of the demonically possessed, and highlighting her own lack of anger as evidence for the holy nature of her own body (in contrast to that of the priest). It is no wonder, then, that the priest is left 'wyth hevy cher.'

Margery, then, moves from inhabiting the chained, wounded body of the madwoman, to assuming the same authority given to the closed, pure body of a holy man. It is her experience and subsequent interpretation of madness which allows her to make this transformation. Unfortunately, madness is not as empowering for all who suffer it, as the next text I will examine, Hoccleve's Series, will demonstrate.

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[76] See chapter three.

Chapter Seven: Thomas Hoccleve

Madness seems to be a defining feature of early autobiographical writing. Thomas

Hoccleve also included an account of his madness in his writing. Hoccleve (ca. 1367-

1437), a clerk with the Privy Seal, is at first glance the antithesis of Margery Kempe.

While she is illiterate, his career is built upon a deep knowledge of texts. However,

Hoccleve's <u>Series</u>, the text I will be examining, is structured by madness in much the

same way as Margery's <u>Book</u>. The text is written ostensibly in response to Hoccleve's

experience of madness, and to the social isolation which follows.[1] Both authors are

impelled to write following, and as a direct result of, attacks of madness. Both face the

difficulty of articulating a self which has already been seen to be fractured.

In both texts, madness is a blank space which demands to be filled.

The <u>Series</u> itself comprises a number of interlinked texts within a frame narrative. The

frame narrative begins with the <u>Complaint</u>, in which Hoccleve bemoans his situation, and

makes plans to re-enter the social world through his writing. These issues are then

followed up in the <u>Dialogue</u>, in which Hoccleve and a visiting Friend continue to discuss

Hoccleve's madness, and to debate whether a return to writing would precipitate a

relapse. This is followed by the three texts which we hear Hoccleve deciding to write in

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[1] I do not plan to address here the much-debated question of whether Hoccleve's madness is autobiographical, or merely a literary convention. As John Burrow has pointed out, the two are not, in any case, mutually exclusive. (John Burrow, <u>Autobiographical Poetry in the Middle Ages: The Case of Thomas Hoccleve</u>, Sir Isaac Gollancz Memorial Lectures (London: British Academy, 1983), rpt. of <u>The Proceedings of the British Academy</u> 68 (1982): 389-412, at 394.) While I will be using the name 'Hoccleve' to refer to both character and author for convenience, I reserve judgement on whether the two are identical, mutually exclusive, or any stage in between.

the <u>Dialogue</u> – two exempla, <u>Jereslaus's Wife</u> and the <u>Tale of Jonathas</u>, separated by a

moralistic treatise on the correct preparation for death, <u>Lerne to Die</u>.

The tales are connected by further discussions between Hoccleve and his Friend about the

writing process itself – which texts to choose, whether to include moralizations, how best

to fit text to patron. As critics have acknowledged, the texts are linked by shared concerns

– the value of confession and a concomitant concern for self-narration, the potential gap

between appearance and identity. [2] Lee Patterson groups them by their portrayal of 'old

Hocclevian themes – the betrayal of trust, the impossibility of learning from experience,

sin manifested as sickness, confession as the only cure.'[3] One thread holding the <u>Series</u>

together which has often been overlooked, however, is the presence of madness. While

the importance of madness to the <u>Complaint</u> and <u>Dialogue</u> is obvious, its presence in the

texts which follow has not been fully recognised. It is notable, however, that Hoccleve

includes episodes of madness, or at least feigned madness, in every text in the <u>Series</u>:

insanity is clearly central to the work.

As Isabel Davis notes, Hoccleve 'comes from a similar cultural milieu to Kempe: part of

the nascent bourgeoisie in the urban centres of late medieval England.'[4] Neither Hoccleve

nor Margery fit well into culturally-prescribed roles. Margery, as we have seen, is caught

between her duty as wife and her desire to be a holy woman. Hoccleve has similar

problems. As a secular clerk, he faces the same problems as Gower: he does not fit into

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[2] Derek Pearsall, "Hoccleve's <u>Regement of Princes</u>: The Poetics of Royal Self-Representation," <u>Speculum</u> 69 (1994): 386-410, at 408. <u>JSTOR</u>, 28 Nov. 2007, <http://www.jstor.org/search>.; Harper 202-203.
[3] Lee Patterson, "'What is Me?': Self and Society in the Poetry of Thomas Hoccleve," <u>Studies in the Age of Chaucer</u> 23 (2001): 437-70, at 449-50.
[4] Davis, <u>Writing Masculinity</u> 35-36.

the traditional three estate model – he is neither cleric, soldier, nor peasant.[5] Like

Margery, he does not fit easily into society. Given the similarities of their experience,

then, we might expect to see more similarities in Margery's and Hoccleve's works.

However, their writing, and the approach they take to madness, is quite different. Much

of this difference stems from the gendered nature of madness. Madness has different

implications for men and for women: Hoccleve's masculinity enables him to address his

madness in different ways to Margery. He can demonstrate rationality in ways that

Margery cannot. However, as a man he is also vulnerable to madness in ways that

Margery is not. While Margery is able to use her madness as a positive force in shaping

her identity, Hoccleve treats madness only as a handicap.

Hoccleve's depiction of madness is peculiarly depersonalised. His madness is seen as

something apart, which 'me out of myself / caste and threw' (C 42). Notably, it is

described in terms of space and movement. Rather than being actively experienced,

madness is defined by a total absence of the self: 'the substance / of my memorie //

Wente to pleye / as for a certein space' until God 'Made it for to retourne / into the place

// Whens it cam.'[6] There is a 'disseuerance' between Hoccleve and his wit (C 248).

Madness creates a gap in Hoccleve's identity. This experience of madness undermines

Hoccleve's authority in a way which does not apply to Margery, who has no authority to

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[5] Ethan Knapp, The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001) 71.

[6] This and all subsequent references to the Complaint and Dialogue are from Thomas Hoccleve, Thomas Hoccleve's Complaint and Dialogue, ed. J. A. Burrow, EETS 313 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), and cited by work and line number. This reference C 50-51, 54.

start with. In the words of James Simpson, 'Hoccleve's problem as an author is that his voice is publicly regarded as being unstable after his madness.'[7]

Hoccleve does to some extent employ the same strategy as Margery Kempe in attributing his madness to divine intervention. He is 'scourgid' with his sickness – punished for his sins in this world rather than the next (C 23). Just as Margery does, Hoccleve portrays himself as persecuted by those unable to read God's design. His solitary existence can thus be justified by recourse to the powerful trope of the persecuted holy man. Excluded from society, Hoccleve lives in 'greet torment / and martire' (C 63).

> Syn I recouered was / haue I ful ofte
> Cause had of anger and inpacience,
> Where I born haue it / esily and softe,
> Suffryng wrong be doon / to me and offense
> And nat answerd ageyn / But kept silence (C 176-80)

Hoccleve, in turning the other cheek to his enemies, is fulfilling admirably the Christian conception of suffering patiently through adversity. In terms of the requirements of secular masculinity, however, this refusal to take offence is less ennobling, and, indeed, is potentially emasculating. The fact that Hoccleve is prompted in his tolerance by fear of being judged as mad again complicates any idea of him as martyr. Unlike Margery, he cannot fully embrace the potential for holiness implicit in madness. He most wishes to return to an uncomplicated, masculine identity.

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[7] James Simpson, "Madness and Texts: Hoccleve's Series," Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen, King's College London Medieval Studies 5 (London: King's College London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991) 15-29, at 21.

Incorporating madness into a teleology of sin and punishment means that it is no longer

seen as merely a personal experience, but as a sign from God which must be explained.

The need to offer an explanation neatly provides Hoccleve with a reason to write. Since

Hoccleve's body is being consistently misread by his friends, so he produces a text, the

Complaint, that cannot be misread. Indeed, both Hoccleve and Margery are particularly

concerned with textuality. Madness creates problems with reading, not only for those

suffering from madness, but also for those watching from the outside. The surface no

longer gives an acceptable indication of what is happening underneath. Margery's

emphasis on her own body can be read as a consequence of this failure of reading.

McAvoy argues that Margery's text is primarily written upon her body, that she

'challenges... scripted authority by establishing the text of her own female body as an

alternative, authoritative and unmediated location of what she refers to as "very trewth

schewyn in experiens."[8] Margery's selfhood is articulated by means of her body.

Regardless of her madness, her body, and its centrality to her personhood, is a constant.

Hoccleve, however, has no such stability. His text contains a deep distrust of the body, a

fear that it will betray him. The famous mirror scene demonstrates an alienation from his

body, a fear both that it does not reflect his true self, and, paradoxically, a fear that it

reflects it all too well. Identifying with the body is, in any case, a feminine attribute, and

one which would damage Hoccleve's masculinity. As a man, Hoccleve needs to distance

himself from his body, finding identity instead through textual authority. Indeed,

Hoccleve's account of madness is essentially textual. He does not read his own madness;

instead, he reads other texts about madness. All the information about Hoccleve's

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[8] McAvoy, '"Aftyr Her Own Tunge"' 160.

madness is delivered to the reader at third hand. We are told what Hoccleve believes other people say about him. The body becomes textualised: a construction of others. However, this has its own problems. Knapp argues that 'as a representative of an emergent class of secularized clerks, Hoccleve had no easy route of identification with any established source of textual authority.[9] While Hoccleve attempts to write himself into pre-existing narratives – the Psalms, the Book of Job, Isidore's Synonyma – his experience does not truly fit into any of these narratives.

