Protean Madness and the Poetic Identities of

Smart, Cowper, and Blake

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

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Abstract

This thesis offers a comparative analysis of the poetic identities of Christopher Smart (1722-71), William Cowper (1731-1800) and William Blake (1757) in the context of contemporary understandings of madness and changing ideas of personal and spiritual identity from c.1750-1820. Critical attention is focused on the chameleonic status of madness in its various manifestations, of which melancholy, particularly in its religious guise, is particularly important. This thesis adopts an historicist approach that emphasizes poetic voice, and registers a close analysis of the arguments and diction employed in poetry, prose and medical writing associated with eighteenth-century madness. Rather than assuming a pathological status for these poets, I have paid close attention to the way in which madness is represented in the work itself and drawn contrasts with significant contemporary ideas in influential medical discourse. The thesis looks at key long poems including Smart's *Jubilate Agno* (written c.1758-63), Cowper's series of moral satires in *Poems* (1782), and Blake's *The Four Zoas* (written c.1797-1807), as well as some prose writing and letters, all of which contend with issues that underlie the public and medical scrutiny of madness in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the line between madness and strong religious convictions; the relationship between the body and the soul; anxieties about the social order and the national character; and a burgeoning individualism. The argument is attentive to the importance of language in medicine as well as poetry, and analyses the diction employed by several eighteenth-century mad-doctors, most notably the St. Luke's physician, William Battie (1703-1776); the cleric, physician, and poet, Nathaniel Cotton (1707-1788); and the controversial Bethlem apothecary and prolific medical writer, John Haslam (1764-1844). Although historically grounded, the thesis makes connections between the eighteenth-century culture of madness and contemporary understandings of mental disturbance.

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Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Introduction

'One Power alone makes a Poet. - Imagination The Divine Vision'

William Blake (1757-1827) made this remark when annotating Wordsworth's *Poems* (1815). 'I see in Wordsworth', Blake observes, 'the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually & then he is No Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at Enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration'.[1] Blake's emphasis on a spiritual identity was shared by the two other eighteenth-century poets who are subject to close attention in this thesis: Christopher Smart (1722-1771) and William Cowper (1731-1800). Cowper's work reveals a much less emphatic sense of divinity than that conveyed by Blake above. The poet of 'The Contrite Heart', one of the *Olney Hymns* co-written with the Anglican clergyman, John Newton (1725-1807), confesses to divided feelings in the desire to reach the deity: 'I sometimes think myself inclin'd / To love thee, if I could; / But often feel another mind, / Averse to all that's good'.[2] The poetry of Smart expresses no such troubled desire. *A Song to David* (1763), published just after the poet had been released from a private madhouse, and in the same year when Cowper entered one, has an absolutely triumphant ending which fully participates in the glory of Christ:

> Glorious – more glorious is the crown
> Of Him, that brought salvation down
> By meekness, call'd thy Son;
> Thou at stupendous truth believ'd,
> And now the matchless deed's atchiev'd,
> DETERMINED, DARED, and DONE.
> FINIS.[3]

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[1] William Blake, 'Annotations to Wordsworth's *Poems* (1815)', in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor, Doubleday Books, 1988), p.665, p.1. All subsequent references to this edition of Blake's work will appear parenthetically within the text, citing the page of the Erdman edition, followed by the page (or plate) number of the manuscript, followed by the line number(s) of the poem where applicable, as (E665, p.1, …).

[2] William Cowper, 'Hymn IX', in *The Poems of William Cowper, 1748-1782*, ed. by John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I, p.148, 9-12. All subsequent references to this edition of Cowper's work will appear parenthetically within the text, citing the volume in question, the page of the Baird and Ryskamp edition, followed by the line number(s) of the poem, as (I, p.148, 9-12).

[3] Christopher Smart, *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart; Religious Poetry 1763-1771*, ed. by Marcus Walsh and Karina Williamson, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), II. (LXXXXVI), p.147, 511-16. All

The visionary power of the imagination that Blake and Smart celebrate so vociferously was suspiciously regarded by many eighteenth-century mad-doctors. Thomas Arnold (1742-1816), for instance, pathologized an over-active imagination in his *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity* (1782-86).[4] 'Too great Activity of Imagination' is filed under the 'Mental Causes' of insanity, which include a comprehensive list of the passions.[5] According to Arnold, the imagination could provoke a pathological condition, 'calculated to give occasion to insanity, as well by the very active vibrations which it excites in the fibres and vessels of the brain, as by its natural alliance with folly'.[6] Arnold applauds Shakespeare: 'It is with much propriety, therefore, that the Poet of Nature has connected, by this common character of imagination, the poet, the lover, and the madman'.[7] In recent years, poetry and medicine seem to have moved closer together, but Arnold's remark is a reminder that they have never been estranged.[8] Cowper's doctor, Nathaniel Cotton (1707-88), was both a clergyman and a respected poet, who wrote religious verse which self-deprecated his work as a physician. Cotton had a more settled position than Cowper when it came to matters of spiritual identity: 'For let the witling argue all he can, / It is Religion still that makes the man'.[9]

This thesis offers a comparative analysis of poetic practice and medical discourse in relation to madness and identity in England from c.1750 to c.1820, with particular reference to Smart, Cowper, and Blake. My interest in eighteenth-century madness is grounded in modern psychiatric

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subsequent references to this edition of Smart's work will appear parenthetically within the text, citing the volume in question, the page of the Walsh and Williamson edition, followed by the line number(s) of the poem, as (II, p.147, 511-16).

[4] *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Printed for Richard Philips, 1806). Hereafter, Arnold's *Observations*.

[5] Arnold, 'Contents' in *Observations*, II. Arnold's causes are divided between 'Mental' and 'Bodily Causes'.

[6] Arnold, II, p.267.

[7] Arnold, II, pp.267-68. 'The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, / Are of imagination all compact' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, Scene I).

[8] I am thinking of 'The Poetry of Medicine Project', which runs workshops on literature, medicine and the NHS, given by medics as well as literature academics. Since 2009, there has been an annual Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine, an international award with an NHS category.

[9] 'To the Rev. James Hervey on his Meditations', in *Various Pieces in Verses and Prose,* 2 vols, ed. by Nathaniel Cotton the Younger (London: J. Dodsley, 1791), I, p.124.

theory and practice. This study germinated in my mind as a consideration of the historical underpinnings of the current mental healthcare system, and much of my research was done while I was still working as a nurse in London. I wanted to understand the origins of the dominant biological psychiatry of the present day, and my preliminary reading suggested the importance of the eighteenth century in this respect. I have chosen to focus on the representation of madness in poetry and medicine next to changing ideas of spiritual and personal identity. My selection of these particular poets is based partly on their textual and biographical links, and partly on their relevance to a discussion about the understanding, treatment, and parameters of eighteenth-century madness. I have found this to be, in each case, compelling, not just for the insight that the poetry gives into eighteenth-century ideas, but for what it suggests about the modern approach to mental health. The eighteenth-century concern with the recognition and definition of madness as first steps toward its treatment describes a terminological quandary which is still observable today. Indeed, the questions at the centre of this thesis in an eighteenth-century context point to obdurate problems: How far is it possible to describe madness or mental disturbance objectively? How do we distinguish one condition from another? How can a condition be managed if it cannot be visualized? How can crude moral and social judgments be avoided? How do we approach the voices of those imputed to be mad?

In *Mind-Forg'd Manacles* (1987), a highly influential history of madness, Roy Porter identifies an absence of 'sorely needed cross-cultural research' in the field.[10] Thirty years later, there is still a need for work that is alert to the multiple senses of madness in a wide range of eighteenth-century discourses, from poetry to medicine to parliamentary investigation and reform. This thesis is intended as a contribution to such cross-cultural research. To adapt a point made about literature and science in recent work by Tristanne Connolly and Steve Clark, I aim to treat

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[10] *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (London: Penguin, 1987), p.ix.

poetry and medicine as 'parallel and mutually illuminating spheres' of cultural enquiry.[11] In the texts considered here, a range of contemporary understandings of madness and personal identity emerge which point in illuminating ways towards the contested nature of both concepts. I pay close attention to poetic voice, which is seen as integral to an understanding of poetic identity in relation to what Scott Hess describes as an emerging 'authorial self' shaped by a burgeoning eighteenth-century print culture.[12] My analysis draws on long poems, particularly Smart's *Jubilate Agno* (c.1758-63); Cowper's series of moral satires in *Poems* (1782); and Blake's *The Four Zoas* (c.1797-1807). It is not my intention to give comprehensive readings of these complex works, but instead to trace the key ways in which they represent madness and poetic identity. I look at the constitution of the self in poetry alongside some of the most influential medical texts about madness in the eighteenth century, notably works by William Battie, John Monro, and John Haslam.[13] I also give a close reading of Cowper's *Adelphi* (c.1767-72), which is not only a key text for eighteenth-century madness, but also elucidates an important area in the development of ideas about the self, that of Protestant self-examination. In addition, I make reference to relevant pieces on poetry, doctors, identity, and madness in the *Midwife* (1750-53), the periodical which Smart wrote for and edited. I do not intend to give a psychological interpretation of the poets' states of mind, but I am attendant to the stigma of madness insofar as this has affected their critical reception.

An analysis of poetry in terms of madness requires a deft balancing act, because, in addition to the risk of strengthening a pejorative association, madness has been extensively written about in a number of different contexts: literary and historical; linguistic and philosophical; legal and

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[11] 'Introduction', *Liberating Medicine, 1720-1835*, ed. by Tristanne Connolly and Steve Clark (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), p.2.

[12] Scott Hess, *Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p.4.

[13] William Battie, *A Treatise on Madness* (London: J. Whiston and B. White, 1758); John Monro, *Remarks on Dr. Battie's Treatise* (London: Dawsons, 1758); John Haslam, *Observations on Madness and Melancholy, with Practical Remarks on the Disease and an Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection* (London: Printed for C. Rivington, 1798). Hereafter, Battie's *Treatise*; Monro's *Remarks*; and Haslam's *Observations*.

sociological; psychological and psychiatric. Given the range of disciplines currently involved in the

historiography of madness, all jostling for attention in a culture increasingly concerned with mental

health, it seems likely that this will remain a contentious area. The late eighteenth century is

frequently cited as a watershed in the history of medical approaches to madness, often woven into

the asylum movement and the beginnings of the dominant medical psychiatry of the nineteenth

century, as in Edward Shorter's proposed 'asylum period 1770 to 1870, in which biological concepts

held sway'.[14] Critics as well as advocates of psychiatry acknowledge the importance of the mid to

late eighteenth century for its development as an organized profession with a body of knowledge

and theory and an emerging legislative framework. Andrew Scull's *The Most Solitary of Afflictions:*

Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900 (1993), for instance, reaches back into the eighteenth

century to extend an earlier critique of the Victorian asylums made in the same author's *Museums*

of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England (1979). Against the

belief in the steady emergence of a progressive biological psychiatry stands Michel Foucault's *Folie*

et déraison: histoire de la folie à l'âge classique (1961), first translated in English from an abridged

version of the original as *Madness and Civilization* (1967), and again more recently as *History of*

Madness (2006). In Foucault's still profoundly challenging work, an opposition between reason and

unreason informs a wide-ranging critique of the subjugation of the mad during the 'classical period'

(c.1660-1800).[15] Here criticisms of the processes of modernity and historiography are as much at

issue as the relationship between madness and language.

Leading scholars in the field have all acknowledged the importance of the book's central

insight into the silencing of madness as a form of unreason, while disputing the historical grounds

in a British context for its key claim that the mad were subject to a physically enacted 'Great

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[14] Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.3.
[15] Michel Foucault, 'Preface to the 1961 Edition', in *History of Madness*, ed. by Jean Khalfa, trans. by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.xxxiii. 'The classical age… covers precisely that period when the exchange between madness and reason modifies its language, in a radical manner. In the history of madness, two events signal this change with singular clarity: in 1657, the founding of the Hôpital Général, and the Great Confinement of the poor; and in 1794, the liberation of the mad in chains at Bicêtre'.

Confinement' carried out by repressive institutions. Michael MacDonald's verdict *in Mystical Bedlam* (1981) was even-handed, both describing a scholarly indebtedness but also questioning Foucault's approach to history: 'The great value of Foucault's work lies in his insight that madness was a speculum in which normal people saw their own image reversed and distorted'.[16] The major weakness, MacDonald adds, is the sense that 'real' people become 'vague or fanciful' in Foucault's theory, where 'abstractions confront abstractions'.[17] Porter questions the applicability of Foucault's claims to the English social and political landscape, and suggests that an abstract opposition between reason and unreason, 'misrepresents the much more dynamic English Enlightenment perception of reasoning as a process'.[18] The text more convincingly identified a subtle form of repression in language, as Allan Ingram has written: 'Foucault's exploration of the discourse of madness, its structures and imperatives, its parody of the forms of reason in the face of reason's obstinate inattentiveness, is the history of a resolute linguistic repression'.[19] There is much still to support Foucault's argument that madness in the eighteenth century was held to be devoid of any meaningful content, that it had nothing to communicate and could therefore be disregarded.[20] As such, I agree with the statement given by Connolly and Clarke during their discussion of Foucault: 'What seems desirable is at once a liberation by and a liberation from Foucault...'.[21] While an interdisciplinary approach and a view of power that is not absolute and static are to be welcomed, 'master-narratives' which include Foucault's 'the Great Confinement' are rightly regarded with scepticism. What is important is 'specific context' and 'detailed textual interpretation'.[22] Andrew Scull's most recent volume, pointedly titled *Madness in Civilization* (2015), emphasizes a range of

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[16] *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.xi.
[17] MacDonald, p.xi.
[18] Porter, p.280.
[19] *The Madhouse of Language: Writing and Reading Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.6.
[20] Foucault, *History of Madness*, p.165. According to the author, in '*a practical consciousness of madness*', dialogue is muted: 'All that remains is the calm certainty that madness should be reduced to silence'.
[21] Connolly and Clarke, pp.5-6.
[22] Connolly and Clarke, p.6.

understandings of madness over a long time frame, where religious, psychological, supernatural, and social senses of mental disturbance are given attention in addition to medical models. Foucault is taken to task for his interpretation of the powerful series of images of the *Narrenschiff* or 'Ship of Fools' from the late medieval and early Renaissance period. Scull argues that Foucault missed the 'artistic conceit' in these works, 'embracing the wholly mistaken notion that these powerful paintings were representations of something real'.[23] The line between representation and reality is particularly difficult to determine where madness is concerned, as I discuss below. My own employment as a nurse has given me a clear sense that language matters greatly in relation to the way in which psychiatric issues are conceptualized and treated. I have a related sense that the terminology employed in the eighteenth century not only helped to structure the response to madness at the time, but also continues to shape the understanding of mental disorder today.

My introduction will lay the groundwork for an analysis of the multiple forms of eighteenth-century madness. The first section establishes the central topic of poetic identity in relation to voice. The emphasis placed on the spirit in the poetry of Smart, Cowper and Blake, has profound implications for the understanding of voice, but it also intersects with eighteenth-century debates on personal identity. A key figure here is the philosopher and physician John Locke (1632-1704), a touchstone for both eighteenth-century mad-doctors and poets. Locke added an enormously influential chapter on 'Identity and Diversity' to the second edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690, 1694), and his theory of mind is at the centre of eighteenth-century ideas of madness located in the imagination.[24] By describing a point of convergence between religious melancholy and enthusiasm, the following section points to the enduring influence of religious understandings of madness throughout the eighteenth century, and provides some initial commentary on the resonance of enthusiasm and melancholy in eighteenth-century poetry. Through the presentation of a dialogue between poetry and medicine in the 1720s, the third

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[23] Scull, *Madness in Civilization* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), p.115.
[24] John Locke, 'Chapter XXVII' (Book II), in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin), pp.296-314. Hereafter, Locke's *Essay*.

section expounds upon the idea of protean madness. The fourth section is a brief summary of the shifting political and legal framework around madness as it evolves in the period identified, with reference to a number of significant developments. The fifth and final section illustrates the ambiguous role and uncertain professional status of mad-doctors in a complex curative environment in a period of limited consensus, with particular attention paid to Cotton, William Battie (1703-76), and John Haslam (1764-1844).

Poetic Identity as Voice and the Voices of Madness

By poetic identity, I mean the self-referencing within a poem, the way in which the self, or selves, are constituted within it. This is not synonymous with personal identity, a term which did not have a uniformly accepted meaning in the eighteenth century. By emphasizing poetic identity in association with voice, I am building on recent work by Joanna Fowler and Allan Ingram which records an interest in both the distinctiveness of the poet and the time and place in which the poetry was composed: '… the importance of those many aspects of circumstance – biographical, social, political and cultural – that gave impetus to the adoption and development of a way of writing poetry'.[25] My analysis will suggest how variations of voice relate to understandings of madness and personal identity in the wider culture. I aim to foreground the poetry by making an effort to engage with it on its own terms, rather than treat it as a repository for a prearranged theory.