As we discussed above, Hoccleve is unable to truly fit his experiences into a religious context and maintain the expectations of secular masculinity. Nor can he rely on medical narratives, concerned as they are with sickness, and with the potential for relapse. As Hoccleve's friends make clear, such narratives merely undermine any attempt at constructing a sane identity. Likewise, Hoccleve's social situation prohibits him from exploiting the conventions of romance. These problems with narrative are never entirely solved. We find ourselves in a situation in which madness, while in one sense central to Hoccleve's narrative, is also strangely absent. Hoccleve's experience of madness is never truly addressed; his narrative starts from his recovery. In the Complaint, madness is always already in the past. Hoccleve's writing, rather than being an account of madness, is instead an account of the *aftermath* of madness, and an exploration of the ramifications which the experience of insanity holds for identity.

Margery's madness is framed as a private experience; she is confined at home and looked after by servants. We experience Margery's madness from the inside, as it were; she tells

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[9] Knapp, Bureaucratic Muse 71

us what *she* felt and saw. In contrast, Hoccleve's is a decidedly public madness. He declares that 'It was so knowen to the peple / and kowth // Þat conseil was it noon / ne nat be mighte' (C 43-44). His madness is a spectacle: 'How it with me stood / was in euery mowth' (C 45). Indeed, our knowledge of Hoccleve's madness comes solely from others' perceptions. His madness is introduced in terms of what 'Men seide…' about him (C 120). As Helen Hickey notes, 'nowhere does Thomas discuss the interior experience of madness other than through its social and personal results.'[10] His madness, seemingly, only exists in terms of the perceptions of others. And, as Ethan Knapp and James Simpson, among others, have noted, Hoccleve seems primarily concerned about the effect which his madness has on others.[11]

The Complaint is overwhelmingly concerned with the need to fit into the crowd. Hoccleve finds himself continually the subject of others' gaze. The 'prees' of the city in which he lives and works exercises a constant pressure: 'if I in this prees / amis me gye // To harm wole it me torne / and to folie' (C 139-40). Hoccleve is particularly concerned to repress any trace of an aberrant individuality: he aims to be unnoticed, unable even to speak, 'Lest þat men of me / deeme wolde and seyn // "See how this man / is fallen in ageyn"' (C 181-82).

His madness, phrased as it is in terms of an absence of the self, has created a gap between Hoccleve's past and current identities. Hoccleve is no longer able to act naturally; he is

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[10] Helen Hickey, "Doubting Thomas: Hoccleve's *Wilde Infirmite* and the Social Construction of Identity," Deviance and Textual Control: New Perspectives in Medieval Studies, ed. Megan Cassidy, Helen Hickey, and Meagan Street, Melbourne University Conference Series 2 (Melbourne: History Dept, U of Melbourne, 1997) 56-77, at 64.

[11] Knapp, Bureaucratic Muse 165; Simpson, "Madness and Texts" 24.

ever-conscious that he is being watched for signs of a return to madness. His post-

madness existence is a life lived through the reactions of others. Even his absence from

the crowd's gaze will cause him to be judged: 'If þat I nat be seen / among the prees //

Men deeme wole / þat I myn heed hyde // And am wers than I am / it is no lees' (C 191-

93). There is no escape.

Even descriptions of Hoccleve's madness focus on those aspects which can be observed

by others:

> Men seide I lookid / as a wylde steer
> And so my look / aboute I gan to throwe.
> Myn heed to hye / anothir seide I beer.
> 'Ful bukkissh is his brayn / wel may I trowe,'
> Seide the thridde / 'and apt is in the rowe
> To sitte of hem / þat a resounlees reed
> Can yeue / no sadnesse is in his heed.
>
> Changed had I my paas / some seide eek,
> For heere and ther / forth stirte I as a ro,
> Noon abood / noon areest / but al braynseek.
> Anothir spak / and of me seide also
> My feet were ay / wauynge to and fro
> Whan þat I stonde sholde / and with men talke,
> And þat myn yen / soghten euery halke. (C 120-33)

This is not, as it has been taken to be, a description of Hoccleve's madness. Hoccleve, in

these stanzas, is sane: the only madness here is that which is projected onto him by

others. As Hoccleve is assumed to have relapsed into a previous madness, however, we

can surely presume that the symptoms of madness seen in the sane Hoccleve closely

parallel those which he actually displayed when mad.

Notably, Hoccleve's madness is read from his movements, from gesticulations and actions. He is judged for his inability to fit in with the 'prees': for moving out of step with everyone else (C 73). He is unstable. Hoccleve's symptoms – rolling eyes, restlessness, loss of control of bodily movement, complete lack of reason – could have been taken straight from a medical textbook.[12] As Doob comments, this type of frenzied movement and eye rolling are 'standard symptoms of the madman': more particularly, they are those generally considered to characterise frenzy.[13]

His frenzy is described as something alien, something which takes over his self. It is a 'wylde infirmitee,' a 'seeknesse sauage' (C 40, 86). There is a real sense of Hoccleve's madness as an invasion. While Hoccleve's madness is decidedly aggressive, however, Hoccleve himself seems entirely passive in response. He characterises himself as an accidental victim of madness: he takes a 'falle / into... wyldenesse' (C 107). He is acted upon, rather than acting: 'the substance / of my memorie // Wente to pleye / as for a certein space' (C 50-51). Hoccleve is particularly concerned to mark out madness as an episode entirely separate from his normal self. While the possible causes and aftermath of madness are clearly articulated, the period of madness itself is not. It remains a blank space.

Perhaps one of the most characteristic features of Hoccleve's treatment of his madness is a mixing of religious and medical imagery. This synthesis revolves around God as the 'curteys leche / souerain': 'Right so / thogh þat my wit / were a pilgrym // And wente fer

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[12] See the introduction for standard descriptions of frenzy.
[13] Doob 221.

from hoom / he cam agayn. // God me voided of the greuous venym // Þat had infectid

and wyldid my brayn' (C 236, 232-35). Madness as poisoning is a common image, used

often in medical texts. This image of poisoning is interwoven with images of

consumption and devouring: 'ioie hastow for to muse // Vpon thy book / and there in

stare & poure // Til þat it thy wit / consume and deuoure' (D 404-406). Madness is

something unseen, unexpected.

There have been diverging diagnoses of Hoccleve's madness. Most critics agree that

Hoccleve displays two different sets of symptoms. Those 'observed' in him (or, as

Hoccleve wishes us to believe, projected onto him) by others are symptoms of frenzy.

However, Hoccleve himself, in the writing of the <u>Complaint</u> and <u>Dialogue</u>, displays

symptoms that have been identified as melancholic. Ironically, this melancholy, the

'thoghtful disese,' appears to be caused by the social isolation Hoccleve has experienced,

itself caused by his previous attack of frenzy (C 388). Doob argues that Hoccleve is a

'typical melancholic: the season is that in which the melancholic humour increases; his

meditations on death and mutability are characteristic of the melancholic; and his

wakefulness and despair... are also standard medical symptoms.'[14] She adds, correctly,

that Hoccleve's advancing age makes him more inclined towards melancholia. She seems

to assume, however, that his friends, in being concerned about a resurgence of

Hoccleve's madness in summer, are fearing an attack of melancholy: 'summer was

considered the most dangerous time for madmen of all kinds'[15] This is true of frenzy, a

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[14] Doob 220.
[15] Doob 221.

hot and dry condition, but surely not of melancholia, which, as a cold and wet condition, is particularly predominant in autumn.

Knapp argues that 'These two infirmities should be distinguished not as cause and effect but as two parallel sicknesses with divergent literary genealogies and respectively different characteristics.'[16] Knapp characterises Hoccleve's frenzy as part of the 'ecclesiastical traditions of penitence and consolation': it is a type of misfortune which is typically Boethian. [17] Hoccleve's melancholy, Knapp argues, is a more realistic proposition: 'Thought exists in the "Complaint" as a double to the "wylde infirmitee", a malady always represented in relation to the social causes and consequences that penitential discourse erases from madness proper.'[18] Knapp appears to regard Hoccleve's frenzy as a much more literary disease than his melancholy. As we can see above, however, both are equally plausible medically. While Knapp notes that Hoccleve's frenzy is never given an exact cause, this is in fact typical: as we have seen, the causes of madness are diverse, and medical writers are often unable to give a clear account of the genesis of a disease.[19]

Hoccleve's friends, indeed, seem to see him purely in a medical sense. They only interpret his madness according to a rigorous textual knowledge, distrusting Hoccleve's own account of his mental state. They are suspicious of Hoccleve's claims to have put madness behind him: 'Althogh from him / his seeknesse sauage // Withdrawe and past /

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[16] Knapp, Bureaucratic Muse 172.
[17] Knapp, Bureaucratic Muse 172.
[18] Knapp, Bureaucratic Muse 173.
[19] See the introduction for further details.

as for a tyme be, // Restore it wole / namly in swich age // As he is of'; "'Whan passynge

hete is," quod they / "trustith this, // Assaile him wole ageyn / þat maladie'" (C 86-89, 92-

93). Again, these friends are interpreting according to medical texts, in which age and

climate are widely accepted as triggers for insanity.

Hoccleve makes a counter-accusation, that his friends themselves cannot be trusted as

interpreters. By reading Hoccleve's body for signs of madness, for example, his friends

are reading in the wrong genre. They are operating in a medical genre while Hoccleve is

prompting them to read theologically.[20] Mills argues that

> the Narrator's friends approach him through a diagnostic vocabulary derived
> from medical treatises and define and imprison him – and themselves – in their
> discourse. There is, finally, no language of 'normality' which the Narrator can
> substitute for that discourse; he can only offer a discourse which constructs him as
> an exemplum not of madness but of patience, which he must defend against the
> alternative, preferred by his Friend, the abandonment of discourse.[21]

Hoccleve's friends read his madness in acceptable medical terms. Heat could indeed

bring on an attack of frenzy. However, there is a flaw in their reading. Hoccleve's

advanced age, bringing a cooling and drying, might make him more inclined to

melancholy, but surely not to a choleric-induced frenzy. Even by their own standards, the

judgements of Hoccleve's friends lack authority.

In an attempt to replicate his friends' viewpoints, Hoccleve attempts to view himself in a

mirror in order to gain the objectivity to see himself clearly.

> Many a saut made I / to this mirour
> Thynkynge / 'If þat I looke / in this maneere

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[20] See Harper 196.

[21] David Mills, "The Voices of Thomas Hoccleve," <u>Essays on Thomas Hoccleve</u>, ed. Catherine Batt,
Westfield Pub. in Medieval Studies 10 ([Belgium]: Brepols, 1996) 85-107, at 96.

Among folk / as I now do / noon errour
Of suspect look / may in my face appeere.
This contenance / I am seur / and this cheere
If I foorth vse / is no thyng repreeuable
To hem þat han / conceites resonable.'

And therwithal / I thoghte thus anoon:
'Men in hire owne cas / been blynde alday,
As I haue herd seyn / many a day agoon,
And in þat same plyt / I stonde may.
How shal I do / which is the beste way
My troublid spirit / for to brynge in reste?
If I wiste how / fayn wolde I do the beste. (C 162-75)

This attempt to 'see' his own insanity has received a great deal of critical attention. It is

generally agreed to be the moment which reveals the extent of Hoccleve's fractured

personality. Simpson states that 'by looking in his mirror, Thomas is treating himself

purely as other: he tries to see himself only as others see him, and as a result evacuates

any sense of personal coherence.'[22] Knapp argues that

> Hoccleve presents himself here as both the self looking into the mirror and the
> self he is trying to surprise by looking at that mirror. It is a moment at which
> Hoccleve quite intentionally evokes that sense of the uncanny that is particularly
> associated (by Lacan and others) with the mirror, a simultaneous presence of two
> images of the self and the consequent fragmentation of that self into both subject
> and object of perception.[23]

This reliance on mirrors to display the truth of the mad self evokes Palomides. It also

recalls Gower, who finds the truth of his identity in a mirror. For both Palomides and

Gower, mirrors show truth. For Hoccleve, in contrast, the use of mirrors is much more

problematic, as Harper comments: 'madness in literature is often spectacular. In the

romances, in particular, madness is instantly identifiable by appearance..... In the

Complaint, however, the identification of madness is more problematic, as Hoccleve

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[22] Simpson, "Madness and Texts" 24.
[23] Knapp, Bureaucratic Muse 170.

continually draws attention to the discrepancy between inner, subjective impressions and outer appearances.'[24]

The body we see here, the locus for Hoccleve's anxiety, reflects the way in which Hoccleve's body acts throughout the text: performing as a spectacle for others rather than subjectively experienced. Hoccleve, in attempting to feign his old identity, undergoes what Knapp describes as 'internal fragmentation,' a continuation of the 'mutual surveillance' of the crowd.[25] Hoccleve is attempting to self-consciously 'perform' his pre-madness self. The irony, of course, is that his desperate attempts at performance can only produce falsity. Hoccleve's attempts 'to peynte contenance / cheere and look' are doomed to failure (C 149). Hoccleve's consciousness of his own performance undermines the body as an unproblematic source of identity, and of masculinity. They can only produce a masculinity that, in its essential falsity, is no masculinity at all.[26]

Following the mirror scene, issues of interpretation become paramount in the text. Indeed, the <u>Complaint</u>, and later the <u>Dialogue</u>, becomes a contest of interpretation. As Simpson argues, 'The friend, clearly, is "reading" the Complaint both diagnostically... and ironically (reading the professions of sanity as evidence of continuing mental instability).'[27] Hoccleve's problem lies in his inability to control the way in which his body or speech is interpreted: 'Whatso þat euere / I sholde answere or seye // They wolden nat / han holde it worth a leek' (C 142-43). He turns to writing as a means of

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[24] Harper 202-203.
[25] Knapp, <u>Bureaucratic Muse</u> 169. See also Patterson, "'What is Me?'" 444.
[26] See chapter two for a discussion on the difficulty of contstructing an innate masculinity in medical texts.
[27] Simpson, "Madness and Texts" 22.

communicating over which he has more control. However, even this is misinterpreted.

The Friend attributes Hoccleve's initial madness to his 'bisy studie': 'thy werk hard is to

parfourme, I dreede. // Thy brayn parcas / therto nat wole assente' (D 302, 296-97)

> Of studie was engendred thy seeknesse,
> And þat was hard / Woldest thow now ageyn
> Entre into þat laborous bisynesse,
> Syn it thy mynde and eek thy wit had slayn?
> Thy conceit is nat worth a payndemayn. (D 379-383)

As Harper notes, 'Hoccleve presents the interpretation of his madness as the central

problem in his struggle for identity. A principal question raised by the Complaint is...

who has the authority to identify madness?'[28]

Ironically, the behaviour of those who still believe Hoccleve mad after his recovery – an

inability to tell reality from imagination, truth from fiction – mirrors the madness they

attribute to Hoccleve. Hoccleve, in effect, projects his madness outward onto his

accusers. As Harper points out, Hoccleve engineers a situation in which those who

believe him mad are themselves associated with delusion, and with the dangerous powers

of the imagination: 'I may nat lette / a man to ymagyne // Ferre aboue the moone / if þat

him list' (C 197-98). Hoccleve is, in contrast, the figure of reason: 'Of swich

ymagynynge / I nat ne recche; // Let hem dreeme as hem list / and speke and drecche [be

troubled in sleep]' (C 307-308).

> In the context of the dispute over his sanity, Hoccleve's reiteration of the word
> "ymagination" is both a defensive and an aggressive 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.[29]

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[28] Harper 195.
[29] Harper 209.

Moreover, those that accuse Hoccleve of madness engage in behaviours specific to madmen. Their false prophecies about his condition, their insistence on knowledge which, Hoccleve insists, can only be attributed to God, all these are attributes of the melancholic.[30]

Hoccleve's insistence that 'It is a lewdenesse // Men wyser hem pretende / than they be,' brings those who accuse him down to the level of fools (C 101-102). Like the typical madman, they are unable to see clearly: 'a dirk clowde // Hir sighte obscured / withynne and withoute' (C 292-93). Hoccleve's erstwhile friends, he suggests, are themselves guilty of mental lapses. The Friend, as part of his effort to dissuade Hoccleve from publishing the Complaint, assures him that 'How it stood with thee / leid is al asleepe, // Men han foryete it / it is out of mynde' (D 29-30). As forgetfulness is so much a part of Hoccleve's own madness, such references (an earlier example is Hoccleve's wistful complaint that 'Foryete I was / al out of mynde aweye') are clearly loaded (C 80).

The behaviour of Hoccleve's friends on encountering him, ironically, echoes his own actions when mad: 'I sy the cheere [face, expression] / abaten [lose strength] and apalle [cloud over] // Of hem þat weren wont / me for to calle // To conpaignie / Hire heed they caste awry [askance] // Whan I hem mette / as they nat me sy' (C 74-77). Such sudden changes of expression, not to casting awry of the head, recall the judgements made against Hoccleve: 'Men seide I lookid / as a wylde steer // And so my look / aboute I gan

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[30] For example, The Book of Quinte Essence states that 'þat humour of blak coler is so noyous, þat if it a-bounde and a-sende vp to þe heed, it troubliþ alle þe my3tis of þe brayn, engendrynge noyous ymagynaciouns' (The Book of Quinte Essence 17).

to throwe' (C 120). Hoccleve also comments that 'They þat me sy / fledden away fro me'; the sane Hoccleve, it seems, is a fixed point from which others move away (C 79). In a text which has already associated madness with movement, and sanity with stability, this division of movement is significant.

The main problem with Hoccleve's isolation is the loss of homosocial community which it entails. Indeed, Hoccleve's main regret in his Complaint is that he is no longer accepted by his friends; that he is ostracised from homosocial society.[31] This rejection by other men, as well as the loss of his clerkly status, means that Hoccleve loses a large part of what makes him a man. As Mills comments, Hoccleve's 'suffering lies in the isolation of the Narrator from the social network that sustains him and from the means of re-entry to it – money or the ability to write.'[32] As Ethan Knapp has demonstrated, Hoccleve's writing is dominated by his position in the Privy Seal.[33] This is crucial to his identity. In a text in which Hoccleve seems to be striving to divorce male identity from the body entirely, Hoccleve's identity as a man instead is determined by his relationship to other men, and by his work. Indeed, Davis argues that, in the fifteenth century, increasingly 'work defines the masculine self.'[34]

However, Hoccleve fights back against any loss of masculinity. He implies that it is those who accuse him of madness who are less than masculine. He is aided in this by the fact that, while others denigrate his masculinity, they do so in the feminine medium of gossip.