Voice is always an important category when interpreting poetry, but it has a highlighted cultural significance in relation to madness as a sign of the humanity of the mad– or their perceived lack of it. I attend to the voices of three male poets in this study, all of whom have been associated with pathological madness, though Blake was not confined. There were of course many people who resided in eighteenth-century madhouses who have remained voiceless, and Smart, Cowper, and

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[25] 'Introduction', *Voice and Context in Eighteenth-Century Verse: Order in Variety*, ed. by Joanna Fowler and Allan Ingram (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.1-7 (p.3).

Blake should not be seen as spokespersons for the enormous range of experiences that eighteenth-century madness entailed. They are very particular voices, well versed in literary culture and the sleights of language, and products of the time in terms of their attitudes to gender, class, and the nation state. I present a range of fascinating differences as well similarities between these poets, who have related but also opposing understandings of madness. I intend to reveal aspects of the wider culture by attending to their particular positions within it.

Voice has a complex sense in relation to religious poetry and madness, since it can be both an indicator of sickness and a sign of divinity, as Porter describes: 'Reformation piety was sympathetic to speaking prophetically or hearing voices from Beyond, as marks of a divine madness. Equally of course these might be Satan's wiles, symptoms of sickness or even of fraud'.[26] This double sense is reflected in both the importance attributed to voice in the poetry of Smart, Cowper, and Blake, as well as some degree of unease in the potential for misinterpretation. Voice points to the thought within a poem and to the way in which that thought is represented structurally and formally in terms of genre, style, diction, stress, and rhythm. It is described by John Sitter as both an 'elemental and elusive part of poetry'. Since words are literally silent on the page and voice is in one sense a metaphor, Sitter suggests that it is helpful to think of a poem as a script: 'Reading the lines on the page as instructions for performance then becomes a continuous experiment in *producing the poem*'.[27] This model of reading poetry seems apt for the poems of Smart and Blake which not only utilize a wide range of voices, but also make voice a subject in itself. The later poetry of Cowper, which includes *The Task* (1785), has a more uniform voice. Self-representation is by no means straightforward in Cowper's work, however, and opens out onto contemporary questions of authorship. In Cowper's earlier poetry, voice is more conflicted and the identity of the poet is less settled than the digressive 'I' of *The Task*. It is partly because of these observations that I concentrate my attention on Cowper's first published collection, *Poems* (1782).

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[26] Porter, p.19.
[27] *The Cambridge Introduction to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.7-9.

There has been an enduring stereotypical association between madness and poetry which dates back at least as far as Plato.[28] The title of one poem in *Lucida Intervalla* (1679) by the Bethlem patient, James Carkesse (b. c.1636), bluntly informs the reader that: 'Poets are Mad'.[29] Since Carkesse willingly took on the divine fury of the poet, this was not necessarily a bad thing. Carkesse shows how the tables could be turned by directing all his poems against his physician, Thomas Allen. 'Bedlam' is described as the 'best of Universities' for poets, where poetic fire is directed at 'Mad-quacks', as the poet alludes to the spectacle of madness, with patient and player drawn alongside one another: 'And 'till he cures of Poetick Rage, / Our Galleries you must fill, quit Pit and Stag'.[30] In another poem, Carkesse highlights how 'Zeal for God' can be interpreted in different ways, as the poet objects to his being 'seiz'd on for a Madman, only for having endeavoured to reduce Dissenters unto the CHURCH'.[31] Acknowledging the connection between prophets and poets in a verse entitled 'Poet no Lunatick', Carkesse qualifies the madness of poets by arguing somewhat ironically that the poet self-cures by writing poetry: 'Physician, *heal thy self*, we say; but know it, / In earnest said to the self-curing Poet'.[32] The performative aspects of madness, the delicate line between religious *zeal* and the determination of a pathological state of mind, and the idea of poetry as a cure all reappear in the work of Smart, Cowper, and Blake.

There is a danger in conflating medical symptomology with literary analysis. This study does not look at voice as reflective of individual pathology, nor does it make large conceptual leaps between eighteenth-century ideas of madness and those of the present day. As John Baker

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[28] Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by C. J. Rowe (Warminster: Aris & Philips, 1986), pp.55-69. Four kinds of divine madness are discussed: love (from Aphrodite); prophecy (from Apollo); the divine fury of poetry (from the Muses); and mystic rites (Dionysus). Socrates: '… the man who arrives at the doors of poetry without madness from the Muses, persuaded that expertise will make him a good poet, both he and his poetry, the poetry of the sane, are eclipsed by that of the mad, imperfect and unfulfilled', p.59.
[29] James Carkesse, *Lucida Intervalla, Containing Divers Miscellaneous Poems, Written at Finsbury and Bethlem by the Doctors Patient Extraordinary* (London: Unknown, 1679), p.50.
[30] Carkesse, p.50.
[31] Carkesse, p.17.
[32] Carkesse, p.36.

observes, 'poetry is a ritualized, carefully structured, highly self-conscious use of language'.[33] Yet past criticism of poetry associated with madness has sometimes been given to comment on its disorder or its lack of structure as a supposed revelation of the author's pathological state of mind at the moment of composition, as if that was recoverable. In *Madness and Blake's Myth* (1989), for instance, Paul Youngquist claims, in a phenomenological reading of Blake's *The Four Zoas*, that the poem's mythology of madness registers the poet's own shattered consciousness. More recent scholarship has argued that what was previously understood as evidence of a pathological condition was in fact the expression of a radical politics. Clement Hawes reads Smart's poetry within a tradition of enthusiasm, seen as an aesthetic mode of style as well as a form of social protest.[34] Saree Makdisi emphasizes Blake's radical politics and views the poet's enthusiasm as a challenge to unitary ideas of the self and more conservative ideas of liberty.[35] The attempt to describe how the syntax, diction, and content of a poem refers to a past pathological state of mind is so fraught with difficulties as to be better avoided. Rather than assuming a pathological status for historical subjects based on modern ideas of psychiatry, this study acknowledges the agency of the poet as an important cultural participant. This is not to say that voice should be pinned on to the authorial self, but, on the contrary, to recognize, firstly, that ideas of self-representation and the underlying concept of personal identity were in flux when Smart, Cowper and Blake were writing; and secondly, that poetry can involve an assembly of different voices and personae which reference different perspectives.[36]

Poetic identity, voice, and madness are all constituted in primarily spiritual terms in the work of the poets under consideration here, but an explication of this can throw light on more secular understandings of madness and personal identity in the culture. As Christopher Fox has

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[33] John Baker, ''Strange Contrarys': Figures of Melancholy in Eighteenth-Century Poetry', in *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800*, ed. by Allan Ingram and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.83-113 (p.86).
[34] *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[35] *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[36] Hess, pp.32-33.

described, *personal identity* was subject to an 'extensive early eighteenth-century controversy' in the wake of Locke's chapter in the *Essay*.[37] The validity of the concept was scrutinized and evaluated by leading thinkers like George Berkeley (1685-1753) and David Hume (1711-1776), and absorbed and satirized by others, including figures that had a direct influence on Smart and Cowper, like Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and Matthew Prior (1664-1721).[38] Employing three terms ('man', 'substance', and 'person') in his discussion of human identity, Locke opens up a place for a material understanding of it by first insisting that the idea of the *man* must be connected to the body: 'For I presume 'tis not the idea of a thinking or rational being alone, that makes the idea of a man in most people's sense; but of a body, so and so shaped, joined to it'.[39] Moreover, Locke crucially questions our ability to know the soul (as a thinking 'substance'), and uses the third category of *person* to account for moral and theological responsibility, where personal identity is conceived as consciousness:

> For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and 'tis that that makes everyone to be what he calls self; and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and 'tis by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done.[40]

If Locke separates personal identity from both the idea of the *soul* and the idea of *man* by describing the *person* in terms of consciousness alone ('Consciousness makes the same person'), Smart, Cowper, and Blake draw on primarily religious understandings of identity located within the spirit.[41] As Fox describes, personal identity prior to Locke was always understood in theological terms through the idea of a 'substantial self' (an immaterial substance or soul which was

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[37] *Locke and the Scriblerians: Identity and Consciousness in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.2.
[38] Fox, pp.38-9. The author also cites Shaftesbury, Butler, Mandeville, and Priestley, alongside the Scriblerians.
[39] Locke, p.302.
[40] Locke, pp.310-12.
[41] Locke, p.307.

accountable to God), which was the 'indivisible and immortal part' of the person.[42] In this context,

Fox emphasizes the radical bent of Locke's imposition of the self-as-consciousness, and describes

the reaction in the early part of the eighteenth century, where adherents to the earlier view of self-

as-substance included Joseph Butler (1692-1752). Smart's *Jubilate Agno*, Cowper's series of moral

satires, and Blake's *The Four Zoas* all point to the insecurity of ideas about not only madness but

also personal identity. It is important to emphasize the continuing nature of this debate, where

eighteenth-century discussions of personal identity anticipate recent theoretical debates on

discursive practices, agency, and interiority:

> … [T]he opposition of interiority versus discursive identity is not only a phenomenon of postmodern critical debate, but can already be discerned in the long-eighteenth century, which sees the emergence of both the notion of an essential, inner self and the notion of a self as a bundle of perceptions retrospectively labelled 'I'.[43]

The stigma of madness has entered into the criticism of all three poets. On its first

published appearance in 1939, Smart's *Jubilate Agno*, for example, was misleadingly described as 'A

Song from Bedlam' by the editor W.F. Stead, as if the work owed more to the madhouse than to

anything else.[44] The process of stigmatizing clearly acts in an opposite way to the construction of

any positive form of identity, as Porter suggests when he describes stigmatizing as, 'the creation of

spoiled identity… projecting onto an individual or group judgements as to what is inferior,

repugnant, or disgraceful'.[45] In my analysis, I am sensitive to the crude stigmatizing of the mad in

the eighteenth century in a variety of forms, from medical treatises to official documents. Even if

the voices of many of the imputed-insane were effectively silenced, though, Porter is surely right to

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[42] Fox, pp.14-5. The author cites the philosophy of Boethius (c480-524 AD): 'A person is the individual substance of a rational nature', which he argues is supported by the *Meditations* (1641) of Descartes, who takes his thinking self to be the substantial self as soul.

[43] Isabel Karremann, 'Introduction', *Mediating Identities in Eighteenth-Century England: Public Negotiations, Literary Discourses, Topography*, ed. by Isabel Karremann and Anja Müller (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp.1-15 (p.3).

[44] *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song From Bedlam*, ed. by William Force Stead (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939).

[45] Roy Porter, *Madness: A Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.62.

suggest that 'examining what survives of the *vox insanorum* at least pitches the interpretative

issues on to a higher plane'.[46]

Religious Melancholy and Enthusiasm

In order to understand the relationship between madness and poetic identity, the spiritual stances

of the poets must be examined in relation to contentious aspects of the eighteenth-century

evangelical revival. All three poets had a problematic relationship with the established Church, and

all three held idiosyncratic opinions on fundamental aspects of Christian doctrine. Edward Katz

establishes Smart's position on the borders of Anglicanism, noting his failed attempt to reform the

liturgy.[47] Smart's personal interpretation of St. Paul's maxim to pray 'without ceasing' saw him

confined in St. Luke's Hospital and Potter's private madhouse.[48] In *Jubilate Agno*, he gives a sense

of his own vocation as '*the Lord's News-Writer – the scribe-evangelist*' (I, p.63, B327). Cowper's

evangelical conversion had a Calvinist dimension which ultimately led to an expression of his total

abandonment by God, though Brunström has argued that 'his religious agonies derive not simply or

even primarily from Calvinism but from a much larger tradition of experiential reasoning…'.[49] In

Brunström's view, Cowper reflects the uncertainty of the ideological climate in which he was

writing: 'His version of eighteenth-century individualism rejected the mediatory assistance of

human reason, church/social solidarity, and [finally] even the mediation of Christ…'.[50] Blake

developed a vast private mythology in art and poetry, and consistently rejected the authority of the

state in religious affairs, and several scholars have located him within a tradition of antinomian

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[46] Porter, *Mind-forg'd Manacles*, p.230.
[47] Edward Joseph Katz, '"Action and Speaking Are One": A Logological Reading of Smart's Prophetic Rhetoric', in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment* ed. by Clement Hawes (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp.47-66, (p.54).
[48] *Bible: King James Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Subsequent references to the Bible will all be taken from this edition and given parenthetically in the text, naming the biblical book, followed by the chapter, followed by the line(s), as (I Thessalonians 4: 17).
[49] Conrad Brunström, *William Cowper: Religion, Satire, Society* (Lewisburg, PA : Bucknell University Press, 2004), p.169.
[50] Brunström, p.168.

enthusiasm, including Makdisi, and Jon Mee.[51] Both aspects of this tradition were subject to

regulatory interventions, but Robert Rix has argued persuasively that Blake's eclecticism, while

tending to deny all authority other than that of the spirit, does not necessarily put his ideas outside

the terms of contemporary debate: 'It is the removal of relevant parallels and comparisons to his

contemporaries that have shaped the distorted image of Blake as either an isolated genius or as a

poor madman'.[52]

Crucially, all three poets were identified with enthusiasm, and Blake self-identified: 'Meer

Enthusiasm is the All in All!' (E645, p.35). Enthusiasm had a complex history going back to the

religious discord of the seventeenth century, and to the emergence of various sectaries during and

after the the Civil War (1642-51), including the Ranters and the Diggers. Although it took on new

meanings in the eighteenth century, it was, as Mee writes, 'still primarily in circulation as a

pejorative term describing an excess of religious zeal'.[53] Since the charge of enthusiasm often

brought with it an accusation of madness, this is a key area of enquiry. As Grayson Ditchfield notes,

even John Wesley (1703-91), careful to defend Methodism from the charge, described enthusiasm

as '"madness; fancied inspiration"'.[54] In Blake's *Milton*, both Wesley and George Whitefield (1714-

70) are enthusiastically 'raisd up' (E118, pl. 22[44], 55). Cowper's madness was identified with a

Calvinistic stream of Methodism, a complicated charge, since, as Nicholas Temperley observes: 'The

Calvinistic Methodists, who split from the Wesleys under Whitefield's leadership in 1741,

generated both Anglican evangelicals, who remained in the established church, and separatist

movements…'.[55] Despite Wesley's efforts, as Misty Anderson observes, the connection between

Methodism and enthusiasm continued to be made throughout the eighteenth century and into the

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[51] *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

[52] *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.155.

[53] *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.9.

[54] Grayson Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: Taylor Francis Ltd, 1998), p.73.

[55] 'The Music of Dissent', in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn, in England and Wales*, ed. by Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.197-228 (p.211).

nineteenth: 'Enthusiasm, the term for irrational beliefs and responses that means, at an etymological level, "possessed by a god," seemed to critics an obvious way to describe Methodists'.[56] Enthusiastic Methodism represented a threat to an emerging modern self:

> Understanding the term "enthusiasm" in the eighteenth century means understanding that its pejorative valence named a perceived irrationality that Methodists also rejected while also etymologically announcing the crisis of self that Methodism represented: being *en-theos*, possessed by a god and thus not a modern, contained self.[57]

An association with enthusiasm for poets was a double-edged sword. Two factors are prominent, both of which could bring the poet into conflict with mainstream Anglicanism if not the state as a whole: the poet as a *prophet,* and the poet as an *evangelical* celebrant. The framework around these ideas was not static, but both these projections were always suspect from a High Church perspective, where, as Mee suggests, 'merely to be a Methodist (even before its schism from the Church) or Dissenter was to be tainted with enthusiasm'.[58] The eighteenth-century debate on enthusiasm comes after centuries of religious interpretations of madness, and more immediately followed an important seventeenth-century shift in understanding concerning the relationship between Christianity and the classical divisions of madness.

Spiritual and religious understandings of madness are perhaps as old as madness itself. In a Christian context, part of this comes directly from the Bible as in the Old Testament story of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4); the New Testament reference to madness as demoniacal possession (John 10: 20); and to the idea of speaking in tongues which is defined against genuine prophetic belief (I Corinthians 14: 23). Stanley W. Jackson describes how, before the birth of Christianity, the classical world divided madness into three traditional forms of disease: melancholia, mania, and phrenitis (meaning 'delirium and fever' which separated it from the other two).[59] The conceptions

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[56] Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief and the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), p.49.
[57] Anderson, p.50.
[58] Mee, p.14.
[59] *Melancholia & Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.30.

of melancholia and mania inter-related in complex ways with important aspects of Christian belief throughout the medieval and early modern period. The development of melancholia as a form of madness is particularly relevant here since it takes on a new and specifically religious significance in the eighteenth century which has important implications for understanding Smart, Cowper, and Blake. For around two thousand years melancholia, alongside mania, was seen as part of the humours system first established by the Hippocratic writers and Galen in the classical period.[60] By the mid seventeenth century, it had evolved to incorporate important aspects of Christian doctrine, as in the association made between melancholy and the Fall by St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179).[61] With the system of the humours beginning to wane, the religious understanding of madness was given fresh impetus by the new humanistic interpretations of Robert Burton (1577-1640).