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[31] Simpson, "Texts and Madness" 24.
[32] Mills 91.
[33] See Knapp, The Bureaucratic Muse.
[34] Davis, Writing Masculinity 142.

> Axid han they / ful ofte sythe and freyned
> Of my felawes / of the priuee seel
> And preide hem to telle hem / with herte vnfeyned
> How it stood with me / whethir euele or weel (C 295-98)

This is in stark contrast to Hoccleve's own rational and controlled prose, which demonstrates his capacity for calm, reasoned argument – the very opposite of the manic, disconnected prose that would be expected of a madman.

Despite his attempts to neutralise his critics, however, Hoccleve's experience of madness clearly affects his masculinity. He is affected, like all madmen, by the normal issues – the loss of rationality, the inability to control oneself, the dependence on others that madness involves – which threaten masculinity. These issues are, however, if anything more problematic for Hoccleve. Hoccleve, as a clerk, is defined by his ability to write and his capacity for rational thought. Madness is an obvious threat to both of these attributes. To a large extent, Hoccleve shares a social status with Gower – the 'quasi-clerical status' we have already examined.[35] As with Gower, this brings with it problems with sexual relationships, something which I will examine in more detail later.

Hoccleve's text, then, is both an attempt to re-establish his sanity, and to defend himself against accusations of loss of masculinity. As we have seen, one of his tactics is to problematise the whole notion of madness, blurring the boundaries between the sane and the mad. This, however, is only one of a number of strategies used throughout the Series. Crucially, Hoccleve also attempts to normalise his experience of madness, to extend its characteristics to other men. Hoccleve, like Gower, compares madness to drunkenness.

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[35] Davis, Writing Masculinity 143. See chapter five.

> Nay / thogh a man do / in drynkynge excesse
> So ferfoorth / þat nat speke / he can ne go,
> And his wittes / wel ny been reft him fro
> And biried in the cuppe / he aftirward
> Comth to himself ageyn / elles were hard. (C 227-31)

Hoccleve's comparison of his own, seemingly terrifying, madness to such a familiar activity as drunkenness makes it both accessible and understandable. More importantly than being merely familiar, however, drinking is understood as masculine behaviour.[36]

Hoccleve is able to incorporate the values of secular masculinity into his narrative of conversion. As we have discussed, Hoccleve fits his madness into a framework of sin, punishment and amendment: 'Thurgh Goddes iust doom / and his iugement // And for my beste / now I take and deeme, // Yaf þat good lord / me my punysshement' (C 393-95). This is, as Doob points out, the classic pattern of providential madness we are familiar with from Nebuchadnezzar.[37] As we identified earlier, there are problems in integrating a classic religious conversion with a secular lifestyle. Hoccleve, however, attempts to negotiate these issues by the intriguing method of phrasing his conversion in terms of lordship.

God, in this schema, becomes Hoccleve's 'good lord'. The realisation, prompted by his madness, of his foolish worldliness, and the urge to rededicate himself to Christ, is phrased by Hoccleve in terms of pledging allegiance to a new lord. One of the more interesting aspects of what is a largely conventional identification of God with a secular

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[36] For a full discussion of drinking and masculinity, see chapter five.
[37] Doob 212.

ruler is that it allows Hoccleve to imagine himself as part of a masculine community. He

positions himself rhetorically as part of a lord's retinue:

> The benefice of God / nat hid be sholde...
> It to confesse / and thanke him am I holde,
> For he in me / hath shewid his miracle.
> His visitacioun / is a spectacle [eye-glass]
> In which þat I / beholde may and see
> Bet than I dide / how greet a lord is he (D 92-98)

This is the counterpart to the <u>Complaint</u>'s mirror scene. Hoccleve may still be a spectacle,

but with a very different meaning. Rather than an exemplar of madness, he is now the

living proof of God's beneficence. This also furthers Hoccleve's identification of himself

as Christ's retainer: much like a man in livery, Hoccleve is a living token of his lord's

power.

Hoccleve moves on to criticise secular lords, and their support for retinues who waste the

tax-money of the poor. In blaming society's ills on the 'the maintenaunce // Of grete

folk,' Hoccleve compares God's lordship to these secular parodies, and, by implication,

his own position as God's retainer to those serving worldly lords (D 150-51). Those who

trust in secular communities can only be betrayed.

> The fool thurgh loue of this lyf present
> Deceyued is / but the wys man woot weel
> How ful this world of sorwe is and torment,
> Wherfore in it / he trustith nat a deel
> Thogh a man this day / sitte hye on the wheel
> Tomorwe he may be tryced from his sete;
> This hath be seen often / among the grete. (D 260-66)

The question Hoccleve poses, then, is: who is the real fool? The man whose madness has

alerted him to the follies of worldly concerns, or the man who continues to trust in the

transient joys of the world?

Hoccleve's reintegration into homosocial society may have begun with his imaginary

transposition into the retinue of the Lord, but it proceeds on more homely levels. The

arrival of the Friend and the transition of Hoccleve's Complaint into a dialogue continues

his socialisation. The Friend, indeed, is instrumental in providing Hoccleve's next link to

a homosocial community: he reminds him of a previous commitment to write for the

Duke of Gloucester (D 526-34). This connection enables Hoccleve to create a second,

equally constructed, community in which he is Gloucester's 'humble seruant & his man'

(D 560). Hoccleve's connections with Gloucester are stressed: 'Next our lord lige / our

kyng victorious, // In al this wyde world / lord is ther noon // Vnto me so good ne so

gracious, // And haath been swich / yeeres ful many oon' (D 554-57). Hoccleve can only

gain from association with such a prominent figure. Gloucester has an unproblematic

masculine identity – 'he is al knyght soothly' (D 616).

There follows a discussion of which genre of writing might be appropriate for such an

illustrious dedicatee as the Duke (a niche eventually filled by the tale of Jereslaus' Wife).

Among other suggestions, the Friend advises:

> To cronicle his actes / were a good deede,
> For they ensaumple mighte and encorage
> Ful many a man / for to taken heede
> How for to gouerne hem in the vsage
> Of armes / It is a greet auauntage
> A man before him / to haue a mirour,
> Therin to see the path vnto honour. (D 603-609)

Again, the image of the mirror appears, although this time it is not a literal mirror, but

'mirour' in terms of an exemplar. The proposed chronicle of Gloucester's deeds is

intended as a mirror to those who would emulate him. This time, the focus of attention is not Hoccleve at all, but rather his writings. Hoccleve himself is no longer a spectacle: instead, as author, he controls the means by which others are perceived. He has finally regained a position of power. Moreover, he has exchanged a feminised position – object of the gaze – for a masculine one – wielder of the gaze.

Hoccleve and Women

Despite such tactics, however, Hoccleve can never truly avoid the threat to his masculinity that comes with his insanity. As we have seen, discourses of madness always have a subtext of threatened masculinity, and this inevitably finds its way into Hoccleve's Series. Moreover, Hoccleve's masculine identity is made even more problematic by his relation to women. Davis has identified insecure sexual identity as a fundamental feature of the clerkly class:

> the curious aspect of these middling bureaucratic identities, in terms of medieval social theory and category, was the disparity between occupational and sexual identity; whilst these literate professions had previously been classified as those of the chaste religious (although in practice no doubt there had always been a body of secular clergy), married or, perhaps more confusingly, never-married bureaucrats looked as if they ought to be classed with the first estate on account of their occupation but with the second or third on account of their sexual or marital status.[38]

Hoccleve himself, we learn, is in possession of a wife, but it does not appear to be a close relationship. Indeed, we first hear of her through Hoccleve's Friend, who asks: "'Thomas / how is it twixt thee & thy feere?" // "Wel, wel", quod I / "What list yow thereof heere? // My wyf mighte haue hokir & greet desdeyn // If I sholde in swich cas / pleye a

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[38] Davis, Writing Masculinity 94.

soleyn."' (D 739-42). Thomas' wife, then, first appears in the text as a distinctly negative figure. In a text which is primarily concerned with representation, Hoccleve's refusal to allow his wife a real presence is clearly significant. She is introduced into the text in order to be dismissed. Her only characterisation is her propensity for 'hokir and greet desdeyn.' This is not an auspicious account of marriage.

Indeed, as we will see, the Series is studded to references to the trials of marriage, and the iniquities of wives. Hoccleve seems primarily to employ talk of his married status as a means of identifying with other men, of creating an intimacy from the shared experience of enduring close proximity to women. This intimacy includes not only the Friend with whom he shares the account of his marriage, but also with the male reader. Women, needless to say, are explicitly excluded from this circle.

Davis, indeed, argues that 'Hoccleve regards women only as distractions, impediments, and embarrassments.'[39]

> Hoccleve distances his narrator... and therefore nominally himself, from his marriage and indeed from women generally... Thomas is constructed as inherently clerical, as a natural celibate and a man whose marriage is an aberration.... The body is a source of pollution in verse that regularly produces an aggressive clerical antipathy to sexuality.[40]

This aversion to sexuality is something which emerges increasingly clearly in the texts which follow the Complaint and Dialogue, and which I will examine in detail. In this context, however, it is instructive to compare Catherine Batt's reading of the Regement

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[39] Davis, Writing Masculinity 156. Davis includes Thomas' wife in this assessment (Writing Masculinity 157).
[40] Davis, Writing Masculinity 143.

of Princes. Batt argues that Hoccleve's own discourse in the Regement is inalienably

bound to discourses of femininity.

> those binary oppositions conventionally predicated on sexual difference – intellect
> versus body, power versus disenfranchisement, centrality versus marginality – are
> part of the discourse the Hoccleve figure uses, and ultimately transcends, in
> describing his own predicament. As he articulates his position, so he imagines
> himself in those very spaces traditionally understood as "feminine."[41]

Batt goes on to argue that in the Regement Hoccleve's persona adopts traits traditionally

characterized as feminine. 'Even as he writes himself into the role of advice-giver, he

displays those qualities antifeminist literature especially condemns in women: he wanders

aimlessly about, he is prey to excess... and he is overly garrulous.'[42] Bryan, too, in his

study of 'the gendered dynamics central to Hocclevean complaint,' echoes this

identification of Hoccleve with a feminine position. He points to 'the complainer's

enforced marginality... private suffering, and Hoccleve's successful commodification of

his interiority as an object of scrutiny for eyes more powerful than his own': all traits

customarily identified as female.[43]

Batt's and Bryan's arguments apply equally well to Hoccleve's position in the

Complaint. Even the process of writing is made analogous to that of giving birth:

> The greef aboute myn herte / so swal
> And bolned euere / to and to so sore
> Þat needes oute / I muste therwithal.
> I thoghte I nolde / keepe it clos no more
> Ne lette it in me / for to eelde and hore;
> And for to preeue / I cam of a womman

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[41] Catherine Batt, "Hoccleve and... Feminism? Negotiating Meaning in The Regiment of Princes," Essays on Thomas Hoccleve, ed. Catherine Batt, Westfield Pub. in Medieval Studies 10 ([Belgium]: Brepols, 1996) 55-84, at 60.
[42] Batt, "Hoccleve and... Feminism?" 61-62.
[43] Jennifer E. Bryan "Hoccleve, the Virgin, and the Politics of Complaint," PMLA 117 (2002): 1172-87, at 1173. 28 Nov. 2007, <www.mlajournals.org./toc/pmla/2002/117/5>.

I brast out / on the morwe / and thus began (C 29-35).[44]

With the addition of Hoccleve's madness, however, this feminisation becomes even more blatant. We have already discussed the ways in which madness is associated with feminine characteristics: this is, if anything, exaggerated in Hoccleve's work.[45] Those qualities Hoccleve associates with his madness are nearly identical to those he associates with women. The 'chaunge and variaunce' associated with Hoccleve's fall into madness parallels the inconstant nature of women, of which Hoccleve so often complains (C 10).

Moreover, his mad self is accused of being 'riotous,' a term which has links with both women and lower status men (C 67). Hoccleve's letter to Sir John Oldcastle, in fact, Isabel Davis argues, makes this association explicit.[46] Davis claims that here Hoccleve defines elite masculinity by 'religious submission' and obedience – while rebelling against the status quo is effeminizing, defending it as 'an active, martial activity, an assertive and heroic kind of virility'.[47] Within the Series itself, the term recurs in the Tale of Jonathas, in which Jonathas's mother warns him grimly to flee 'the conpaignie of wommen riotous' (JF 354).

Even Hoccleve's body, surely a basic element of his masculinity, is affected by his madness. Hoccleve's insanity leaves him with a body that no longer unproblematically

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[44] While the above passage positions Hoccleve in a feminine position, however, it need not be read at face value. This image of birth may well be meant to convey Hoccleve's usurpation of the act of creation. The feminine is displaced as the source of birth: creating is refigured as a masculine act. This would correspond to what we will see is the basis of Hoccleve's treatment of women in the Complaint and Dialogue – to exclude them from the text.

[45] See chapter two.

[46] See Isabel Davis, "Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy," A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004) 35-54.

[47] Davis, "Men and Margery" 40.

mirrors his identity; that is used as evidence of his continued madness despite his own conviction that he is sane. He is forced to 'peynte' his 'contenance,' adjust his demeanour and behaviour; make sure his body is continually performing sanity. However, he is left with the nagging fear that his body will betray him, that the madness that others see in his body is actually a reflection of the truth of his self. We are left with an impression of his body as unstable, prone to change, liable to betray, both deceptive and unable to conceal secrets. In short: feminine.

Hoccleve's goal in the wider Series, then, is to displace this untrustworthiness back onto women where it belongs. Throughout each of the interlinked tales – Jonathas' Wife, Lerne to Die, Jonathas and Fellicula - Hoccleve consistently links madness with women and those affected by them. In condemning irrational women, and the mad men that surround them, he is able to assert himself as a wise and rational authority, one able to well advise others on avoiding the pitfalls of feminine untrustworthiness and irrationality. Indeed, these tales are introduced by a diatribe against the unreliability of women readers. When speculating about which texts would suit the Duke of Gloucester, the Friend advises Hoccleve to write something to please women. Female readers, he warns, have taken offence to a previous text of Hoccleve's, the Epistle to Cupid: 'Thow art cleen out of hire affeccioun... hir loue ageyn purchace // Or stonde as thow doost / out of loue & grace' (D 676-79).

The suggestion that women's approval has a slightly mercenary quality, that it can be 'purchased,' is only the first of many criticisms woven into the Friend's ostensible

concern for female approval. While pleasing women is admirable, the Friend warns

against losing one's natural masculine authority in doing so:

> But thogh to wommen thow thyn herte bowe
> Axynge hir graces / with greet repentance
> For thy giltes, thee wole I nat allowe
> To take on thee swich rule and gouernance
> As they thee rede wolde / for greuance
> So greet / ther folwe mighte of it parcas
> That thow repente it sholdest ay, Thomas (D 715-21)

The Friend illustrates this warning with the salutary tale of Eve crushing the head of the

beguiling serpent:

> Now syn womman had of the feend swich might,
> To breke a mannes heed / it seemeth light.
>
> Forwhy, let noon housbonde / thynke it shame
> Ne repreef vnto him / ne vilenye,
> Thogh his wyf do to him þat selue same.
> Hir reson axith haue of men maistrie
> Thogh holy writ witnesse and testifie
> Men sholde of hem han dominacioun,
> It is the reuers in probacioun (D 727-35).

This jokey dismissal of women is clearly intended to foster a sense of male camaraderie

built on the exclusion of women. Indeed, the relationship between Hoccleve and the

Friend, previously characterised by their extended argument about Hoccleve's mental

state, is strengthened through their shared concern about women as readers.

Women are clearly problematic readers: 'wommen been felle and wyse; // Hem for to

plese / lyth greet craft & art' (D 681-82). Indeed, Hoccleve claims that he has been

misinterpreted: his Epistle to Cupid is not misogynist at all: 'Whoso lookith aright / there

in may see // Þat they me oghten haue in greet cheertee' (D 776-77). Women readers

clearly cannot be trusted to interpret a text correctly.[48] Indeed, the problem of female

readers replaces the Friend's original concern about the reactions of Hoccleve's *male*

readers. In an act of rhetorical sleight-of-hand, Hoccleve substitutes an audience of

critical women for his original critics, his male peers.

It could be argued that the disregard for female opinion of which Hoccleve is accused,

whether deservedly or not, actually enhances his masculinity. He prefaces <u>Jereslaus'</u>

<u>Wife</u> by the declaration: 'Thogh I nat shapen be / to prike or praunce – // Wole I translate

/ and þat shal pourge, I hope, // My gilt / as cleene / as keuerchiefs dooth sope' (D 824-

26). Hoccleve's use of an image of washing 'keuerchiefs' as a metaphor for purging the

conscience assists in trivialising the matter of women. Washing laundry is a typically

female occupation; the keuerchief a particularly negligible item of clothing.

The opinions of women, clearly, hold the same import for men as any petty household

task: they are not to be taken seriously. Hoccleve's disavowal of any intention of 'priking

and prauncing,' with all the connotations of effeminacy which that involves, is a

continuation of his disregard for catering to female opinion. Instead, he limits himself to

'translating': a rational, clerkly act, and one which befits his dignity.

The first tale which Hoccleve 'translates' is that of <u>Jereslaus's Wife</u>. In the tale of

<u>Jereslaus's Wife</u>, the Emperor leaves his wife to look after his lands while he goes on

pilgrimage to the holy land. The Wife is herself a paragon of women, the most beautiful

in the world:

And for þat beautee in womman, allone

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[48] Mills 95

> Withouten bontee, is nat commendable
> Shee was ther-to / a vertuous persone,
> And specially pitous & merciable
> In all hir wirkes / which ful couenable
> And pertinent is / vn-to wommanhede[49]

However, the pity and mercy by which the Wife is defined are precisely the characteristics which get her into trouble. Jereslaus, unfortunately, gives the job of steward in his absence to his evil brother, who promptly begins to oppress the 'pore & simple folk' and, worse, rob the rich (JW 68). In a move that, typically, links land and the female body, he also desires his brother's wife. It is this, rather than his depredations on the people, which prompts the Wife to have him imprisoned. Still more unfortunately, however, the Wife demonstrates her admirable traits of mercy and pity by giving in to her brother-in-law's pleading to be released before the Emperor should return. As Hoccleve wisely notes, 'Often happith / wommannes tendrenesse // Torneth hir vn-to harm / and to duresse' (JW 172-73). So it proves, as the brother loses no time in once again attempting to blackmail the Wife into having sex with him, and, when she refuses, leaving her hanging by her hair from a tree in the middle of the forest.