One important development for my purposes is Burton's conception of religious melancholy in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Jeremy Schmidt has established that the term took in both the idea of a disease and the politics of sin through the terrors of the conscience, since Burton used the notion to critique both Catholics and radical Protestant groups like the Anabaptists.[62] By blending together natural and supernatural explanations, Burton proposed a mixed disorder with mental, bodily, and spiritual components, just as he created ambiguity around the place of melancholy within the system of the humours:

> The Name is imposed from the matter, and Disease denominated from the materiall cause… from black Choler. And whether it be a cause or an effect, a Disease or Symptome… I will not contend about it. It hath severall Descriptions, Notations, and Definitions (Part 1, Section 1).[63]

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[60] Porter, p.21 and pp.45-7.
[61] Jackson, p.326.
[62] Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p.50.
[63] Robert Burton, *The Anatomie of Melancholy*, 6th edn (London: Printed & are to be sold by Crips & Lodo, 1652), p.31. Hereafter, Burton's *Anatomy*.

Notwithstanding this, and with implications for Cowper in particular, Burton carefully delineated the various kinds of melancholy, and included 'Enthusiasts' among those 'parties' affected by religious melancholy in 'Excess', as opposed to those affected by religious melancholy in 'Defect': 'For methods sake I will reduce them to a twofold division, according to those two extreams of *Excess* and *Defect*, Impiety and Superstition, Idolatry and Atheisme '.[64] Burton clearly acknowledged that he was introducing religious melancholy for the first time as a 'species' apart (rather than a symptom or cause of another category). Having described how previous scholars traditionally divided 'Love-Melancholy' into two kinds, one whose object was women, and one whose object was God, religious melancholy was identified as the latter and given its own section:

> I have no pattern to follow as in some of the rest, no man to imitate. No physician hath as yet distinctly written of it as of the other [Love-Melancholy]; all acknowledge it a most notable Symptome, some a cause, but few a species or a kinde (Part 3, Section 4).[65]

The inclusion of enthusiasm under religious melancholy was a significant step since, in addition to its primary meaning as 'a specifically religious error', enthusiasm could also refer to an identifiable condition that could potentially be treated.[66] As such, Jackson argues that Burton is central in a 'transition' between an understanding of enthusiasm primarily in terms of theology to an understanding of it as both a religious phenomenon and a treatable disease: '… those contending with the deviant beliefs of enthusiasts and sectarians brought such views into the realm of religious controversy, aiming to explain away such beliefs as symptoms or melancholic illness'.[67] Also significant for Cowper, and in a very different way, for Blake, was Burton's focus on the idea of religious *despair* as a condition, which was separated from religious melancholy, and given its own section that grew with subsequent editions of the text, suggesting a growing anti-Calvinism. In the subsection on despair in the sixth edition of *Anatomy*, Burton lists its causes as, '*the Divel [sic],*

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[64] Burton, p.638.
[65] Burton, p.632.
[66] Mee, p.2.
[67] Jackson, p.329.

melancholy, meditation, Distrust, weakness of faith, rigid Ministers, misunderstanding Scriptures,

[and] *guilty consciences*' (Part 3, Section 4, Subsection 2).[68] Like Burton, both Cowper and Blake

have a very closely related sense of melancholy and despair. According to Burton, despair should

be treated with spiritual physic, that is religious counsel as well as medical advice: 'For Physick the

like course is to be taken with this as in other melancholy: diet, ayr [sic] , exercise… They must not

be left solitary, or to themselves, never idle… Counsel, good comfort is to be applyed '.[69]

The unceasing emphasis on the spirit, the engagement with prophecy, and formal aspects

of the poetry of Smart and Blake stand in pronounced opposition to a religio-politics which sought

to isolate and control enthusiasm. Cowper demonstrates that he was acutely aware of its

pejorative meaning. Even outside of an association with melancholy madness, the suspicions about

enthusiasm going into the second half of the eighteenth century were manifold, and were an

important factor in the determination of identity. Locke and then Hume had both defined

enthusiasm in opposition to reason and represented it as a false religion and a threat to civil order.

In Locke's words:

> This I take to be properly enthusiasm, which though founded neither on reason, nor divine
> revelation, but rising from the conceits of a warmed or over-weening brain, works yet, where it once
> gets footing, more powerfully on the persuasions and actions of men, than either of those two, or
> both together.[70]

Hume also interpreted enthusiastic claims to divine authority as antithetical to reason, and

squarely described such thinking as mad fanaticism: 'Human reason and even morality are rejected

as fallacious guides: And the fanatic madman delivers himself over, blindly, and without reserve, to

the supposed incursions of the spirit, and to inspiration from above'.[71] In times of great political

uncertainty such as the 1790s, as Jon Mee has extensively documented, enthusiasm was regarded

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[68] Burton, p.695. The subsection on despair is longer than twenty pages, pp.695-723.
[69] Burton, p.705.
[70] Locke, *Essay*, 'Chapter XIX: Of Enthusiasm' (Book IV), pp.616-17.
[71] David Hume, 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', in *Writings on Religion by David Hume*, ed. by Antony Flew (Open Court: La Salle, Illinois), 1992, pp.3-9 (p.4).

as a contagious danger to the entire body politic, and, as such, was subject to various forms of regulation, including the self-regulation of style.[72] The threat was seen to come through self-declared prophets and their effects on the plebeian crowd: 'From Locke onwards enthusiasm had been presented as a contagious disease capable of rapidly infecting the lower orders. To many the Methodist revival seemed to be corroborating evidence of this weakness in the popular mind'.[73] Scull even suggests that the apparent appeal of enthusiasm to the 'unlearned and the unwashed' contributed to the slow pace of the secularization of mental disorder among the lower orders, since the treatment of enthusiasm was made up of an eclectic mix of religious, astrological, and magical cures.[74] As Andrews and Scull report, Methodism was particularly stigmatized in the 1730s and 1740s: 'Through its emphasis on sin and the spirit world, on hellfire and damnation, it was said to be actually driving its adherents into madness'.[75] It is clear from medical works and from the discussions in the press about Cowper's malady that enthusiastic Methodism could still be counted among the causes of madness, alongside more organic or physiological contentions, at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Some of the distrust surrounding enthusiasm in a socio-political sense was reflected in seventeenth and eighteenth-century views of enthusiastic poets, but enthusiasm, as well as melancholy and other forms of eighteenth-century madness, could also have a more positive emphasis in poetry. Byrd comments on the scepticism towards enthusiastic poets in the first half of the eighteenth century:

> Distrust of rhetoric had for a generation been converging from several directions: from a general feeling that passionate, highly charged political language had driven the nation toward its devastating civil wars; from the impressive insistence of the natural scientists, newly organized into a Royal Society, that language concentrate on clarity and logic rather than "untruthful" imaginative

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[72] Mee, p.15.

[73] Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, p.49.

[74] Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp.176-77.

[75] *Undertaker of the Mind: John Monro and Mad-Doctoring in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p.80.

rhetoric; and again, especially from the obnoxiousness of the enthusiasts, who scorned logic and clarity and valued instead a kind of transcendent incomprehensibility.[76]

Jonathan Swift and Samuel Johnson had both argued that religion and poetry – let alone enthusiasm and poetry – were an ill-fit.[77] Later in the eighteenth century, a heady mix of enthusiasm and poetry was seen in no uncertain terms as a threat to public order, but, as Mee observes, citing James Thomson (1700-1748) and Mark Akenside (1721-1770), enthusiasm had earlier been advocated 'as a necessary part of poetic composition'.[78] In eighteenth-century cultural discussions on enthusiasm, the imagination is a key battleground, as it is in the debate around melancholy and other forms of madness. The association between religious delusion and a diseased or 'hypochondriacal imagination' is already made in Burton's *Anatomy*.[79] James Beattie described the deluded melancholic as a figure of '*gloomy* Imagination'.[80] Mad-doctors, notably William Battie, sought to define madness in terms of deluded imagination (as I explore in the next chapter). In *Rasselas* (1759), Johnson gives a description of madness as a disease of the intellect unbalanced by imagination: 'All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can controul and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any depravation of the mental faculties'.[81] The insanity lurking inside imagination threatens reason, but it is a question of degree and visibility, a point which enters into Johnson's sympathetic view of Smart during his confinement. Invoked by all sides, the imagination could be warily regarded as a disease and a potential source of social and political discord, as in Lockean philosophy, while at the same time, in the poetry of enthusiasm and melancholy, it was often found to be fundamentally healthy as a locus of truth or authentic being. Imagination is often, too, at the centre of arguments

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[76] Max Byrd, *Visits to Bedlam: Madness and Literature in the Eighteenth-Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974), pp.48-9.

[77] Neil Curry, *Christopher Smart* (Horndon: Northcote, 2005), p.70.

[78] Mee, p.17.

[79] Stephanie Shirilan, *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), p.70-1.

[80] James Beattie, *Dissertations Moral and Critical* 3 vols (Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1783), I, pp.291-2.

[81] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas,* ed. by Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.93.

put forward in relation to poetic identity. In Blake's work, the threat is seen from the other side and a selfless, inspired and imaginative poetry must be defended from its rational detractors:

> To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
> To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
> To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration
> That it no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of Madness
> Cast on the Inspired, by the tame high finisher of paltry Blots,
> Indefinite, or paltry Rhymes; or paltry Harmonies (*Milton*; E142, pl. 41, 6-10).

In Smart's work, the poetry of imagination is less explicitly endorsed but always implied in spiritual terms, as a line from *Jubilate Agno* has it: '*For there is no invention but the gift of God, and no grace like the grace of gratitude*' (I, p.25, B82).

Melancholy received poetic attention in the work of the 'graveyard poets', a loose literary grouping that draws together Thomas Parnell (1679-1718), Robert Blair (1699-1746), Edward Young (1683-1765), and Thomas Gray (1716-1771), and which is sometimes taken to include Smart and Cowper.[82] The deployment of melancholy in their work suggests the multiple ways the concept could be understood in the eighteenth century, not all of which referred to a condition. Melancholy in poetry does not necessarily describe a pathological condition. Jackson has given a useful summary:

> As a complex of character traits, a set of manners, or a coloration to a personality, melancholy was well regarded by many and thus often taken on as an affectation. For many, it was an indication of a superior mind, or at least of refinement and superior social status.[83]

This leads to some confusion in terminology, Jackson continues, since melancholy could refer to the primarily social affectation just noted, *and* to a severe form of madness as melancholia, *and* as a synonym for lesser conditions such as hypochondriasis and the spleen.[84] This even leaves aside the

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[82] Baker, p.101.
[83] Jackson, p.141.
[84] Jackson, p.143-44.

nuances in ideas of melancholy as a mixed condition, as described by Robert Burton in his

conception of religious melancholy, which was adapted by Richard Baxter (1615-1691), whose work

was in turn presented by Samuel Clifford as *Signs and Causes of Melancholy* (1716) (as I explore in

Chapter 2). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, poetry offers a very fluid conception of melancholy,

where different forms seem to move in and out of each other. Baker discerns, for instance, three

different kinds of melancholy in Young's *Night-Thoughts* (1742-45): melancholy as bereavement; a

moral melancholy linked to prophesying; and 'melancholy as metaphysical and religious despair'.[85]

This kind of multiplicity is part of the protean nature of madness in the eighteenth century.

While it is necessary to remain alert to the potential transformations, omissions, and

personal and literary synthesis that takes place within autobiographical writing, there are clear

textual and biographical links between the poets I have just been discussing. It may be helpful to

end this section by giving a short overview of these connections. Smart and Gray were known to

one another as contemporaries at Cambridge.[86] Cowper was well acquainted with the poetry of

Young, and, in his correspondence, laments the poet's death, describing how Young had been

visited by his friend, Nathaniel Cotton, during his final sickness: '… the earnestness with which he

[Young] discoursed about religion, gave him, in the doctor's eye, the appearance of a prophet'.[87]

Blake illustrated Blair's *The Grave* (1743) and Young's *Night-Thoughts*, writing a significant part of

The Four Zoas on the proof sheets of the designs he had made for Young's poem. The

correspondence and unpublished records of Smart, Cowper, and Blake, reveal a range of shared

concerns about the proper purpose of poetry, as well as biographical and textual links. Smart and

Cowper had common friends. Spencer Madan, Cowper's cousin, had acted in Smart's play, *A Trip to*

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[85] Baker, pp.104-5.

[86] Betty Rizzo and Robert Mahoney, 'Introduction', *The Annotated Letters of Christopher Smart* ed. by Betty, and Robert Mahony (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), (pp.xv-xxvii) p.xvi.

[87] William Cowper, 'Letter to Lady Hesketh, 12 July 1765', in *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper; Adelphi and Letters, 1750-1781*, ed. by James King and Charles Ryskamp, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), I, p.104. All subsequent references to Cowper's letters will be taken from this edition and will appear parenthetically within the text, giving the addressee, the date of the letter, and the page number of the King and Ryskamp edition.

Cambridge. Bonnell Thornton (1724-68), a lifelong friend of Smart who contributed to the *Midwife*, was also an intimate friend of Cowper and a co-member of the satirical group, the Nonsense Club.[88] Cowper subscribed to Smart's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1752) and to his edition of *A Translation of the Psalms of David* (1765).[89] The poet and biographer William Hayley (1745-1820) and the Reverend Thomas Cawardine (1734-1824) accessed the manuscript of Smart's *Jubilate Agno* while they were considering Cowper's affliction (regarding the text as 'a fair specimen of the nature of poetic insanity' according to the unreliable W.F. Stead).[90] While working in Felpham with Hayley, who was writing a biography of Cowper, Blake produced artwork of the dead poet and wrote a poem about the relationship between Cowper and Hayley, 'William Cowper Esqre' (E507). Blake also praised Cowper's letters: 'Perhaps, or rather Certainly, the very best letters that ever were published'.[91] Blake also referred to Cowper in an annotation to Spurzheim's *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind, or Insanity* (1817), which I discuss in Chapter 4. Finally, Curry speculates, but not implausibly, that Smart probably 'featured' in the conversations Blake and Hayley had while they were working on the Cowper material.[92]

Terminology: Protean Madness

The terminology of madness in the eighteenth century is complex in terms of historical precedent and contemporary usage. There is also the question of the relatedness of eighteenth-century madness to modern psychiatric conditions. Recent scholarship has addressed this issue directly with respect to melancholy and depression, such as Clark Lawlor's *From Melancholia to Prozac*

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[88] Min Wild, *Christopher Smart and Satire: 'Mary Midnight' and the Midwife* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p.197.

[89] Curry, p.106.

[90] William Force Stead, 'Introduction', *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song From Bedlam* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), p.15.

[91] William Blake, 'Letter to Thomas Butts, 11 September 1801', in *The Letters of William Blake with Related Documents*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.35. All subsequent references to Blake's letters will be taken from this edition and will appear parenthetically within the text, giving the addressee, the date of the letter, and the page number of the Keynes edition.

[92] Curry, p.107.

(2012), and the multi-authored, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression 1660-1800* (2011). When considering the pre-history of depression and its equivalent states, the authors of the latter volume draw attention to both 'continuity and discontinuity'.[93] I am wary of using modern criteria to diagnose past conditions, not least because it is only possible to access those conditions through an incomplete record of descriptive accounts, but I would rather emphasize than deny the parallels between eighteenth-century discussions on madness and those of the present day on disease-categories like schizophrenia and bipolar. However, uncovering the connections between modern psychiatric conditions and eighteenth-century understandings of madness is clearly a formidable task and well beyond the scope of this thesis. While it may be impossible to put the 'untranslatable' historical experience of madness into modern terms, as Northrop Frye argued with reference to Blake in the 1950s, it is possible to contrast the representation of madness and identity in poetry with that found in contemporaneous medical writing.[94] This approach can yield insight into both medicine and poetry even if representation brings its own set of issues.

An episode from the 1720s will give a good sense of the permeability between poetry and medical discourse in the eighteenth century, a point which is evident in the case of Nathaniel Cotton, the poet-physician who treated Cowper. A definition of the condition known as *the spleen* is the key concern of both a medical lecture on the subject by William Stukeley (1687-1785) and a poem by Anne Finch (1661-1720). Stukeley introduces *Of the Spleen* (1723) by validating the form of poetry as an aid to the enquiry into disease. He pointedly includes Finch's 'A Pindaric Ode on the Spleen' (1701) in order to 'help out my own description of the disease'.[95] The poem offers a

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[93] Allan Ingram and Stuart Sim, 'Introduction', *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800*, ed. by Allan Ingram, Stuart Sim, Clark Lawlor, Richard Terry, John Baker and Leigh Wetherall-Dickson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), (pp.1-24) p.2.
[94] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.13.
[95] William Stukely, *Of the Spleen, Its Description & History, Uses & Diseases, Particularly the Vapors, with their Remedy* (London: Printed for the Author, 1723), 'To the Reader', no page given.

compelling description of an unknowable malady which is nevertheless seen to have very real

consequences:

> What art thou Spleen, which every thing do'st ape?
> thou Proteus to abus'd mankind,
> who never yet thy real cause could find,
> or fix thee to remain in one continu'd shape!
> Still varying thy perplexing form,
> now a dead sea thou'lt represent,
> a calm of stupid discontent;
> then dashing on the rocks, wilt rage into a storm.[96]

Finch's ascription of the sea-god Proteus to the spleen suggests the shifting and elusive nature of

the condition.[97] In literature, the figure of Proteus is linked to inconstancy by Shakespeare;[98] and to

alchemy and the quest for the philosopher's stone by Milton in *Paradise Lost* (1667).[99] The Finch

poem claims that the spleen is beyond the power of any remedy, with the physician unable to

'trace the secret the mysterious ways, / by which thou do'st surprize and prey upon the mind' (lines

44-5) (See Appendix II: Figure 1). The physician's impotence in the poem makes Stukeley's

trumpeting of it even more remarkable: 'Tho' the physician's greatest gains, / altho' his growing

wealth he sees / daily encreas'd by ladies fees, / yet do'st thou battle all his studious pains' (38-41).