The Wife is discovered by an earl from a 'strangë contree' (JW 269). At this point, the Wife herself introduces another layer of deceit into the story: 'shee wolde by no way // Deskeuere what shee was / ne what fallace // Was doon to hire / cloos she kepte hire ay, // And tolde nat o word of hire affray' (JW 282-85). This refusal to speak means that she, like Hoccleve, is a blank space, onto which others' interpretations must be projected.

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[49] All references to <u>Jereslaus' Wife</u> (JW), <u>Lerne to Die</u> (L) and <u>Jonathas and Fellicula</u> (JF) are from Thomas Hoccleve, <u>Hoccleve's Works I: The Minor Poems</u>, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS e.s. 61, (London: Kegan Paul, 1892), and cited by work and line number. This reference JW 8-13.

Unlike Hoccleve, however, her body gives a trustworthy impression of her character: her essential identity as 'sum gentil womman... of blood' is apparent at first sight (JW 290).

Despite her anonymity, the Wife is employed as a governess for the earl's daughter. Once more, however, she becomes an object of desire, this time for the lord's steward, who presses her for 'flesshly loue' (JW 317). On being rejected, he seeks vengeance, which comes in the form of murdering the earl's daughter, and planting the bloody knife in the Wife's hand 'ffor men sholde haue noon othir demynge, // But shee had gilty been / of this murdrynge' (JW 347-48). An inability to make correct interpretations once again powers the plot. The steward sets up a tableau – the murdered child, the bloody knife in the Wife's hand – which lends itself to a certain (incorrect) interpretation: 'And so it seemed / as by liklyhede, // Al be it / þat nat were it so in dede' (JW 391-92). The Wife, however, does not provide an alternative interpretation: 'This Innocent lady / no word ageyn // Spak / for shee spoken had ynow beforn, // Excusynge hire / but, al was in veyn' (JW 421-23). The Wife gives up on interpretation entirely, withdrawing from a speech which cannot be trusted to convey truth. Like the coins about which Hoccleve rails in the Dialogue, it is impossible to tell truth from false.

After her exile from the court, the Wife comes across a thief being led to a gibbet, at which 'ffor verray routhe hir thoghte hire herte bledde' (JW 439). She pleads for his life, eventually bribes the guards to let him go, and takes him on as her manservant. Arriving in a city, the Wife takes up lodging, upon which her fame spreads. Again, the Wife evokes desire, this time in a Shipman whose wares she proposes to examine. The

Shipman bribes the thief to escort the Wife to him on a day on which the wind is good for sailing, and promptly makes off with her. It is notable that the situation arises in the first place because of the Wife's typically feminine desire for 'precious clothes': had she not wanted to view the Shipman's merchandise, she would have been safe (JW 522).

The Wife's response to her kidnapping employs similar trickery to the Shipman: she agrees to his demands to become her lover, but asks for privacy. She then takes advantage of being out of the view of the sailors to pray for deliverance. Her prayers are answered with the advent of a storm, which sinks the ship. The Wife miraculously survives, and finds herself washed up near a nunnery, which she promptly joins and lives 'In holy lyf / and vertuous clennesse' (JW 688). So holy is she, in fact, that God grants her 'swich a grace' that she is able to miraculously heal sickness. While the Wife is performing good works, Jereslaus' brother, 'þat cursid traitour, // Mirour of malice and iniquitee,' has contracted leprosy (JW 696-97). His fellow-persecutors are similarly stricken. The steward has been made both blind and deaf, and, if that was not enough, 'the tremblynge // of palesie / sore gan him wrynge' (JW 704-705). The thief is 'Potagre [gouty] and gowty / & halt' and 'in othir sundry wyse seek' (JW 713, 714), while the Shipman has been smitten with 'franesie' (JW 715).

The Emperor, hearing of a woman able to cure all sickness, brings his brother to the nunnery. The Wife, disguising her face under a veil, meets her husband and his brother, as well as the steward, thief and Shipman, who have coincidentally arrived at the same time. She refuses to cure them, however, unless they make a full confession, to which

they reluctantly consent. The various sinners then, through their confession, recount the history of the Wife. Once they are finished, the Wife happily reveals herself, and cures them: "Now been yee cleene shryuen / freendes deere; // Now shul yee all haue of me medecyne" (JW 924-25). She is reunited with her husband, and lives, presumably, happy ever after.

The most obvious resemblance to Hoccleve's own narrative comes with the malady of one of the attackers, the shipman, who has been stricken with 'frenesy' – the same form of madness, as we have seen, that affects Hoccleve himself. As Harper observes, this has the effect of distancing Hoccleve from his insanity: 'Hoccleve is now the moralistic observer of madness rather than its pathetic victim.'[50] However, the story has deeper relevance to Hoccleve's own narrative. This is a story to which confession is central.[51] The motif of illness as punishment for sin is one, too, that resonates with Hoccleve's own interpretation of his madness. Their sick bodies are proof of the sins they have committed. Just as Hoccleve's own madness authorises him to write about insanity, so too do their ailments guarantee the truth of their tales. It is only in telling their true stories that they rid themselves of their sickness: again, a parallel of Hoccleve's hopes that writing the Series will purge him of any association with madness.

The issue of interpretation is also paramount in Jereslaus' Wife: characters are repeatedly confronted with different explanations of the same events. The Wife continually fails to

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[50] Harper 215.

[51] As critics including Doob (213) and Pearsall ("Hoccleve's Regement of Princes" 408) have noted, illness as punishment for sins, and confession as cure (both central themes of the Complaint and Dialogue), are central to both Jereslaus' Wife and the Tale of Jonathas.

read the malicious intent of the men she comes across in her journey. However, they also fail to read her correctly, assuming that she is sexually available, rather than the chaste married woman she really is. When disappointed in their expectations of her availability, they exploit the false interpretations of others in order to gain their revenge. Again, this is a continuation of Hoccleve's strategy, in the words of Harper, to highlight 'the discrepancy between inner, subjective impressions and outer appearances.'[52] It is only at the conclusion of the tale, with the introduction of the motif of confession, 'a divinely stable language that redeems linguistic and, by analogy, all other forms of exchange,' that these issues of interpretation are finally resolved. [53] As with Hoccleve's own problems with interpretation, as documented in the Complaint and Dialogue, these misreadings can only be reconciled with the assistance of the divine.

Hoccleve next introduces a treatise on the art of preparing for death through repentance and confession, Lerne to Die. The treatise is heavily based on the 'Ars moriendi' chapter of Henry Suso's 1334 tract Horologium sapientiae, and offers largely standard warnings about the dangers of dying in mortal sin.[54] Indeed, much of the treatise is devoted to a sinner's deathbed regrets, and his conversation with a 'disciple' who attempts to persuade him to repent before it is too late. This repeated pattern of an extended complaint, followed by dialogue, can only remind the reader of Hoccleve's own situation. Notably, the terms of the sinner's complaint – crying 'With lamentable vois' that 'The worldes fauour / cleene is fro me went; // fforsake y am / frendshipe y can noon fynde' – echo

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[52] Harper 202-203.

[53] Robert J. Meyer-Lee, "Hoccleve and the Apprehension of Money," Exemplaria 13 (2001): 173-214, at 211-12.

[54] Christiania von Nolcken, "'O, Why Ne Had Y Lerned for to Die?': Lerne for to Dye and the Author's Death in Thomas Hoccleve's Series," Essays in Medieval Studies 10 (1993): 27-51, at 29.

Hoccleve's own (L 97, 505-506). The sinner is alone, abandoned by his erstwhile friends: 'I look on euery syde bisyly, // But help is noon / help and confort been dede' (L 127-28). The sinner employs phrases which echo those of Hoccleve himself, complaining that 'slipt out of mynde // I am' (L 508-509).

In another parallel with Hoccleve, those friends who still belong to the dying man continually misread his body: 'They seyn / "thogh thow seeke in thy bed now lye, // Be nat agast / no dethes euel haast thow, // ffor this / thow shalt eschape wel ynow."' (L 537-39). Such misreadings offer false hope of recovery, turning the patient's mind away from death and repentance: 'Thus bodyes freendes been maad enemys // To the soule' (L 540). The disciple complains that he is not listened to: his advice is ignored. Like Hoccleve, his speech is treated as meaningless: 'But thogh thy wordes sharpe & stirynge seeme, // To many a man / profyten they but lyte; // They looke a-part / and list take no yeeme // Vn-to the ende / which mighte hem profyte' (L 519-22). Like Hoccleve's friends, they are both blind and deaf to the truth: 'Yen they haan / and seen nat worth a myte; // And eres han also / and may nat heere; // They weenen longe for to lyuen heere' (L 523-24).

Although the sinner is not mad in any explicit sense, his identification with Hoccleve, and his unreasonable behaviour in turning away from the strictures of the Church, do suggest that he is to be considered as a type of the madman. Certainly, there are suggestions of this in Hoccleve's use of language. The sinner is dying 'as a beest / þat no reson can' (L 581). He mourns that 'my wit is cleene fro me past, // And in my mynde / is ther no thoght ne cast // Othir than serche a way / how deeth eschape' (L 347-49). He bemoans,

'What eilid me / to bathe in swich folie? // Why nadde reson / goten the maistrie // Of me / why?' (L 284-85).

The Tale of Jonathas, too, involves a scene of madness, although in this case, it is merely a pretence. In this tale, the eponymous Jonathas is repeatedly betrayed by his lover, Fellicula. Having inherited three magic gifts from his father, a ring which inspires friendship, a brooch which grants wishes, and a carpet which transports one anywhere in the world, Jonathas sets off to study at university. However, he meets the evil Fellicula, who using her feminine wiles, persuades him to tell her the source of his mysterious wealth, and then proceeds to go after it herself. She steals in turn his magic ring, brooch, and flying carpet, finally leaving him stranded in a deserted land where he is forced to wander hopelessly in a search for civilization.

His misfortunes, alas, do not finish there: he comes across a lake which burns the flesh from his feet and a tree whose fruit gives him leprosy. However, things rapidly right themselves. He discovers a second lake, the waters of which heal his feet, and a second tree whose fruit restores his health. Having taken samples of these various fruits and waters, Jonathas is thus conveniently able to cure a nearby leprosy-stricken king, and thus earn enough for his passage back home. Once in his home city, he starts work as a doctor, and is approached by Fellicula, who by this time has become riddled with disease. He promises to cure her if she makes a full confession, which she duly does, upon which Jonathas doses her with the poisonous water and fruit. Her stomach bursts open in a

shower of entrails, and Jonathas returns home to his mother, presumably to live happily ever after.

Madness here arises on the second occasion that Fellicula steals something from Jonathas, this time a magic brooch which has the power to grant wishes. Having talked Jonathas into entrusting it to her for safe-keeping, Fellicula pretends that it has been stolen, whereupon:

> 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!
> ffor which y wole anoon right, with my knyf
> My self slee / y am weery of my lyfe" (JF 332-36)

Again, the story revolves around penitential illness and confession – again, too, it is the hero of the story, and the wronged party, who has the role of confessor and healer. Like the Wife, Jonathas demands a full confession – although he is far less forgiving. Rather than being reconciled with a penitent Fellicula, as we would have expected from the Wife, he brings about a particularly gruesome death. Fellicula's murder is seemingly unexceptionable: poisoning one's thieving ex-lover is, it seems, perfectly acceptable behaviour for a hero.

It can be argued, however, that the Wife's tendency towards forgiveness, while in religious terms admirable, is on a more practical level decidedly irresponsible. Indeed, her forgiveness of the Brother for his first attempt to seduce her sets in train all the criminal actions which follow. An excessive willingness to forgive is clearly irrational, and strongly associated with the feminine. As a man, Jonathas chooses justice rather than

mercy: the rational choice, and one which enables his happy ending rather sooner than the Wife's.

While Hoccleve's inclusions of madness in each of these stories do serve to project madness away from himself and onto others, they also serve to further Hoccleve's aims in establishing his masculinity. Principally, this is achieved by diverting madness away from Hoccleve and onto the untrustworthy feminine. Karen Winstead has already demonstrated the misogynist nature of the Tale of Jereslaus's Wife: 'taken together, Jereslaus' Wife and Jonathas and Fellicula form an artfully constructed antifeminist joke, which mocks disorderly women in general and "feminist" readers in particular.'[55] Not only is the female protagonist generally incompetent, but Hoccleve's narratorial comments are decidedly misogynistic, ranging from exaggerated praise that, in the light of his previous criticism of women in the Dialogue, can only be read as ironic, to his final observation that, unlike Jereslaus, most men would be only too glad to have their wives disappear without trace: 'ffyndynge of hire / had been to him but wo, // ffor him wolde han thoght þat swich a fyndynge, // To los sholde han him torned, and harmynge' (JW 943-45).[56]

Despite his previous concern over the reactions of women, Hoccleve continues to criticise them. Even in a tale whose heroine is surely the perfect wife, Hoccleve is unable to resist undermining marriage. The Wife is notable for her exceptional nature: by her very exemplarity, however, she demonstrates the failure of the rest of the female sex to

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[55] Karen A. Winstead, "'I am al Othir to Yow than Yee Weene': Hoccleve, Women, and the Series," Philological Quarterly 72 (1993): 143-55, at 145.
[56] Winstead 145-47.

live up to her standard: 'the story of this "humble lamb"... is in fact a slap in the face to the unruly wives in Thomas's audience, who have forgotten their place in the divinely-ordained gender hierarchy.'[57] Hoccleve's tactics in this duplicate the tale's overall strategy: ostensible praise undermined by subtle (and not so subtle) criticism:

> In al the world / so louynge tendrenesse
> Is noon / as is the loue of a womman
> To hir chyld namëly / & as I gesse,
> To hire housbonde also / where-of / witnesse
> We weddid men may bere / if þat vs lyke,
> And so byhoueth / a thank vs to pyke [thank] (JW 394-99)

Hoccleve chides those who believe women can't be constant: they can, but only

> But it be / wher they take han a purpos
> Þat naght is / which, be it neuere so hoot,
> They change / lest it hurte mighte hir loos,
> And keepen it secree / couert & cloos,
> Vnexecut / thogh of hem nat a fewe
> The reuers doon / what / the feend is a shrewe. (JW 492-97)

Hoccleve also spends some time discussing the propriety of the Wife having left the castle in the first place without a maid: 'Par auenture / men wole han meruaill, // That damoisele / with hir had shee noon' (JW 190-91). However, Hoccleve goes to some length to assure us, this was perfectly normal: 'This chaunce shoop / many a yeer agoon; // That tyme par cas / was no swich array // As þat in sundry Contrees is this day' (JW 194-96). This seemingly unnecessary defence of the Wife really serves only to call attention to itself. Indeed, such an exaggerated insistence that we should not judge the Wife for her recklessness can only prompt the reader into doing that very thing.

Women, indeed, are presented throughout the tale as a catalyst for sin. The Wife, while innocent in herself, causes others to sin by her very presence. Once separated from her

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[57] Winstead 146.

husband, her body provokes desire in each man she encounters, with often fatal

consequences. Indeed, in the case of the Shipman, this desire leads directly to madness.

This pattern of sinning and subsequent illness can only stop, and the tale be resolved,

when the Wife is first confined within a nunnery, and then returned to her rightful

marriage. In addition, while the ending is framed as a happy one, the Wife, in

pronouncing her former enemies her 'freendes deere,' in fact repeats the same mistake

which prompted her troubles, letting her womanly pity overcome the need for justice.

The tale thus becomes not so much one of good triumphing over evil, as a morality tale

demonstrating the fatal consequences of a woman being given independence and

authority. As Harper comments, in proving that 'women are unfitted for "rule and

governance", Hoccleve diverts attention from the unruliness of his own life.'[58]

The second interlinked tale, the moralistic Lerne to Die, continues the trend of

disparaging women, going so far as to portray Death itself as female.[59] R. F. Yeager

describes this departure from tradition as 'strikingly odd,' noting that 'this gendering of

Death is not Hoccleve's consistent custom. Apart from the Regement, when Hoccleve

personifies Death in other poems, he does so as a "he.'"[60] Death is also characterised

using imagery of female labour: 'Shee is the rogh besom / which shal vs alle // Sweepe

out of this world / whan God list it falle' (D 286-87). As well as being overtly gendered,

Death is replete with those characteristics we have learned to define as feminine. She is

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[58] Harper 216.

[59] As we can see, this goes back as far as the Dialogue.

[60] R. F. Yeager, "Death is a Lady: The Regement of Princes as Gendered Political Commentary." Studies in the Age of Chaucer 26 (2004): 147-93, at 148-49.

fickle, taking some men when old, some in their prime (L 162-64). She cannot be

understood by men.

The only thing which can match the power of a feminised Death is the might of God,

which Hoccleve once again figures in images of secular lordship:

> Deeth wolde han ofte a brydil put on thee,
> And thee with hire / led away shee wolde
> Nadde the hand of goddes mercy be.
> Thow art ful mochil / vn-to þat lord holde (L 71-74).

Once more, Hoccleve's text centres on a baleful female figure, and one who desperately

needs to be controlled. Indeed, through the very act of translating the treatise we are

reading, Hoccleve asserts a form of control over death – through instructing laymen and

women in the art of preparing for death, he allows them to control the manner of their

passing, and their ultimate fate beyond death. Hoccleve's victory over death becomes a

victory over women.

Yeager examines Hoccleve's similar strategy in the <u>Regement</u>, which also features a

feminine Death, who is here overcome by the power of Hoccleve's inspiration, Chaucer.

Chaucer himself may be dead, but his poetry lives on. Yeager comments that 'women, as

they are used in both the "Remonstrance against Oldcastle" and the <u>Regement</u>, are

images of disorder, of surrendered male "vigour" and authority misplaced. That

ultimately the "vertu" of Chaucer's poetry will render him immune to "Lady Death" can

thus be predicted from her gender.'[61] It is perhaps worth noting that Death's victim in

<u>Lerne to Die</u> is also a man, and a man, as we have already noted, whose complaint

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[61] Yeager, "Death is a Lady" 193.

parallels Hoccleve's. The situations they find themselves in, however, are quite different.