Finch addresses the spleen directly, but the unknowable nature of the condition is represented as a

threat to both poet and doctor. As Eric Parisot comments, 'melancholia as a state of failed or false

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[96] Anne Finch, 'A Pindaric Ode on the Spleen, By the Late Right Honourable the Countess of Winchilsea', 1-8, no page given.

[97] Homer, *The Odyssey*, rev. trans. by D.C.H. Rieu (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), p.50. Proteus, who herds seals in Egypt, is consulted by Menelaus about how to return home: 'This island is the haunt of that immortal seer, Proteus of Egypt, the Old Man of the Sea, who owes allegiance to Poseidon and knows the depth of all the seas' (Book 4: Menelaus and Helen, 84-6).

[98] William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 3-24 (p.23). Proteus (Act V, Scene IV): 'Inconstancy falls off ere it begins'.

[99] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 1989), p.73. 'That stone, or like to that which here below / Philosophers in vain so long have sought, / In vain, though by their powerful Art they bind / Volatile Hermes, and call up Proteus from the Sea, / Drain'd through a Limbec to his Native form. (Book II: 600-5).

piety… disables rather than abets poetic apprehension of the divine'.[100] The search to understand

and treat it leaves the physician vulnerable to being caught by it, and, like Blake's sense of

'Despair', the Spleen kills off creativity: 'I feel my verse decay, & my crampt numbers fail' (76).

Finch's commentary on the Spleen as a Proteus was not unusual. Porter indicates that there

was a consensus here: '… the one thing commentators from Shakespeare onwards were able to

agree upon was that insanity was a veritable Proteus. How infinite its varieties! How mercurial its

qualities! How artfully could lunacy ape sanity!'[101] Burton described melancholy as a Proteus, as did

the poet and physician, Richard Blackmore (1654-1729).[102] In *The Dunciad*, like Proteus, poets from

the 'College' of Bedlam cannot be restrained: 'Keen, hollow winds howl through the bleak recess, /

Emblem of music caused by emptiness. / Hence bards, like Proteus long in vain tied down, / Escape

in monsters, and amaze the town (35-8)'.[103] In order to satirically show how 'near allied dulness is

to madness', Pope alludes to a vacuum at the centre of the latter concept, but madness is a threat

through its vague inarticulateness, as well as its monstrous nature.[104] Adjectives like chameleon

and protean are also a feature of later criticism, as for instance in Scull's work on hysteria. Hysteria

is described as 'a chameleon-like disease that can mimic the symptoms of any other, and one that

somehow seems to mould itself to the culture in which it appears'.[105] Later in the same text, Scull

observes that, although hysteria and hypochondria are 'admittedly protean categories embracing

disorders that mimicked other forms of disease, [they] must necessarily have caught in their net

numerous afflictions that today would be assigned to a wholly different realm of neurological

pathology…'.[106] As well as the extent to which madness was embedded in language concerns, I

want to emphasize the status of madness as a concept in a continuous flux. Like its subdivisions,

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[100] *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p.79.
[101] Porter, p.1.
[102] Porter, pp.45-6.
[103] Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, in *The Major Works*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.411-569 (pp.436-7).
[104] Pope, p.436.
[105] Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.6.
[106] Scull, p.34.

madness is the Proteus that eludes definition. It is always in the act of being defined but a definition acceptable to all never materializes. If the meaning of madness is always unstable, though, its very unsettled nature seems to draw more and more efforts to resolve it, so that madness can at least be understood as an enduring conceptual problem in a linguistic sense.

Despite several taxonomic medical works on madness, there is little by way of an agreed approach or common understanding at the end of the eighteenth century. (I have given a list of medical and literary works in my Timeline: see Appendix I). Poetry and medicine do not necessarily move in opposite directions. The title page of Arnold's *Observations* includes a quotation from Gray's poem, 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College': 'And moody madness laughing wild / Amid severest woe'.[107] Given the poem's gloomy themes of failure, disappointment, the coming of old age and death, the Leicester mad-doctor Arnold makes a curious choice which nevertheless contributes to the book's overall sense of its own limits. In the Preface to the first (1782) edition, for instance, Arnold takes some trouble to insist on the essential reality of the book's object to discover the secret of madness in nature, remarking of his own observations: '… though they offer but merely the outline of an important object, it is not the chimerical delineation of an imaginary form which they exhibit; it is not a fancy-piece; but a real copy… drawn with some care and exactness immediately from nature'.[108] Arnold readily concedes the provisional nature of the project and his potential fallibility: 'I am sensible, indeed, that my enumeration, and definitions, of the several species, and varieties, of Insanity, are still very incomplete; and that in some instances they may possibly be erroneous'.[109] This kind of reflection on a process of reasonable endeavour is made by other mad-doctors and suggests the extent to which madness was seen to be beyond the grasp of a full medical understanding, particularly in terms of cause, as Arnold also suggests: '… symptoms, are the only ready, and infallible means, of distinguishing disorders: the distinction from

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[107] Arnold, I.
[108] Arnold, 'Preface to the First Edition', in *Observations*, 2nd edn, I, liii-iviii (p.liii).
[109] Arnold, p.lv.

causes being exceedingly vague, and uncertain'.[110] The sense that an understanding of madness

remained beyond the scope of human knowledge is also conveyed by the response to Arnold's

work. His second Preface (written 1806) begins with a vigorous defence of his particular

arrangement and scientific approach against the 'confounding' of medical and moral insanity.[111]

This discussion serves to indicate the ease with which such basic distinctions could be mixed up

(although Arnold's arrangement was certainly elaborate). Such methodological disputes are a sign

of the profound instability of madness as a referent.

A key aspect of this instability resides in the difficulty of distinguishing between 'madness

itself' (that is madness as a felt experience; the 'truly insane') and 'mad' writing (writing that is

about madness).[112] Allan Ingram has suggested that language might be seen as a madhouse with

literary form part of the structure of the house, 'in which madness can retrieve itself, or retrieve

something that is nearly itself… '.[113] Leading up to this point, Ingram acknowledges the possibility

that madness may exist 'beyond the framework of a linguistic construct'.[114] Having considered the

debate presented by Ingram and Faubert in *Cultural Constructions of Madness in Eighteenth*

Century Writing (2005), I take the view that, even in the case of writers like Smart and Cowper who

were judged to be insane by eighteenth-century standards, it is safer to consider the work 'mad'

writing rather than the expression of 'madness itself'.[115] Both categories are problematic, but to

discover the latter, as Ingram and Faubert suggest, is almost impossible. Even writing that seems to

directly express madness as an illness could be a retrospective effort to salvage something in

linguistic terms from an earlier experience, or just an attempt to represent an unexperienced

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[110] Arnold, p.lvi.

[111] Arnold, pp.iii-v.

[112] Allan Ingram and Michelle Faubert, *Cultural Constructions of Madness in Eighteenth Century Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp4-5 and p.202. The authors allude to the work of Sander Gilman who makes a distinction between the history of 'illness' and the history of 'disease', the latter viewed as a social construct that provides a framework for understanding the former.

[113] Ingram, T*he Madhouse of Language*, p.13.

[114] Ingram cites Foucault: 'Language is the first and last structure of madness, its constituent form; on language are based all the cycles in which madness articulates its nature'. p.8.

[115] Ingram and Faubert, p.202.

madness in writing. The key point, I think, is that the search for 'madness itself' in language and art almost inevitably entails a confrontation with representation upon representation: 'Disbelief may be willingly suspended, but we are still faced with what is at bottom a performance, either of lines on a page that get up and speak or of crafting with colour, shape and movement'.[116] This does not mean, however, that representations of madness in poetry and in medicine cannot yield insight. As will be seen in relation to Battie and Smart, and Haslam and Blake, contentions around the purpose of language make for utterly different conceptions of identity which reflect back on each other. My experience of the jargon-filled language of modern psychiatry, moreover, has cautioned me against the idea that medical language can ever fully account for 'madness itself' – it sometimes seems to contribute to it.

In the consideration of madness as a cultural construction, it is helpful to recall Foucault's position on historiography, as interpreted by Paul Bové: 'He will not accept the essentialist ideal that there is an identity of madness across time nor an identity of cultural productions for the representation of 'madness''.[117] If Foucault can be seen to challenge the whole discipline of historiography insofar as it was involved in producing a model of modernity based on Enlightenment ideals, Smart and Blake might be seen to represent something of a counter-cultural tendency within this. I examine this in relation to Locke's empiricist promotion of personal identity-as-consciousness. If Dror Wahrman is right to suggest that the last decades of the eighteenth century mark an important period in the development of a new form of personal identity with 'a fundamental emphasis on self' which is linked to modern individualism, then Smart and Blake both have a vexed relationship with such a trajectory.[118] Some of the most challenging thought in these poets in relation to madness touches on the idea of self-identity, which is often treated warily. All three poets express poetic identity in terms of a spiritual relationship with God. With Smart, this

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[116] Ingram and Faubert, p.202.
[117] Paul Bové, 'Madness, medicine and the state', in *Rewriting the History of Madness: Studies in Foucault's Histoire de la Folie*, ed. by Arthur Still, and Irving Velody (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.52-62 (p.57).
[118] *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2004), p.xiii.

involves an idea of self-sacrifice, as in his 'Hymn on Generosity' (XXI), where everyone and everything forms part of God's 'vast communicative Mind': 'Not for themselves the warblers build, / Not for themselves the lands are till'd, / By them that tread the corn' (II, p.348, 1-13). While Cowper agonizes over the self as a potential source of worldly vanity, Blake, in *Jerusalem*, simply denounces the Selfhood as a fundamental error: 'In Selfhood we are nothing: but fade away in mornings breath' (E187, pl. 40, 13). At the same time, the enthusiasm the poets were identified with was considered to be a threat to emerging understandings of personal identity tending towards individualism. While Smart and Blake remonstrate with the empirical, psychological, and linguistic theories of Locke, the enthusiasm that the philosopher pathologized could be seen in no uncertain terms as a threat to an emerging idea of a unitary self, a point made by Makdisi: '"Enthusiasm," in short, threatened the sanctity, the stability, the sovereign imperviousness of the unitary subject, just as it threatened the sanctity of private property and the political norms and orders of the state'.[119]

Cowper arguably absorbs key aspects of Locke's theories of personal identity and the association of ideas, but the poet's commentary on the relationship between the self and the demands of authorship shows that *personal identity* was by no means a universally accepted notion. In the lead up to the publication of *Poems* (1782), Cowper's letters reveal an uncertainty over his spiritual status and a doubt concerning the validity of the self as a subject for poetry. Although a form of the digressive self-as-consciousness eventually emerges in his poetry, Cowper resists self-presentation. 'My Ambition', he explains in a letter to William Unwin, 'would be more gratified by annihilating the National Incumbrances, than by going daily down to the Bottom of a Mine to wallow in my own Emolument' (2 December 1779, p.311). In this letter, Cowper enclosed the poem, 'Human Frailty', demonstrating a sense of trepidation about the public nature of authorship: 'I thank you for your Interest employ'd to procure me a Place in the Paper, perhaps I may use it; but I am not always in a Humour to appear in Print. What follows is for Private Use' (2

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[119] Makdisi, p.296.

December 1779, p.311). Cowper was not alone in asking whether there was anything intrinsically valuable about the new idea of the self.

Earlier in the century, in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), Hume had denied that the concept of personal identity was anything other than a fiction. Identity is a quality attributed to distinct perceptions in the imagination which are then reflected upon, and as such, it is performed: 'The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations' (Book I: Of the Understanding).[120] Personal identity, as a developing concept, was subject to criticism and, on occasions ridicule. Matthew Prior's 'A Dialogue between Mr: John Lock and Seigneur de Montaigne' (1720) parodies personal identity as 'Mr John Lock' tells his servant, also called John, that he may go downstairs to sup but must lock the door, causing great confusion:

> John You may go down and Sup; Shut the door. Now John has been a common Appellative to Millions of Men… Now none of these could my Master Speak, for they are either Dead or Absent; it must therefore be me; doubtful again: for my Masters own Name is John, and being a Whimsical Person, he may probably talk to himself. Bo, that cant be neither, for if he had Commanded himself, why did he not obey himself: If he would go down why does he sit still in the Elbow-chair, 'twas certainly meant to me John, not to him John. Well then, go down and Sup, go down. Whither?[121]

Prior pokes fun at Locke's theory of personal identity and the philosopher's deterministic theory of language, which was a major bugbear for Smart and Blake, but which nevertheless frequently underscored medical views of insanity.

The complexity of the context around personal identity is also informed by a pressure on eighteenth-century poets to meet new expectations of a reading public in a growing marketplace, as Hess has described: 'Poets from the mid eighteenth century onwards faced both an increasing sense of isolation in relation to a largely unknown public and a corresponding sense that the inherited genres, roles, and models of poetic identity no longer fit the radically different contexts of

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[120] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by Ernest C Mossner (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), p.301.
[121] 'A Dialogue between Mr: John Lock and Seigneur de Montaigne', in *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.615-639 (p.636).

the market-place'.[122] Hess goes on to suggest that this leads to experimentation with new forms of direct and indirect poetic identity, and suggests that Cowper occupies an interim stage between Pope and Wordsworth, using *The Task* as an example of 'ambivalent self-representation'.[123] An association with madness, though, could all but shatter the foundations of social identity, and the forms that self-reference took in the context of stigma and public denunciation, and in the cases of Smart and Cowper, of confinement, is an important theme in this thesis.

For all the difficulties in delving into the multifaceted chameleon of eighteenth-century madness, it is possible to cautiously suggest some of the ways in which historical discussions mirror and inform those of today. Some modern thinkers imply that there is at least some continuity. Darian Leader's *What is Madness?* (2011) resists the methodological assumptions of modern psychiatry, and startlingly opts to use the terms madness and psychosis interchangeably while denying that he holds a relativist view.[124] Leader's argument that madness should be taken as a conceptual problem, rather than a purely medical one that has been 'solved by genetic or neurological research' has its antecedents in the eighteenth century.[125] I would emphasize both the long historical engagement with madness as a philosophical conundrum, and the particularly intense nature of the public discussions around madness towards the end of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, which come to focus on the institutional scandal and public recriminations of a large-scale parliamentary investigation. There are a number of factors which enter into the public wrangling over insanity at the close of the century, not least the ongoing perception that this was a growing problem: 'From Georgian mad-doctors to Victorian psychiatrists, the consensus was that insanity was on the increase, in fact mushrooming quite disproportionately beyond the net surge in population'.[126]

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[122] Hess, p.6.
[123] Hess, pp.22-3.
[124] Darian Leader, *What is Madness?* (London: Hamilton, 2011), p.7.
[125] Leader, p.5.
[126] Porter, p.160.

The Political and Legal Framework around Madness

Porter grapples with the notion of the eighteenth century as a disaster for psychiatry and its

patients, but persuasively argues that the century can be lost in judgements made in the light of

both earlier and later events.[127] In this way, an over-emphasis on seventeenth-century spiritual

physic, or a perspective seen through the historiography of the asylum movement of the

nineteenth century, distorts an understanding of eighteenth-century madness and its treatment.

A look at the political and legal context around the confinement and release of both Smart

and Cowper immediately challenges Foucault's intimation that the eighteenth-century response to

madness was characterized by centralized institutional control. In the same year (1763) as a small-

scale parliamentary investigation into abuses committed in private madhouses, Cowper was

admitted to Cotton's 'Collegium Insanorum', which was run on religious principles; while Smart was

released from Potter's private madhouse after upwards of four years there and following an earlier

one-year stay at St. Luke's Hospital for the Insane.[128] The issue at stake in the parliamentary

investigation was not state control but the problems caused by a complete lack of regulation and

legislative oversight to the point that many private madhouses did not even keep registers.[129] It is

misleading to think of a systemic response to madness in the eighteenth century. Parliamentary

intervention, as Porter points out, was very limited throughout the eighteenth century.[130] (I have

listed the key Acts in Appendix I). Parliament did not regulate private madhouses until 1774, but

even then, the legislation was quite tame. The Act for Regulating Private Madhouses set up a

limited system of inspection and meant that confinement now required certification from a

medical practitioner (unless the lunatic was a pauper) but was not always enforced and has been

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[127] Porter, p.4.
[128] *A Report from the Committee, Appointed (Upon the 27th Day of January, 1763) To Enquire into The State of the Private Madhouses in this Kingdom with the Proceedings of the House thereupon. Published by Order of the House of Commons* (London: Printed for John Whiston and Benjamin White et al, 1763).
[129] Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, p.20.
[130] Porter, p.111.

regarded as ineffective.[131] Abuses continued until the far more searching investigation into the

state of madhouses across the country from 1815-16.[132] The eighteenth century is characterized by

the regular documentation of abuses, an increasing specialization and professionalization of the

mad-doctoring trade, but also by state inertia. For the legacy of asylums, this is an important point

to note. The original promotion of the asylum as a concept that built upon charitable hospitals, as

well as the moral therapy of the late eighteenth century, was full of idealism. The concern was to

avoid the kind of scandal that muddied the reputation of many private institutions, as well as the

major public one at Bethlem.

The relatively tolerant treatment that Smart and Cowper seem to have received shows that

eighteenth-century madhouses were not uniformly barbaric. Conditions were extremely variable.

Private madhouses could be operated in accordance with the will of the proprietor, who was by no

means necessarily a doctor. A wide range of institutions housed the insane, which included bride

wells and parish workhouses in addition to the private madhouses and the key symbolic institution

of Bethlem, '… ironically, the smallest, most specialized, and least affluent of the great London

hospitals of the Georgian age'.[133] There was not a set of institutions that all related to an

administrative heart at the centre of government. Rather, as William Parry-Jones established

through the influential term 'trade in lunacy', mad-doctors and patients were part of an expanding

commercial sector in a developing consumer society.[134] Andrews and Scull describe how the

growing affluence of London fuelled this sector, and enabled mad-doctors to command large fees

by administering privately to aristocrats, in addition to work in the larger hospitals for the insane

poor.[135] Referring to Smart's doctor, William Battie, the same writers emphasize the remunerative

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[131] Scull, p.24.
[132] Scull, pp.115-22.
[133] Jonathan Andrews, and Andrew Scull, *Customers and Patrons of the Mad-Trade: The Management of Lunacy in Eighteenth-Century London* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2003), p.7. Bethlem was expanded after the 1720s.
[134] William Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy, A Study of Private Madhouses in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1971).
[135] *Customers and Patrons*, pp.9-11.

potential within the emerging 'mad-business' which is defined after Parry-Jones as: 'a "trade in lunacy" whose key elements included a growing reliance on institutionalization (particularly in profit-making "madhouses") and on an increasingly visible cadre of mad-doctors'.[136]

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the opening of new public hospitals for the insane began with St. Luke's in 1751, where Smart was confined between 1757-58. While St. Luke's was an important new charitable institution with a reforming rationale which precipitated the establishment of other specialist hospitals, there is little to confirm Foucault's notion of 'the Great Confinement' in terms of either the management of the institutions or the numbers involved.[137] After St. Luke's come hospitals for the insane at Manchester (1752) and Newcastle (1765), and later, the first named public asylum at York (1777), followed by another one at Liverpool (1797). However, these institutions were run in very different ways and operated quite independently. York Asylum, as distinct from the Retreat, was very quickly mired in scandal.[138] Local and regional differences were significant amid the overall diversity of institutional, medical, and religious responses to madness.

In the 1790s and early 1800s, as Blake worked on his major poems, there were a number of significant developments. Between 1788-89, Francis Willis and others had attended on the assumed madness of the King George III, which, as Ingram notes, '… brought the management of madness to the very centre of national consciousness'.[139] The issue of the King's sanity returned in 1801, and after 1810, the King was confined in Windsor Castle for ten years with a Regency Bill in 1811. The turn of the eighteenth century saw the opening of the York Retreat (1796) and the famous nineteenth century asylum at Ticehurst House (1797), as well as the first criminal defence of insanity, which entered into law as the *Act for the Safe Keeping of Insane Persons Charged with Offences* (1800).[140] Between 1816-19, there was an attempt to introduce new legislation which

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[136] Andrews and Scull, *Undertaker*, p.145.
[137] Porter, p.8.
[138] Scull, p.116.
[139] Ingram, *The Madhouse of Language*, p.5.
[140] Porter, p.117.

advocated the building of county asylums and a far more rigorous system of inspection; three Bills

passed the Commons but were rejected by the Lords with resistance from within medicine as well

as from madhouse proprietors and the gentry.[141] This came after two parliamentary investigations:

an 1807 one that resulted in Wynn's Act (1808), which enabled county authorities to provide an

asylum funded by rates but did not require them to do so; and the 1815-16 parliamentary select

committee already mentioned.

Medicine and Mad-Doctoring

Despite the increasing secularization and professionalization of mad-doctors in the eighteenth

century, the most influential institutional response to madness was arguably the moral treatment

put in place by the Quakers at the York Retreat. Medical qualification was not required there, but,

as Barry Edginton has described, the philosophy and institutional set-up of the county-wide

asylums that came to be medically led in the nineteenth century drew heavily on the ideals and

practical arrangements of the Tukes, William (1732-1822) and his grandson, Samuel (1748-1857).[142]

Locke's emphasis on the irrationality of madness as an incorrect association of ideas – rather than

the older idea of madness as bestial – led to a profound change in its treatment: 'Since madness

now appeared to consist at least as much in mental as organic defect, psychological rather than

physiological methods seemed appropriate. And central to psychological medicine was the concept

of management'.[143] Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a

discernible but gradual movement away from the system of the humours towards a more

neurological approach in medicine, but religious ideas of madness were not only popular but

guided and informed professional understanding. Medical and religious perspectives often merge

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[141] Scull, pp.122-5.

[142] 'A space for moral management: The York Retreat's influence on asylum design', in *Madness, Architecture and the Built Environment: Psychiatric Spaces in Historical Context*, ed. by Leslie Topp, James E. Moran and Jonathan Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.85-104 (p.93) and (pp.99-100).

[143] Anne Digby, *Madness, Morality, and Medicine: A Study of the York Retreat, 1796-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.6.

together as they do in Cowper's doctor, Nathaniel Cotton. Wesley's *Primitive Physic* (1747), which

reached a twenty-fifth edition by 1805, began by calling for a revival of the 'Art of Healing' in

accordance with religious principles, lamenting the rise of 'Physick' as an 'abstruse Science, quite

out of the reach of Ordinary Men', with its 'Technical Terms' and 'Critical Knowledge of

Anatomy'.[144] As Wesley stated immediately, sickness was a product of the fall and therefore lunacy

and all other ailments could only be effectively treated with religious advice and simple

remedies.[145] The influence of classical and medieval medicine on the treatment of madness

continued to be marked in the eighteenth century*.*

      Medicine in general was met with great scepticism and the iniquity of doctors was a

common satirical theme. Smart's periodical, the *Midwife* (1750-3) is scathing about medics, as

apothecaries, surgeons and physicians are all slighted as more dangerous than useful. In one

example, an undertaker complains that the absence of the town's physician has led to a decline in

the number of deaths and hence a loss of business:

> You see, Sir, the Necessity of your restoring to the Publick, since Business so stagnates without you; neither will the Intemperance of the Times, the Sedulity of the Apothecaries, War, Pestilence, and Famine, suffice for our Purpose, if you continue in the Country.[146]

The Midwife was a miscellany of parody and light satirical writing on current affairs and

government, summarized by Min Wild in terms of its 'extension of the learned wit tradition', and its

criticisms of Enlightenment philosophy: '[It] attacked forms of intransigent materialism that

attempted to reduce the universe and its inhabitants to mechanistic, mathematised engines'.[147]

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[144] Wesley, John, *Primitive Physic: Or, An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (London: Printed and Sold by Thomas Trye, 1747), pp.x-xi.
[145] Wesley, 'Preface', p.iii.
[146] Christopher Smart, ed. *The Midwife, Or; Old Woman's Magazine*, 3 vols (London: Printed for T. Carnan in St Paul's Church Yard, 1750-53), I, pp.49-51. All subsequent references are taken from this edition of *The Midwife* and will be given parenthetically in the text, with the title of the article, followed by the volume of the edition, followed by the page numbers, as ('*A Letter from an eminent Undertaker in Town, to an eminent Physician in the Country*', I, pp.49-51).
[147] Wild, p.13.

Although it is difficult to definitively attribute authorship of individual articles to Smart, one can be sure that he had a stake in everything that the magazine published as its editor. Medical expertise is routinely mocked within it:

> Physicians frequently obtain a Name for Cures perform'd by Nature or Accident, or by Help of the Patient's Imagination. Many Diseases may be changed, or even cured by the Passions, as Surprize, Joy, and strong Expectation; of which there are numerous Instances: Yet in such Cases, the ignorant Multitude give all the Credit to the Doctor; though he did no more than visit the Patient, without prescribing' ('*Of the* PHYSICIAN', III, p.14).

The Midwife also contains some revealing pieces which suggest an even greater degree of scepticism attended to medical ideas of madness. 'To the Criticks and the Poets', for instance, parodies literary criticism through the dissection of a mad-song stanza of doubtful merit:

> '*On* JOLLITY: *An* Ode, *or* Song, *or both*.
> I.
> There was a jovial Butcher,
> He liv'd at *Northern-fall-gate*,
>   He kept a Stall
>   At *Leadenhall*,
> And got drunk at the Boy at *Aldgate*.
>
> II.
> He ran down the *Houndsditch* reeling,
> At *Bedlam* he was frighted,
>   He in *Moorfields*
>   Be sh—t his Heels
> And at *Hoxton* he was wiped (II, pp.175-176).

These verses are then forensically examined during which the connection between poetry and madness emerges:

> [The poet] would probably have given a Description of that horrid Place [Bedlam], where so many of his Fraternity had made their miserable Exits, but the Catastrophe of his Piece was at Hand; the Fate of this Hero was determin'd, and a long Suspension of it by any Episode whatsoever, wou'd have been unnatural and offensive…. (p.179).

For all the scatological comedy here, the piece leaves the reader in no doubt that Bethlem was an institution held in very low esteem, and other *Midwife* pieces point to the abuses of wrongful confinement and mistreatment, as I explore in the following chapter.

The branches of eighteenth-century medicine had strong class connotations and varying degrees of social standing, as Andrews and Scull report: '… physicians were, or aspired to be, gentlemen; surgeons and apothecaries were seen, in certain ways, to be tradesmen'.[148] Physicians, uniquely, had their own Royal College and members were expected to have a medical degree which qualified them to practise 'physic' (the internal medicine which they were the guardians of); many treated the wealthy on a private basis and sought to distinguish themselves from the other branches by styling themselves as learned in both modern and ancient literature; physicians would not generally touch the patient, and as such, surgeons (who cut and performed blood-letting) and apothecaries (who prepared prescriptions) could be regarded as 'manual attendants'.[149] The question of pathology was the especial preserve of the physician, as Christopher Lawrence describes:

> They knew from their book-learning the possible symptoms of these diseases and also the hidden disorders (the pathology) which could give rise to the symptoms. These hidden disorders comprised a great number of imbalances in the relationship between the solid fibres and the many fluids which were held to constitute the body.[150]

Disease was understood, above all, as a deviation from a natural state, and so the physician's primary function was to restore balance: '… to regulate fluids, to restore harmony and keep what was inside the skin in concord with the outside world'.[151] The elite position of the physician, however, was increasingly questioned, and the hierarchy was not always maintained, so that apothecaries sometimes prescribed and practised internal medicine, for instance, and surgeons

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[148] Andrews and Scull, *Undertaker*, p.19.
[149] Christopher Lawrence, *Medicine in the Making of Modern Britain, 1700-1920* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp.9-12.
[150] Lawrence, p.11.
[151] Lawrence, p.11.

emphasized their unique skills to challenge the hold physicians had over certain diseases, such as syphilis.[152] Given the limitations of diagnosis, the physician's role was often more geared to the management of the disease than to its cure.

Associated with death and loss of social standing, mad-doctoring is likened to undertaking by Andrews and Scull: '… [Both lines of work] discovered that they seemed inextricably linked to the practice and stigma of the lower forms of trade, no matter how hard they struggled to raise the status of their respective occupations'.[153] This is an important point which supports the authors' contention that the appellation they use to describe the mad-doctor – 'Undertaker of the Mind' – should be understood as having both positive and negative dimensions:

> Mad-doctoring was perhaps the least trustworthy of any contemporary emerging specialty, for, more often than any other, it called for measures taken against the will, or without the cooperation, of the patient, and involved a more explicit threat to the patient's personal liberty, legal rights, social status, and identity.[154]

If the specialty was regarded doubtfully, the job was certainly a difficult one, and if mad-doctors were regarded with suspicion by almost everyone, it was not always fairly so. Mad-doctoring was informed by important earlier thought, notably the empirical, linguistic and psychological theories of Locke; the iatrochemical explanations of the body given by Thomas Willis (1621-1675); and the mechanistic and physiological ideas of Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738). The influence of Willis's work, as Scull explains, implicated 'the nervous system and the brain in the aetiology of madness [and] marked the beginnings of a move away from the humoral explanations of madness that medical men had embraced since Hippocrates and Galen'.[155] Boerhaave was a 'synthesizer' who responded to the new emphasis on the nervous system, but at the same time believed that milder nervous disorders 'could be treated with persuasion'.[156]

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[152] Lawrence, p.13.
[153] Andrews and Scull, *Undertaker*, p.xx.
[154] Andrews and Scull, p.56.
[155] Scull, *Madness in Civilization*, p.154.
[156] Scull, p.173.

Many mad-doctors – including Battie, Cotton, and Haslam – recognized the limitations of eighteenth-century medicine and referred to wider social issues. In the 1730s, the popular Scottish physician, George Cheyne (1671-1743), pointed to the importance of a '*Regimen of Diet*' in the treatment of mental and physical illness.[157] In his reporting of the 'English Malady', Cheyne also drew attention to the role of society in the national dispensation towards 'nervous Distempers, Spleen, Vapours, and Lowness of Spirits'.[158] Since there was very little central oversight, ideas on the treatment of madness took many different forms. Traditional treatments included abstinence, bleeding, cupping, cathartics, emetics, blisters, and hot and cold baths. William Pargeter (1760-1810) was still recommending their use towards the end of the century, alongside sedatives like opium.[159] Pargeter, who left medicine for the church in 1795, highlighted the importance of the moral authority of the mad-doctor – the acquired 'art' of governing patients with 'a discerning and penetrating eye'.[160] If Cotton advocated the importance of religious counsel in the treatment of madness, Pargeter was not alone in holding '*Fanaticism*' – understood as 'religious *enthusiasm*' (and particularly Methodism) – as a 'very common cause of Madness'.[161] Haslam also implicated Methodism in the production of insanity, and looked on religious 'delusions' with scant sympathy.

One of the most important and lasting debates about the management of madness in the eighteenth century concerned the role of confinement. While Battie and Haslam vigorously defended its necessity, others like Pargeter and the military surgeon, Andrew Harper (? – 1790) suggested that 'the cells of Bedlam' contributed to the problem: 'Confinement thwarts every salutary purpose, and defeats every effort which nature makes'.[162] Those who had experienced what they regarded as wrongful confinement in a madhouse, from Alexander Cruden (1701-70) to

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[157] *The English Malady: Or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds* (London: Printed for G Strahan, 1733), p.273.
[158] Cheyne, 'Preface', pp.i.-xvi (p.i).
[159] William Pargeter, *Observations on Maniacal Disorders* (Reading: Smart and Cowslade, 1792), pp.80-98.
[160] Pargeter, p.49.
[161] Pargeter, p.31.
[162] *A Treatise on the Real Cause and Cure of Insanity* (London: Stalker and Waltes, 1789), pp.60-1.

Smart to William Belcher, would surely have concurred with Harper's remark.[163] Belcher went

furthest of all in suggesting that the treatment within madhouses was intentionally devised to

make the sane *insane* so that others might profit: 'THE TRADE OF LUNACY; OR, AN APPROVED

RECEIPT, *To make a Lunatic, and seize his Estate*'.[164] Despite his attack on the lunacy authorities,

Belcher admitted his own pathological leanings towards 'real lunacy', offering himself as a material

victim of the trade in lunacy.[165]

William Battie was the leading medical figure at St. Luke's Hospital for the Insane from its

inception in 1751, but also someone who made a considerable fortune from additional work in

private madhouses. The son of a vicar in a small parish in Devonshire, educated at Eton and

Cambridge, Battie had been a governor at Bethlem Hospital since 1742, prior to taking up his

position at the new institution.[166] While his influence on the development of psychiatry has been

much noted, his pamphlets, and many aspects of his career were controversial at the time, and

drew sharp criticism, not least from John Monro, the lead physician and a proponent of traditional

methodologies at Bethlem. As I explore in Chapter 2, Battie contributed to a developing ideal of the

lunatic asylum as a place of recovery, where the idea of removal from harmful influences and

hence confinement as a necessary first step before treatment, assumes great importance. The

attitude towards confinement in Smart's *Jubilate Agno*, though, shows that this was very far from

an accepted model in the middle part of the eighteenth century.