While Hoccleve mourns the loss of the social world, the dying man regrets precisely his

social success, which has led to the neglect of his spiritual concerns. Ironically, the

sinner's life of social frivolity means that he is alone at the moment of death, and at the

final judgement:

> Lord god, how shamefully stande y shal
> At the doom beforn thee and seintes all,
> Where y shal arted be to rekne of al
> That y doon haue & left / whom shal y call
> To helpe me / o, how shal it befall? (L 386-90)

The absence of friendship which plagues Hoccleve, it appears, is actually beneficial: 'Y

haue espyd / the frendshipe is ful streit // Of this world / it is mirour of deceit' (L 454-55).

Here, Hoccleve's madness can actually be seen as a force for good – while the dying man

regrets that he 'nat was beten / with penances whippe,' Hoccleve has already established

his madness as a scourge which turned him away from sin (L 280). Once again, worldly

happiness is proved to be the true 'folie' (L 782). By enabling him to triumph over a

feminine Death, then, Hoccleve's madness actually seems to contribute to his masculine

authority.

The misogyny of <u>Jonathas and Fellicula</u> hardly needs elaboration. As Winstead notes, the

tale confirms practically all current antifeminist assumptions.[62] Those qualities which had

earlier been in danger of adhering to Hoccleve – instability, deceitfulness, riotousness,

inability to conceal secrets – are once more firmly planted onto women. Jonathas accuses

himself of madness in trusting a woman in the first place:

> What eilid me to be so euel auysid,

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[62] Winstead 150.

> That my Conseil / kowde I nat keepe & saue?
> Who can fool pleye / who can madde or raue,
> But he þat to a womman his secree
> Deskeuereth / the smert cleueth now on me (JF 451-55)

This is one madness from which Hoccleve does not suffer.

The tale itself is told in response to a request from Hoccleve's friend that he write a tale to turn the friend's son away from behaviour which will leave him, like Jonathas, prey to women who are 'vnchaast // And deceyuable and sly' (JF 31-32). The Friend ruefully remarks of his son that 'Sauage // And wylde is he / and likly to foleye // In swich cas' (JF 26-28). By the end of the text, then, Hoccleve has so far distanced himself from his madness that he is established as a sane voice who can persuade other 'sauage and wilde' youths to 'forbere riot' and avoid madness-causing women (JF 10). In projecting his madness forcefully onto the feminine, Hoccleve allows himself to slide unobtrusively back into a homosocial world kept together precisely by the repudiation of the feminine. The authoritative Hoccleve we see at the end of the <u>Series</u> is very different from the victim of a feminised madness that we find at the beginning of the <u>Complaint</u>. We may begin the <u>Series</u> with Hoccleve's disordered body, but we conclude it with the disembowelled corpse of Fellicula, gloatingly described by a newly authoritative, clerkly Hoccleve: 'Hir wombe opned, and out fil eche entraille / That in hire was / thus seith the booke sanz faill' (JF 664-65).

Conclusion

Madness is clearly a fluid concept in the Middle Ages. The attempts of medical writers to establish an unambiguous classification, never particularly successful, are undermined by lay writers, who manipulate madness for their own ends. Both Hoccleve and Kempe want to establish a binary dynamic of madness – one can be either mad or sane – with a clear dividing line. Critics in both texts, however, see shades of grey rather than black and white – madness, for them, can never be definitively over: the sufferer is always suspect. While we get a sense of the pain and isolation of madness from the works of Hoccleve and Margery, once translated into text, madness becomes a tool to be used by the author. Madness, something never fully understood, can come to stand for anything out of place.

The assumptions about gender and madness I have examined are largely specific to the Middle Ages. The emphasis on madness as a primarily male experience which we see in medieval medical texts is gradually displaced: a change whose beginnings Neely has placed in the early modern period. Neely charts the extension of previously male-dominated mental disorders to women – a process she describes as the 'regendering of madness.'[1] The association of madness with women reached its peak in the nineteenth century, in which, Jane Ussher argues, 'madness became synonymous with womanhood.'[2] Even in modern times, women account for the majority of mental health

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[1] Neely, <u>Distracted Subjects</u> 6.
[2] Jane M. Ussher, <u>Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?</u> (New York: Harvester, 1991) 64. This is contested, however: see Joan Busfield, "The Female Malady?: Men, Women and Madness in Nineteenth-Century Britain," <u>Sociology</u> 28 (1994): 259-77, 27 Sept. 2009, <http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/28/1/259>.

patients: a 1986 study placed the rate of mental disorders for women at nearly double that for men.[3]

Gender is today interwoven into the details of individual disorders: we can characterise eating disorders, depression and anxiety as typically female; substance abuse and antisocial personality disorder as typically male. Details of the typical gender of sufferers is among the information given by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), which provides the standard diagnostic criteria for mental disorders in the United States and elsewhere. The DSM has expanded exponentially in the past fifty years. The first edition, printed in 1952, contained 70 different categories of illness; the 1994 version, 374 categories.[4] More and more kinds of mental illness are being discovered, or created.

Gender remains a fraught topic in the treatment of madness. The DSM has long been the target of feminist criticism: the criteria for a condition being entered into the DSM relies on the agreement of a majority of APA members, a system that relies on subjective (and thus gendered) judgement. Yoden also points out that 'their evidence relies on a tautology: using the DSM system classifies people in accordance with it and thus confirms its schema.'[5] The DSM to a large extent reflects the views held by society: homosexuality, for example, was listed as a mental disorder until its removal in 1973.

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[3] Joan Busfield, <u>Men, Women and Madness: Understanding Gender and Mental Disorder</u> (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996) 14.

[4] Janice D. Yoder, <u>Women and Gender: Transforming Psychology</u> (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999) 276.

[5] Yoder 275-76.

Feminist critics accuse the DSM of androcentric bias: of adopting the male as normative and pathologising deviation.[6]

While in practice, women may be more mentally ill than men, popular culture is equally concerned with both. Here too, however, we can find a distinct gender difference. While there have been a number of Hollywood films concerning mental illness in recent years, they present a picture of madness dependent on gender. Films such as A Beautiful Mind (2001), about the mathematical genius and schizophrenic John Forbes Nash Jr., and Shine (1996), about the breakdown, institutionalisation and recovery of pianist David Helfgott, present madness as a counterpart to male creativity. In contrast, however, women in films such as Girl, Interrupted (1999), Prozac Nation (2001), and The Hours (2002) experience madness merely as illness. Some sense of the gender divide of the medieval period is clearly still with us.

Popular culture is equally inaccurate in its portrayal of medieval madness. Medieval methods of treating madness are frequently castigated as barbaric.[7] It is true that mad people were commonly chained and/or beaten. Compared to the use of clitoridectomy in the nineteenth century, or electro convulsive therapy in the twentieth (and twenty-first), however, medieval methods seem relatively humane. Indeed, medieval ideas about madness still inform our ideas of treatment. The use of music as a potential cure, a standard recommendation, finds a modern equivalent in music therapy, in which music is

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[6] Yoder 282.

[7] Indeed, a recent episode of the popular BBC series Doctor Who included a depiction of a sixteenth-century Bethlehem Hospital in which the mad are repeatedly (and anachronistically) whipped for the entertainment of the gentry. "The Shakespeare Code," Doctor Who, BBC, 7 April 2007.

used to express feelings which clients are unable to verbalise. On a more profound level,

notions of madness as a physical disease are also still with us: viewing mental illness as

the product of chemical imbalances within the brain – an assumption on which all drug

therapy is based – while far more sophisticated than the medieval belief in humours rising

to the head and causing madness, operates on the same conceptual framework.

Over the latter half of the twentieth century, there has been a fall in hospitalisation for the

insane. Mentally-ill people are once again expected to be cared for within the community,

rather than being automatically institutionalised. This is in some ways a return to the

medieval assumption that the mad person is the responsibility of their social circle, their

family and friends. Neely describes the sixteenth century treatment of the mad (a

continuation of that of the Middle Ages) as essentially tolerant:

> Distracted people are not viewed as essentially or permanently different from
> those who are healthy. Far from being condemned or mocked, characterised as
> inhuman, animal-like, or as outside humanity, they are attended to with concern
> and compassion. The assumption is that they have temporarily lost a self that can
> "recovered" or "restored to memory". When this happens, they are sent home into
> the care of a relative or parish, sometimes with a stipend to pay for continuing
> care.[8]

This is surely a situation to which any modern society could aspire.

The DSM is due to be revised for the fifth time in 2012. The current edition, DSM IV,

includes transsexual and transgender people in its list of those suffering from mental

illness: a policing of sex and gender roles which would be all too familiar to medieval

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[8] Neely 180.

writers.[9] Gender is still, then, a cause for contention in the field of mental health, and the

details of the functioning of the human mind remain largely unknown. As we move into

the twenty-first century, campaigners continue to strive for a greater understanding and

acceptance of those suffering from mental disorders. It appears that we still have far to

go.

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[9] Specifically, transsexual and transgender people can be classified as suffering from, variously, gender identity disorder, transvestic fetishism or autognyephilia.

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