Where Battie tended to vaunt his achievements, Nathaniel Cotton was more likely to

depreciate his own. As I show in Chapters 3 and 4, Cowper applauded Cotton's 'medical skill', but

with a sense that the physician's impeccable religious credentials were at least equally

important.[167] Cotton was a pupil of Boerhaave at Leiden, the leading centre of medical research

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163 Alexander Cruden, *The London Citizen Exceedingly Injured* (Edinburgh: T. Cooper and Mrs. Dodd, 1739).
164 *Address to Humanity* (London: Allen and West, 1796), p.13.
165 Belcher, p.2.
166 Andrews and Scull, p.49.
167 Hayley, *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq. with Remarks on Epistolary Writers by William Hayley, Esq.*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Baldwin and others, 1834), I, p.29.

and training in Europe at the time, which included chemistry and botany as part of the discipline. (Boerhaave held three chairs there in Medicine, Botany, and Chemistry, from 1718-29).[168] Samuel Johnson's account of Boerhaave's life, written in 1738, celebrates the diversity of his achievements. Boerhaave is lauded not only for his empirical approach but for his theological pursuits. According to Johnson, an oration by Boerhaave on 'attaining to certainty in natural philosophy' was 'filled… with piety, and a true sense of the greatness of the Supreme Being'.[169] So far from accepting abstract speculations or hypotheses, this discourse 'proved that we are entirely ignorant of the principles of things, and that all the knowledge we have is of such qualities alone as are discoverable by experience, or such as may be deduced from them by mathematical demonstration'.[170] Boerhaave promoted a Newtonian mechanical philosophy in medicine, which saw the human body as a system of pipes and networks, a 'hydraulic machine' which envisaged the black bile of the humours as a 'kind of sludge… that slowed down the proper circulation of the blood'.[171] This blend of piety and empiricism, and a corresponding sense of the smallness of human understanding, is reflected in Cotton's published work as a medic and as a poet.

Cotton's work underlines the continuing importance of a religious framework in the understanding and treatment of madness, linking him not only to the later Tukes, but also to earlier writers like the Nonconformist minister, Timothy Rogers (1658-1728), who drew attention to his own melancholia. Rogers, like Cowper, made a retreat from London, describing the '*Inward Terror*' of a melancholy that '*seizes on the Brain and Spirits, and incapacitates them for Thought or Action*'.[172] Cotton wrote sermons and religious poetry, and often displays strikingly similar sympathies to Cowper in his evangelical view of the world, but with a significantly different

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[168] Edgar Ashworth Underwood, *Boerhaave's Men: At Leyden and After* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977), pp.7-8.

[169] Samuel Johnson, *The Oxford Authors Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.62.

[170] Johnson, p.62.

[171] Clark Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.77.

[172] *A Discourse Concerning Trouble of Mind and the Disease of Melancholy* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, and Thomas Cockerill, 1691), 'Epistle Dedicatory', and p.iii.

emphasis in terms of self-examination. 'A Fable', an autobiographical take on the life of an eighteenth-century doctor, thoroughly downplays the role of medicine.[173] The doctor-poet of this satiric piece is cast as an 'Owl', who is first seen turning over volumes of literature as part of a bid for 'the poet's bays'.[174] Having fallen into a non-conformist's study, the Owl goes on to self-deprecate both his abilities as a poet (his 'labour'd lays') and his skills as a physician: 'Equipt with powder and with pill, / He takes his licence out to kill'.[175] The self-parody is striking when the Owl is rebuked by his wife for his poetic and monetary shortcomings: 'Say, you the healing art essay'd, / And piddled in the doctor's trade; / At least you'd earn us good provisions, / And better this than scribbling visions'.[176] Nevertheless, vision belongs to poetry and religion, while medicine as a profession is presented as something of a social menace, even as it brings undeserved material benefits: 'Thus ev'ry where he gains renown, / And fills his purse, and thins the town'.[177]

Like Battie and Cotton, John Haslam can be connected to the ideas of moral treatment which became so important through the York Retreat. In some respects, though, the ethos of the Retreat represents a narrowing of aims after an acknowledgment of the limitations of medical science, as Samuel Tuke described:

> In the present imperfect state of our knowledge, of the very interesting branch of the healing art, which relates to the cure of insanity; and unable as we generally are to ascertain its true seat in the complicated labyrinths of our frame, the judicious physician is very frequently obliged to apply his means, chiefly to the alleviation and suppression of symptoms.[178]

As Anne Digby puts it: 'Faith rather than specialist knowledge sustained the laymen who planned and administered the Retreat'.[179] Joseph Mason Cox (1763-1818) had the same sense of the value

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[173] Cotton, I, p.29.
[174] Cotton, I, p.97.
[175] Cotton, I, p.100.
[176] Cotton, I, p.102.
[177] Cotton, I, p.103.
[178] Samuel Tuke, *Description Of The Retreat, An Institution Near York For Insane Persons Of The Society Of Friends* (London: Printed for W. Alexander and others, 1813), p.132.
[179] Digby, p.26.

of good nutrition and air as the Tukes.[180] As the owner of a private asylum at Fishponds, near

Bristol, Mason Cox adopted an elaborate and idiosyncratic approach to management which built on

Battie's work, but also demonstrated how little uniformity there was. His ideas included the shock

therapy of 'swinging', which involved rotating a patient strapped in a suspended chair in order to

induce the benefits of nausea and vertigo on the 'mind' and 'body'.[181] He agreed with Haslam that

religion could cause madness, but added, 'perhaps it would be more accurate to impute such

unhappy effects to absurd views' or the 'want' of religion.[182] Like Haslam, he has the Methodists in

mind, but while attacking 'the zeal of preachers' who induce 'moping melancholy', he also defends

'real religion' which is 'too often considered as an unequivocal mark of mental derangement'.[183]

Haslam was both applauded and severely censured during his career as a doctor. Having

been appointed the apothecary at Bethlem in 1795, he was a key figure at a crucial point in the

history of the hospital, as Porter describes: 'He was to hold the post for twenty-one of the most

traumatic years in its history, being involved *inter alia*, in its move in 1815 from the palatial but

collapsing Moorfields buildings to the new one in Lambeth'.[184] He was celebrated by both Samuel

Tuke and, in France, Philippe Pinel (1745-1826) for his ideas about moral management, but became

embroiled in scandal, partly because of the famous case of James Tilly Matthews (1770-1815), who

protested his sanity after being confined at Bethlem. When Matthews' family and the parish

authorities petitioned for his release, Haslam wrote *Illustrations of Madness* (1810), 'the first book-

length case study of a single patient in British psychiatric history'.[185] The treatment of Matthews

was used against Bethlem and Haslam during the 1815 investigation into the conditions of

madhouses across the country. Haslam was called upon to defend the practices of the hospital as a

whole, and controversially defended the use of mechanical restraints despite parliamentary

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[180] *Practical Observations on Insanity* (London: Baldwin and Murray, 1813), p.100.
[181] Mason Cox, p.159.
[182] Mason Cox, p.25.
[183] Mason Cox, p.27.
[184] 'Introduction', *Illustrations of Madness*, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1988), p.xxv.
[185] Porter, p.xv.

criticism.[186] Both he and Thomas Monro (1759-1833) lost their positions as a result of the investigation, but Haslam rather remarkably continued to be a prolific writer of books on insanity as the asylum movement took shape in the first half of the nineteenth century. Haslam embodies the complexity of late eighteenth-century mad-doctoring, and can be compellingly contrasted with Blake, who questions the validity of any institutional response to madness. Taken together, the work of Blake and Haslam is suggestive of the enormous range of responses to a protean madness in the long eighteenth century.

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter of this study explores poetic and medical philosophies of language in Smart's *Jubilate Agno*, Battie's *Treatise*, and Monro's *Remarks*. An elucidation of the radically different understanding of madness given in these texts gives a snapshot of the concept in the middle part of the eighteenth century, a period in which theories of personal identity and the management of lunacy were being publicly debated. The second and third chapters focus on the work of Cowper, looking at both prose (*Adelphi* and the letters) and poetry (*Poems* 1782), in the context of national anxiety, madness, religious melancholy, and changing notions of the self and personal identity reflected in views of authorship. In both these chapters, I discuss poems and medical writing by Cotton which illuminates the arguments put forward by Cowper on health, mental disturbance, and evangelical faith. The fourth chapter looks at Blake's figure of the *spectre*, which I link directly to Cowper through one version of the character in *Jerusalem*. Spectres come in many different varieties, but in *The Four Zoas*, the first of Blake's long mythological poems, they are closely associated with an insanity of melancholy and religious despair. As his commentary on Spurzheim demonstrates, Blake was aware of medical arguments about madness at a pivotal moment. Blake's poetry and visual art demonstrate a profound interest in the anatomy of the human body, and I

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[186] Andrew Scull, Charlotte Mackenzie, and Nicholas Hervey, *Masters of Bedlam: The Transformation of the Mad-Doctoring Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.38.

compare and contrast Blakean thinking on madness with influential contemporary medical

thought. Here the key figure is the controversial Haslam, whose *Observations* (1798) and

Illustrations (1810) recount some of the major issues that dominated the earlier debate between

Battie and Monro, and suggest, as much as ever, how protean madness was.

Chapter 2: Madness and Poetic Identity in Smart's *Jubilate Agno* (c.1758-63)

'For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour – for they said, he is besides himself'

In this chapter, an analysis of Smart's *Jubilate Agno* in the context of medical works on madness will draw attention to a fundamental tension in mid eighteenth-century culture between, on the one hand, an emerging neurophysiological understanding of the body, and on the other, a still primarily spiritual comprehension of reality. I contrast the poem's critical stance towards Enlightenment ideals with William Battie's attempt to describe mental processes in medical and proto-scientific terminology. Battie's *Treatise* (1758) was swiftly rebuked by John Monro's *Remarks* (1758), and both texts were contemporaneous with the writing of *Jubilate Agno*, begun between June 1758 and April 1759.[1] While Smart's poem admits little room for a medico-scientific view of reality, and while the works of Battie and Monro are at odds with respect to the management and causes of madness, each text engages with the same over-riding questions: What is madness? How is madness related to language? What does it mean to be mad or sane and how is this known or determined? Over this period, Smart was confined in St. Luke's Hospital (1757-58) where Battie was the lead physician, and then shortly afterwards in a private madhouse (c.1758-63), during a period in which such institutions were being publicly questioned. The respective social perspectives from which these texts were written, and their very different critical trajectories make them an illuminating prospect for comparative reading. I make the case that the aesthetic principles of *Jubilate Agno*, summed up by Rizzo as 'imitation/emulation, brevitas, energeia, comprehension', variously subvert the deterministic, materialistic, and mechanistic tendencies within Enlightenment thought.[2] Within this, the conception of spiritual identity implicitly rejects any movement towards a secularized form of personal identity linked to consciousness and the physical body. In contrast to

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[1] Karina Williamson, 'Introduction', *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart; Jubilate Agno*, ed. by Karina Williamson, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I, pp.xv-xxxi (p.xxiv).

[2] Betty Rizzo, 'Christopher Smart's Poetics', in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Clement Hawes (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp.121-32 (p.124).

the recourse to a Lockean language in both medical texts, the poem promotes an associative and evangelically inspired view of the imagination which emphasizes the multi-dimensional qualities of language over and above signification. While medical hostility towards evangelicalism is marked in both Battie and Monro, Smart's work can be seen as a learned and yet playful critique of Enlightenment epistemology which anticipates Blake's work at the end of the century.

In what follows, I begin by discussing how madness was regarded in medicine at the time *Jubilate Agno* was written, and comment on Smart's status as a 'mad' poet. I draw attention to Smart's knowledge and command of rhetoric, which included a self-conscious use of persona in *The Midwife* (1750-53). In the second section, I argue that *Jubilate Agno* presents voice as a subject in itself, which becomes an important part of a social protest registered from inside a madhouse. As I discuss in the third section, Smart's ideas were completely opposed to the deterministic understanding of language adopted by the medical writers. An elucidation of the differences will help to illustrate the dividing lines between medical and religious views of madness. *Jubilate Agno* might be read as the complete antithesis of confinement in any form, and yet it was written at a moment when confinement was being specifically ear-marked by Battie as a prerequisite for the treatment and possible cure of madness – a very significant emphasis in the history of psychiatry. As I show in the fourth section, the limitations of mad-doctoring were considerable in terms of knowledge and professionalism, and social norms and appearances played an important role in determining who was to be confined in a madhouse or one of the few public hospitals for the insane. My final section evaluates Smart's position within a tradition of radical enthusiasm in relation to the way madness is represented in *Jubilate Agno*.

'*For I am the Lord's News-Writer – the scribe-evangelist*': Debating Madness and Identity

When Smart was writing *Jubilate Agno*, Bethlem and St. Luke's were the only two major specialist institutions for the insane in England. As a purportedly reforming hospital, St. Luke's was defined against the long-established Bethlem from its inception, opening almost adjacent to the older

institution on Moorfields in 1751. According to the hospital minute book, Smart was admitted in

May 1757 and discharged 'uncured' in May 1758, the authorities having 'not sufficient reason to

expect his speedy recovery'.[3] Details of his particular admission are lacking but Smart had

undoubtedly been confined in a highly significant new institution. Before St. Luke's, the Bethlem

stood almost alone as a public hospital geared towards the treatment of insanity.[4] Established by a

group of philanthropic City merchants, St. Luke's was the first of a new breed of specialist

institutions built on the voluntary hospital model. As Leonard Smith writes, these hospitals, 'or

asylums as they gradually became known… represented a critical development not only in actual

material provision, but also in philosophy, attitudes, and policy in relation to the treatment and

management of mental disorder and its victims'.[5] The governors of St. Luke's in the 1750s included

the Methodist Peter Dobree and Cowper's friend, the banker John Thornton, who supported

evangelical causes; also on the board was Bonnell Thornton (1724-68), satirical writer and son of an

apothecary, who wrote for a periodical, *The Connoisseur* (1757), which had been critical of visiting

practices at Bethlem, and which Cowper also contributed to.[6] Thornton assisted Smart on *The

Midwife*.[7]

Sometime before January 1759, Smart was confined at Potter's private madhouse at

Bethnal Green. Smart's release from Potter's occurred in the same year – 1763 – as a small-scale

parliamentary investigation into the conditions within private madhouses. Despite reports of

abuses, Parliament did not legislate at this time. It is unclear whether Smart was immediately

moved to Potter's from St. Luke's, but the trajectory from a public institution to a private one was

not an unusual one. Both Battie and Monro made lucrative incomes from their private madhouses,

which sometimes involved taking patients from the public institutions. Battie's considerable wealth

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[3] Chris Mounsey, *Christopher Smart: Clown of God* (London: Associated University Presses, 2001), p.203 and p.209.
[4] Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p.130.
[5] Leonard Smith, *Lunatic Hospitals in Georgian England, 1750-1830* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.2.
[6] Jonathan Andrews and Andrew Scull, *Undertaker of the Mind*, p.299.
[7] Paul Baines, 'Thornton, Bonnell (1725–1768)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn, Jan 2008 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27352 [accessed 14 Sept 2016].

at his death was 'mostly attributable to the profits of his madhouses in Islington and Clerkenwell'.[8]

Smart's biographer notes that he was afforded, at least in some respects, relatively tolerant

treatment: able to write, dig in the garden, read books and periodicals, possibly even allowed out

with an escort on occasions.[9] The poems by which Smart is now best known – *Jubilate Agno* and

Song to David – were both written during or shortly after his confinement at Potter's. *Song to David*

was published shortly after Smart's release but had a mixed reception, and Smart's career as a

writer never fully recovered. His marriage also collapsed and he was never reunited with his

children. In April 1770, Smart was arrested for debt and died in prison, of a liver disorder, on 20

May 1771, at the age of forty-nine. Although Smart seems not to have been subjected to the worst

aspects of confinement in the eighteenth century, his experience touches on many of the central

issues, not least the felt sense of restriction, dispossession, and personal loss. Madness has been at

the centre of interpretations of Smart's poetry. Robert Browning's partial restoration of Smart's

reputation in a poetic homage to *Song to David* repeated the legend that the poem was written

with a key on the wainscot of his madhouse cell. Invoking the commentary of Smart's friends on

the poet's return to health, who warn against further efforts in the vein of 'This scribble on the

wall', Browning laments that Smart took their advice: '… never afterward / One line to show that

he, who paced the sward, / Had reached the zenith from his madhouse cell'.[10]

Battie and Monro were key participants in the politics of eighteenth-century madness.

When wrongful confinement and abuses within private madhouses were investigated by

Parliament in 1763, Battie of St. Luke's, and Monro of Bethlem, were called upon as expert

witnesses, and both recommended regulation. Each related several cases in which 'Persons of sane

Mind' were improperly admitted to madhouses, and Battie noted that it happened frequently. His

evidence summarizes contemporary concerns:

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[8] Andrews and Scull, p.154.

[9] Arthur Sherbo, *Christopher Smart, Scholar of the University* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), pp.122-23.

[10] Robert Browning, *Parleyings With Certain People of Importance In Their Day*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887), p.90.

> Doctor *Battie* gave it as his Opinion to your Committee, that the Private Madhouses require some better Regulation; that he hath long been of this Opinion; that the Admission of Persons brought as Lunatics is too loose and too much at large, depending upon Persons not competent Judges; and that frequent Visitation is necessary for the Inspection of the Lodging, Diet, Cleanliness, and a Treatment.[11]

An article from *The Midwife*, dated 1750, recounts the story of an unfortunate woman forced into a madhouse having been cheated out of an inheritance ('*The History of* Hannah', I, pp.215-24). Smart's persona, Mrs. Mary Midnight, expresses sympathy and criticizes the lack of a legislative framework:

> I came home in a melancholy Mood, and all the Evening could not help reflecting on this fatal Affair. – This poor Woman's case is not singular, for there are many Women who have been betray'd, and married to those who had Wives before, which, I think claims the Consideration of People in Power, as it evidently proves, that there is some Flaw, either in the Construction or Execution of our Laws (p.224).

In 1754, the Royal College of Physicians blocked a bill, though well-documented cases of abuse came before the courts, such as that of Deborah D'Vebre, a woman confined in Turlington's private madhouse in Chelsea on the orders of her husband. D'Vebre was released in 1761 when a physician found her to be entirely rational after her relatives had sued for *habeus corpus*.[12] Despite the conclusions of the 1763 report, however, Parliament did not legislate until the 1774 Act described in Chapter 1. The stigma of an association with madness could be devastating, as the wool-stapler, Samuel Bruckshaw, suggests in his *One More Proof of the Iniquities of Private Madhouses* (1774). His over-riding concern is not so much that he has been thought to be mad, but what that imputation of madness has meant in terms of the loss of civil liberties, of his fortune, and of the corresponding damage to his character and position in society. His situation leaves him 'irreparably injured in substance and good name, his property dispersed, his business annihilated…'.[13] Parts of

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[11] *A Report from the Committee* (London: Printed for John Whiston and Benjamin White et al, 1763), p.9.
[12] Porter, p.150.
[13] *One More Proof of the Iniquities of Private Madhouses* (London: Printed for the Author, 1774), p.viii-ix.

Jubilate Agno indicate that Smart well understood the potentially disastrous social and monetary consequences that an association with madness could entail.

In 1758, Battie and Monro were the main participants in what has been described as the 'Great Lunacy Debate', an early public discussion on the understanding and treatment of madness in England, which took place when the release of Battie's *Treatise* spiked Monro into a rival publication.[14] *Treatise* was an iconoclastic text which sounded out the deficiencies in the existing treatment of madness and laid them firmly at the door of James Monro (1680-1752), the recently deceased physician at Bethlem. Battie presented a Lockean solution to a problem wrapped up in what was seen as the misleading nosology of the humours. James Monro's son, John, responded immediately with *Remarks* which systematically refuted Battie's major claims and took the earlier text apart for its conjecture and linguistic sleights of hand. Battie's text, Monro implied, was as subjective as any poem. For my purposes, Battie's *Treatise* is significant for its positive affirmation of Enlightenment ideals; its sense that 'the causes, effects, and cure of Madness' could be understood through medicine; its declaration that medical research from a hospital base would yield results in this respect; and because *Jubilate Agno* challenges all of this.[15]

Battie's *Treatise* attempted to establish a working definition of madness. St. Luke's claim to be a reforming hospital corresponds to Battie's notion of 'Regimen' which plays an essential role in the treatment of a madness defined as 'deluded imagination', in which it is determined that 'the perception of objects not really existing or not really corresponding to the senses be a sign of Madness'.[16] Battie was here very much taking the lead from Locke, who, when distinguishing between 'idiots and madmen', had noted that the latter 'err, as Men do, that argue right from wrong Principles. For by the violence of their Imaginations, having taken their Fansies for Realities, they make right deduction from them'; madness was an erroneous association of ideas, but Locke added that there were degrees, since 'madmen' had at least some capacity to reason: '… madmen

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[14] Andrews and Scull, p.43.
[15] William Battie, A *Treatise on Madness* (London: J. Whiston and B. White, 1758), p.vii and p.2.
[16] Battie, pp.5-6.

put wrong ideas together, and so make wrong propositions, but argue and reason right from them'.[17] The influence of Locke's associationism was profound, but as Petteri Pietikainen writes, it had a potentially 'sinister' aspect, since the designation of madness as a false consciousness 'could be used to renounce all sorts of wrong thinking... ideas and beliefs'.[18] Monro also drew on Locke, but disputed Battie's emphasis: '...the error does not lie in the imagination, but in the judgment'.[19] Battie divided madness into two main categories: 'original' (organic) and 'consequential' (caused by a wide variety of external factors).[20] Importantly, confinement was regarded by Battie as a pre-requisite for any possible cure, through management rather than medicine, wherein the patient 'needs be removed from all objects that act forcibly on the nerves, and excite too lively a perception of things, more especially from such objects as are the known causes of his disorder'.[21] This last statement might be regarded as an embryonic idea of the asylum, but it is not one that Smart countenances in *Jubilate Agno*, which gives a clamorous and joyous endorsement of spiritual freedom and linguistic possibility.

The central place that considerations about language occupy in the framing of medical arguments about madness in the Battie and Monro texts is one reason why it is relevant to read *Jubilate Agno* in relation to them. Given the history of critical responses to the poem, though, such a reading is not without danger of adding to the stigma that already surrounds the text. It is clearly important to analyse the content of *Jubilate Agno*, not treat this as secondary to moral judgments of the poet, as was unfortunately the case from the very first moment of the poem's publication in 1939. The editor, W.F. Stead, asked the reader to imagine that the poem was like 'one of those fantastic gothic palaces built by the mad King [of] Bavaria' with sunken foundations:

> The fundamental brainwork has broken down, the walls, as it were, are cracked; but not a few of the details are worth examining. There is plenty of rubbish, there are frequent intrusions of the

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[17] Locke, *Essay, '*Chapter XI: Of Discerning, and Other Operations of the Mind' (Book II), p.157.
[18] *Madness: A History* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.71.
[19] John Monro, *Remarks on Dr. Battie's Treatise* (London: Dawsons, 1758), p.21.
[20] Battie, p.68 and p.72.
[21] Battie, p.68.

meaningless and grotesque; yet amid all this, one is continually coming upon a revealing phrase which tells us what the poet had been thinking, reading, praying for, enduring and suffering.[22]

This is one part of a character assassination of Smart, who is described as a 'feckless, drunken, crazy little man… and everyone who knows anything about him knows that he was insane'.[23] This verdict was regrettably attached to *Jubilate Agno* itself: Smart's religion and drinking, Stead speculates, had him 'exhibiting such a chaotic discontinuity of thought as is only too conspicuous in this manuscript'.[24] In 1968, Moira Dearnley also characterized *Jubilate Agno* in terms of Smart's madness, albeit with a good deal more qualification than Stead: 'I am inclined to think that instead of pointing to a coherent body of religious thought and sentiment, Smart's multilingual punning points to a mad, philological vision of reality'.[25] This critical appraisal has been almost totally reversed in recent years by scholarship which finds that little or nothing in the text is meaningless or sure proof of insanity, even by eighteenth-century standards.

'Smart's construction as a mad poet', as Mounsey puts it, has a long critical history.[26] In Mounsey's formulation, there are four main areas of this construction: political; commercial; religious; and poetic. Least convincingly, Smart's political connections with William Kendrick and John Wilkes are seen to put him on the side of reformers whose views were so suspect that 'to declare that Smart was mad affirmed fidelity to the King's ministry'.[27] Also not altogether convincingly, Mounsey argues that the commercial and family interest of Smart's publisher, John Newbery, encouraged the denigration of his reputation, particularly through the early biography written by Smart's nephew, Christopher Hunter: 'Hunter's *Life* [1791] spread the word that Smart was mad'.[28] 'Smart's construction as a madman in terms of his religious views', Mounsey also

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[22] William Force Stead, 'Introduction', *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song From Bedlam* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), p.13-14.
[23] Stead, pp.14-16.
[24] Stead, p.29.
[25] *The Poetry of Christopher Smart* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p.163.
[26] Mounsey, p.18.
[27] Mounsey, pp.274-75.
[28] Mounsey, p.277.

contends, 'arises from the eccentricity of his theology'.[29] Finally, Mounsey characterizes the Stead edition of *Jubilate Agno* as a publication styled for a society at war: 'Christopher Smart had been constructed as the iconic mad poet for the mad world of the twentieth century'.[30] I find Mounsey's religious and poetic arguments most persuasive, which I comment further on below.

Given the critical context, I justify my own reading of *Jubilate Agno* in relation to madness on the basis that the poem demonstrably responds to the accusation of insanity as an integral part of a wider challenge to Enlightenment thinking. Allusions to madness and the paraphernalia of the madhouse only form part of *Jubilate Agno*, but they are not incidental: the poem's social protest is inextricably linked to the circumstances in which it was written. This is not the same as assuming that Smart was a 'mad poet', and I agree with Mounsey that such a view should be challenged, not least because of the rudimentary level of eighteenth-century standards, and the 'equivocal' nature of the evidence for Smart's madness.[31] *Jubilate Agno* should not be read as the production of a 'mad poet', but the poem's layering of meaning effectively challenges contemporary medical thinking about madness couched in Locke's theory of words, and at the same time registers an argument about the experience of confinement in a madhouse.

The question of madness in *Jubilate Agno* has to be seen alongside a theological perspective which takes account of Smart's eccentric position in relation to the established Church. Harriet Guest finds that Smart's view of the Bible might connect him to controversial figures like Cowper's friend, John Newton, the Calvinist rector of Olney, rather than to Anglican orthodoxy, although such a view did not necessarily carry dissenting implications: '… its connection with the miraculous power of prophetic revelation made it, rather, a sword on the side of the defence of faith against the encroachments of natural religion'.[32] Clement Hawes goes further in linking Smart to a longstanding tradition of radical religious enthusiasm going back to seventeenth-century

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[29] Mounsey, p.280.
[30] Mounsey, p.284.
[31] Mounsey, p.15.
[32] Harriet Guest, *A Form of Sound Words: The Religious Poetry of Christopher Smart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.137.

groups like the Ranters and the Diggers, in a reading which aims to take the text out of the 'shadow of private pathology'.[33] In this argument, the 'manic' style of *Jubilate Agno,* in which language is employed as a 'spiritual weapon,' should be seen in the light of a rhetoric of enthusiasm, rather than taken as evidence of pathological madness.[34] One key area in which questions of religion and madness come into focus is that of prophecy, where Smart's projection of prophetic status has been interpreted by Katz in terms of both madness and religio-political struggle: 'Smart symbolically renders the drama of sacrificial victimage, through his dual status as the mad prophet who suffers and as the warrior-prophet who adventures all; and through his role as scribe for God qua artist-agent, he becomes a vehicle for transcendence'.[35] The last point refers to one of the poet-prophet's key claims in *Jubilate Agno*: '*For I am the Lord's News-Writer – the scribe-evangelist*…' (p.63, B327). The line, as Hawes has shown, brings together 'news-writing' and 'scribe-evangelism' so that the former is elevated as part of a project to spread the divine Word.[36] It acts as a reminder of Smart's idiosyncratic career, which, before *Jubilate Agno* was written, had combined serious, prize-winning religious poetry, song-writing for the Pleasure Gardens, satirical journalism and even cross-dressing in the persona of Mrs. Mary Midnight.[37]

I want to carry a sense of the theatricality and performativity of Smart's earlier satirical writing into my reading of *Jubilate Agno*, because, notwithstanding the difficult circumstances that surround and inform its production, the poem can very much be read as a performance of humour and wit as well as protest. Moreover, the medical prose works analysed here are also, I argue, performances, and indeed Monro explicitly slurs the rhetorical posturing of Battie's text as a

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[33] Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.177.

[34] Hawes, p.165.

[35] Edward Joseph Katz, '"Action and Speaking Are One": A Logological Reading of Smart's Prophetic Rhetoric', in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Clement Hawes (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p.59.

[36] Hawes, p.135.

[37] Min Wild, *Christopher Smart and Satire: 'Mary Midnight' and the Midwife* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p.12. 'Mrs. Midnight was unique among periodical personae in that she actually appeared in the flesh, and Smart, in petticoats, was to be seen in the Haymarket Theatre in 1753, using his rhetorical and poetical skills to introduce the wooden-legged dancer 'Monsieur Timbletoes' '.

'performance' on more than one occasion.[38] Smart was the Praelector of Rhetoric at Cambridge University from 1746-7 where he co-designed a curriculum which represented the work of Quintilian, Plato, Cicero, and Demosthenes.[39] Unsurprisingly, rhetorical tropes and figures are prominent in *Jubilate Agno*, bearing out the remark by Horace (whose work Smart translated): 'You may drive rhetoric out with a pitchfork, but she will always come back in one form or another'.[40] As Marcus Walsh has described, Smart's use of allusion as 'an essential, even a characterizing, rhetorical device', marked him out from earlier Augustan poets and poetic theorists who distrusted highly metaphorical poetry and verbal play like punning.[41] This is an important point which not only suggests that Smart was breaking new ground in *Jubilate Agno*, but also underlines the entirely different approaches to language between Smart and the two physicians, who both inherited Locke's deep suspicion of figurative language. As I show in the next section, *Jubilate Agno* marks a new approach but one which drew on more nearly contemporary theories of religious poetry. The self-consciousness of *Jubilate Agno*, though, is already evident in the earlier prose writing of the *Midwife*, which demonstrates an exceptional sensitivity to the ironies and conceits of self-presentation through the use of persona.

The Midwife should be seen as part of the context for a reading of *Jubilate Agno* in relation to madness and identity for at least two reasons. Firstly, it anticipates the rejection of a medico-scientific view of reality and any hold this might have on the understanding of madness. Secondly, the periodical engages with the debate on personal identity and shows that Smart was well-versed in a sophisticated use of persona at a time when conceptions of authorship were changing. I will make some references to relevant pieces from the *Midwife* in the later sections, but it is convenient to give a brief survey here.

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[38] Monro, p.54 and p.60.

[39] Sherbo, pp.42-44.

[40] Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.200. Quotation from Horace's Epistles (Book I, X, 24), cited by the author: 'Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret'.

[41] Marcus Walsh, '"Community of Mind": Christopher Smart and the Poetics of Allusion', in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Clement Hawes (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), (pp.29-46), p.31. The author is referring to Addison and Pope here.

On the first point, the rejection of medicine in the *Midwife* is almost total and the iniquity of doctors is a running theme, as it is in several early Smart poems. 'On seeing Miss H – P – t, in an Apothecary's Shop' (1746) unites the dangers of love and the dangers of physic: 'For since continually you dwell / In that apothecary's cell; / And while so studiously you pry / Into the sage dispensary, / And read so many doctors bill, / You learn infallibly to kill' (IV, p. 109, 45-50). In another poem, 'The Physician and the Monkey' (1752), a lady sends for 'Doctor Drug' to 'clyster poor Pug', objecting when asked to pay: ' "Your price," says the lady – "Why Sir, he's your brother, / And doctors must never take fees of each other"' (IV, p.189, 6-8). In a wide range of satirical attacks on every branch of doctoring, the most hostility is reserved for a professional class which is seen to have limited expertise and material motives, and which is often compared unfavourably with the true cause of religion. In one instance, this extends to a mocking critique of the management of lunacy amid a sustained attack on mechanistic theories of medicine: 'Millstones were brought into the Stomach, Flint and Steel into the Blood Vessels, and Hammer and Vice into the Lungs; and now People began to die in a reasonable Time...' ('A LETTER from Mrs. MIDNIGHT to the College of Physicians, in which it is proved that Old Women and Nature are their greatest Enemies', II, pp.17-22). The piece contains a brutal joke about the restoration of a lunatic by an old woman, which makes the point that madness, in the *Midwife*, is conceived as a socio-religious issue rather than a medical problem. As nature is set up as one of the sworn enemies of the profession, Mrs. Grove is 'cured' not by the medical Faculty but by the less than lucid Goody Curtis: 'This old Woman ask'd her a Question, which was only proper to be put to a Woman, and upon Enquiry found out the Cause of her Disorder, and with some gentle Cathartics and Steel, the Lunatic was soon restor'd' (p.20). In an assault on collegiality, the same piece goes on to recount a fight over another bed-bound patient's future course of treatment, but as the warring physicians squabble, 'all four of fourteen different Opinions', the patient naturally recovers and escapes without having to pay an inflated fee (pp.21-22).

On the second point that the use of persona in the *Midwife* precedes the performative self-identity of *Jubilate Agno*, it it necessary only to look at the figure of Mrs. Midnight. Smart adopts the rhetorical trope of prosopopeia in this persona, as he does in early poems like, 'The Bag-wig and the Tobacco-pipe' (1750), and 'The English Bull Dog, Dutch Mastiff, and Quail' (1758) (IV, pp.174-6; and pp.299-302). Wild has convincingly argued that the employment of classical rhetorical modes of self-presentation enables Smart to make targeted, local points about civil society, and that there is a clear boundary between persona and writer which nevertheless stops short of 'a fully-rounded authorial subjectivity'.[42] Wild adds: '[It] is possible to write and to represent the incoherent, fantastic or unstable self without feeling one's own self to be 'at risk' '.[43] This emphasis on rhetoric, which encompasses an idea of a direct writer/reader relationship mediated by a third-person should be borne in mind when reading *Jubilate Agno*.[44] At a time when personal identity was an unsettled concept, it is well to retain a sense of the subversion, playfulness and shape-shifting in Smart's work. The elusiveness of the self is abundantly clear in one *Midwife* piece in which Mrs. Midnight the persona defends her own existence against a real-life attempt to reveal the face behind the make-up:[45]

> He has made a Printer of me, a Bookseller, a Fidler, and a Fellow of a College, to the Confusion of Persons, and the utter Subversion of all Identity… No, I'll neither suffer Logick to destroy my Being, nor will I be chous'd out of my Sex by all the Figures of Rhetoric…. After having made this Declaration, it only remains, that I beg the candid Audience wou'd take my Word for my own Existence, and I am ready to give my Oath with regard to my Sex ('Mrs. Mary MIDNIGHT in Defence of her own Existence', III, pp.49-50).

The operative phrase in the stage joke is 'the utter Subversion of all Identity' which draws attention to the passage's own performativity to strike a note of defiance, as Mrs. Midnight declares that she exists despite the best efforts of logic to destroy her or rhetoric to unmask her. Such a creation

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[42] Wild, p.37.
[43] Wild, p.37.
[44] Wild, p.34.
[45] Wild, p.33. Smart performed this piece on stage, and was addressing Orator Henley, a supporter of Walpole.

might seem to require a relatively stable self behind the persona, but the passage undoubtedly plays on contemporary concerns in relation to personal identity and authorship. In the potential for a 'Confusion of Persons', in the references to annihilation and metamorphosis, and in the tongue-in-cheek call to be taken on trust, the passage demonstrates a knowingness about the making and unmaking of identity. It blends together the comic and the serious until authorship is caught up in a waggish spectacle of deception and evasion.

'*For the VOICE is from the body and the spirit – and it is a body and a spirit*': Form and Poetic Voice in *Jubilate Agno*

Although it is difficult to make definite conclusions about the form and structure of *Jubilate Agno*, a brief discussion of the manuscript, which I looked at during my research, will help to clarify the editorial issues that are immediately relevant to a reading of voice, identity, and madness in the poem.[46] The manuscript is made up of fragments, and the order and arrangement of the poem are contentious, but its appearance is striking for the evident care taken in the hand-writing, the beauty of the characters, and the painstakingly precise organization on the page. The way it is presented displays a high level of craft. The commentary on precise aesthetic aims in the poem itself suggests that it was intended to be much more than a 'common-place book'.[47] I would also suggest that such a manuscript could not have been created in the worst conditions of eighteenth-century madhouses. Although the manuscript seems to have held considerable personal value for Smart, there is no evidence that he wanted to publish it. While it is impossible to be sure about the intended order of the poem, it clearly involves some degree of parallelism between 'Let' and 'For' verses, which are in physically distinct sections of the manuscript. Fragment A consists of 'Let' verses only comprising lines A1-113; Fragment B contains parallel 'Let' and 'For' verses comprising lines B1-295, and only 'For' verses comprising B296-768; Fragment C has parallel 'Let' and 'For'

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[46] Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno: Manuscript* (MS Eng 719, Houghton Library: Harvard University).
[47] Dearnley, p.136.

verses for lines C1-162; and Fragment D has only 'Let' verses comprising D1-237. The 'Let' verses are written over 3 double folios (numbered 1, 10, and 11) and 3 single leaves (one of which is numbered 3); the 'For' verses are written over 7 single leaves (three of which are marked 3, 4, and 5); in total, there may be as many as 6 missing folios of 'Let' verses (2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9); and 7 missing folios of 'For' verses (1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11).[48]

The relationship between the 'Let' and 'For' verses is contentious, but W.H. Bond's identification of an antiphonal structure based on Hebrew poetry and the litany, and owing much to Bishop Robert Lowth's analysis of Biblical poetics in *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753), is still persuasive.[49] Bond's editorial arrangement – which is taken up by Smart's modern editor, Karina Williamson – has held critical sway, but Guest has several reservations.[50] A reading based on antiphonal parallelism invokes the scenario of a choir singing the 'Let' verses with the single voice of Smart himself reading or performing the 'For' verses. Guest suggests that the 'Let' verses can be seen as dependent upon one another alone, and then downplays the line-by-line correspondence of the paired 'Let' and 'For' verses. The 'For' verses, she posits, 'form an independent body of 'private' meditation, which may reflect on the more 'public' or less personal 'Let' verses, but which may possess an internal poetic integrity'.[51] I agree with Guest's point that the 'Let' and 'For' verses can be read separately and do not necessarily have to be paired, and indeed Fragments A and D only have 'Let' verses, while Fragment B closes with 'For' verses alone. I do not agree, however, with her characterization of the 'For' lines as a ''private' and separate set of responses'.[52] In my view, the personal voice of the 'For' verses has an important bearing across *Jubilate Agno* in terms of Smart's characterization of the poem as *'my MAGNIFICAT'* (p.19, B43). The possessive determiner *'my'* refers the poem to a canticle, a song of praise in which a medley of creatures and natural forms are invoked to praise God. Where the paired verses are extant, I contend that there

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[48] Williamson, p.xxii-xxiii; and Guest, p.125.
[49] W.H. Bond, 'Introduction', *Jubilate Agno* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), pp.1-24 (p.18).
[50] Guest, p.127.
[51] Guest, p.142.
[52] Guest, p.142.

is a mutually reinforcing resonance between the verses, whereby the 'For' lines read back on to the 'Let' lines, and vice versa. In this way, I would suggest that the invocation of a many-voiced celebration of God made at the very outset of the poem enters into the single personal voice of the poet, which in turn flows back into the wider movement, and so onwards.

The personal voice in the 'For' verses of *Jubilate Agno* – through which the individual circumstances of Smart's confinement in a madhouse are partially revealed – needs, then, to be understood as part of a much larger spiritual project. Readers of the poem should be mindful that its incompleteness may reflect a dizzying poetic and religious ambition, or even just a change of circumstances, rather than evidence of pathological madness. Williamson helpfully cites two of the poem's major statements in order to establish its wider aims: 'Smart's primary purpose was to present a work of praise and glorification of God: '*For by the grace of God I am the Reviver of ADORATION among ENGLISH-MEN*' (p.63, B332). His second purpose was evangelistic: '*For I preach the very GOSPEL of CHRIST*' '(p.13, B9). Next to these over-arching goals, though, many other themes coalesce, including the poetic and religious response to a contested madness, and the projection of a strong sense of national identity which is reiterated on multiple occasions. The naming suggests patriotic intentions – ending with English names and accentuating English links to Abraham and St Paul, and also suggesting that the Church of England is one of the seven churches of the Revelation (p.71, B433; p.50, B225; p.32, B126). It may have evolved as a preparatory composition for Smart's *A Song to David* (1763) given the line: '*For I pray the Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it*' (p.19, B43). Taking '*represent*' to mean '*re-present*', Williamson suggests that the poem bears a closer resemblance to the Benedicite canticle than to the Magnificat, but, in either case, it is clear that the poem is written as a call to praise: 'Smart adapts both the general invocation of the Benedicite… and the roll-call of the various species of creation, which are individually called on for praise and blessing'.[53] Everything within it, including

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[53] Williamson, p.xxviii and p.xxv.

the personal voice of the poet's contested madness, is codified as a celebration of the Christian

message:

> Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues: give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
> Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
> Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together (p.1, A1-3).

This microcosm of the poem, insofar as it exists, promotes a levelling of human and animal identity

aligned to the praise or magnification of God. As Hawes argues, Smart subverts the traditional

understanding of madness as bestial by having man and beast 'magnify his name together' with no

clearly marked hierarchy of value that sets humans and animals apart.[54] The opening lines make

clear that this is a poem which celebrates many voices in an allusion to the 'Tongues' of the

redeemed in *Revelation*: 'lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and

kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb… And cried with

a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God…' (Revelation 7: 9-10). At the same time, for all this

levelling and multi-voiced amplification, the poet is reserved a special role as an evangelizing

prophet, whose personal voice speaks out of confinement just as Ezekiel and Isaiah do. The poet's

individual act of devotion infuses into the general paean to praise, but the personal voice of the

poet-prophet is strongly marked in Fragments B and C. The particular importance of this voice is,

moreover, reiterated on many occasions in lines such as: '*For I have adventured myself in the name

of the Lord, and he hath mark'd me for his own*' (p.15, B21); and: '*For I bless God in the strength of

my loins and for the voice which he hath made sonorous*' (p.25, B80).

   Jubilate Agno makes a claim for a new kind of poetic voice, and the importance of those

verses which adopt the personal pronoun is apparent in the insights they give into poetic practice.

The personal concerns of a poet self-consciously composing while imputed to be mad blend into an

enormous poetic project of almost impossible resolution. The enormity can be seen in the breadth

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[54] Hawes, pp.161-62.

and complexity of the poem's references, which touch on the occult and personal and familial

details, as well as eighteenth-century natural philosophy and Biblical events. This allusiveness,

across a range of modern and ancient cultures and languages, and the poem's mixture of personal

and public concerns, taxonomy, and wit, is an implicit challenge to the Enlightenment and orthodox

views of madness. As well as the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, key sources of the poem

include Pliny's *Natural History*; Ainsworth's *Thesaurus*; and Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (1728).

The latter repeats many aspects of Lockean philosophy including an entry on *personal identity*

which is taken almost verbatim from the *Essay*.[55] The long entry on *enthusiasm* also draws

substantially from Locke, describing it as 'a prophetic, or poetic Rage, or Fury, which transports the

Mind, enflames and raises the Imagination'.[56] Defined against both reason and faith, parts of the

entry are taken directly from Locke's *Essay*: '… in Effect, it takes away both Reason and Revelation,

and substitutes in the Room of it the ungrounded Fancies of a Man's own Brain, and assumes them

for a Foundation both of Opinion and Conduct'.[57] An *enthusiast*, moreover, is described as 'a

Fanatic', and should there be any doubt, this is to be 'applied to… modern Prophets'.[58] *Jubilate*

Agno, of course, gainsays this.

Another important source for Smart is Robert Lowth's *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* (1753).[59]

The influence of Lowth's ideas on the style and arrangement of *Jubilate Agno* is observable in

several respects.[60] Firstly, in the argument that a contemplation of sacred subjects and a

'subservience to Religion' was 'the original office and destination of Poetry'.[61] Secondly, in the

endorsement of a 'Sententious Style' which mixed didacticism and brevity, which was seen as the

'primary characteristic of Hebrew poetry'.[62] Thirdly, in an emphasis on the proximity between

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[55] Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia: Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols (London: Printed for James and John Knapton and others, 1728), II, p.370.
[56] Chambers, I, p.316.
[57] Chambers, I, p.316; Locke, *Essay*, 'Chapter XIX: Of Enthusiasm' (Book IV), p.616.
[58] Chambers, I, p.317.
[59] *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews,* trans. by G. Gregory, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1995).
[60] Smart would not have had a copy to hand, but had specifically praised Lowth's work. Sherbo, p.105.
[61] Lowth, I, p.36.
[62] Lowth, I, p.98.

poetry and prophecy whereby poetic art and the prophetic office are seen as having 'one common name, one common origin, one common author, the Holy Spirit'.[63] Lastly, in the description of 'parallelism', which describes the relations between corresponding lines and parts of lines in Hebrew verse. Lowth's categories of 'synonymous', 'antithetic', and 'synthetic relations' appear to be summarized in *Jubilate Agno* as follows:

> *For the relations of words are in pairs first*.
> *For the relations of words are sometimes in oppositions*.
> *For the relations of words are according to their distances from the pair* (p.81, B598-600).[64]

The emphasis on voice in *Jubilate Agno* underlines the poem's assertion of a spiritual reality based on a faith in the *Word of God*, which refers to the Bible, the creative Logos, and Jesus Christ. This conflicts with contemporary medical ideas. Smart's apparent belief in a view of nature as the voice of God clearly contradicts any tendency towards understanding the body or mind in material terms, a view expressed within a poem which attacks the mathematical ideas and natural philosophy of Isaac Newton. Smart's view of spiritual reality is summarized in the lines:

> Let The Eunuch rejoice with the Thorn-Back – It is good to be discovered reading the BIBLE.
> *For Newton nevertheless is more of error than of the truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD* (p.44, B195).

An Hermetic slant to this understanding means that the Earth itself has a voice: '*For EARTH which is an intelligence hath a voice and a propensity to speak in all her parts*' (p.51, B234). Battie's sense of 'practical truth' in natural sensation clearly does not register here.[65] Furthermore, as I show in the following section, the personal voice of the poet attacks the terms of confinement directly and disputes any claim to medical expertise in the cure of '*the LUNATICK*' (p.31, B123). In the parallel verses of 'Let' and 'For' lines, the voice of a poet-prophet dramatizes the tension between an

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[63] Lowth, II, p.18.
[64] Lowth, II, p.35 (synonymous); p.45 (antithetic); and pp.48-49 (synthetic).
[65] Battie, p.7.

emerging understanding of madness focused on the nerves, and a profound, multi-layered sense of religious vocation viewed as being under threat.

The poet's self-characterization as a prophet is clear from the beginning of Fragment B but is made absolutely explicit in the long sequence of lines in Fragment C (pp.97-9, C57-76). Smart's prophesizing has a strongly national dimension, beginning with a dated Easter Day prophecy (22nd March 1761) which is perhaps related to the progress of the Seven Years' War (1756-63), which takes place over the period Smart was confined: '*For it will be better for England and all the world in a season, as I prophecy this day*' (p.97, C58). Poetic voice in *Jubilate Agno* describes a meeting point between a personal, bodily experience of the world and a divine, spiritual experience of it: '*For the VOICE is from the body and the spirit – and it is a body and a spirit*' (p.52, B239). The personal and the divine are not separated in the poem, but rather mutually reinforce one another, which is reflected in poetic form, as John Sitter's comment on this line suggests: 'Voice… is where the poem's mentality and physicality join'.[66] This involves a high degree of self-consciousness as the poem shifts between the individual and the general, the personal and the national, in what Chris Mounsey calls a 'double movement – inward to personal experience and outward to the divine'.[67] The voice of the poet-prophet draws a bridge between God and the world. As Edward Katz has suggested, this voice encourages participation in the divine Logos through poetry, a response to 'a tragic drama of moral blindness, of a turning-away from the world and the Word'.[68] I suggest that one aspect of this moral blindness for Smart is the medical response to madness.

'*For all good words are from GOD, and all others are cant*': Defining Madness and the Logos

This section examines the language of *Jubilate Agno* and Battie's *Treatise* to draw attention to the tensions between medical and religious understandings of madness in the middle part of the

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[66] John Sitter, *The Cambridge Introduction to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.7.
[67] 'Christopher Smart and William Blake: a Distinctive Mode', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth* ed. by Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.166-81 (p.172).
[68] Katz, p.47.

eighteenth century. The poet of *Jubilate Agno* specifically comments on the production of poetic language: '*For my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould which I have made*' (p.69, B404). The metaphor of 'punching', which is taken from type-founding, dramatizes the relationship between poet and reader as the former claims a power over the latter, whose image of a given word is moulded by the poet. The poet's 'talent' is strongly advanced, as Parker observes: 'The lines… argue that the writer's genius, expressed rhetorically as the phenomenon of "punching," has the same effect on each reader who encounters the text'.[69] Elsewhere, in the Preface to *The Works of Horace, translated into verse* (1767), Smart elaborates on the idea of *impression* which is seen to be: '… a talent or gift of Almighty God, by which a Genius is impowered to throw an emphasis upon a word or sentence in such wise, that it cannot escape any reader of sheer good sense, and true critical sagacity' (V, p.xii). Taken together, both comments convey the scale and precision of Smart's poetic ambition ('Genius') as well as the extent to which it was informed by a belief in divine will. The line in *Jubilate Agno* is an assertion of poetic and spiritual identity and is one of many which express a desire to be heard. I have suggested that *Jubilate Agno* should be read with Smart's public, theatrical performances in mind, as well as his success as a prize-winning religious poet. The self-conscious bid for poetic status in the poem has the boldness of a flamboyant stage performance as well as the assurance of faith. The poem's strong religious convictions can be linked to the evangelical conversion expressed in an earlier work, 'Hymn to the Supreme Being, on Recovery from a dangerous Fit of Illness' (1756):

> My nerves convuls'd shook fearful of their fate,
> My mind lay open to the powers of night.
> He pitying did a second birth bestow
> A birth of joy – not like the first of tears and woe (IV, p.322, 69-72).

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[69] Todd C. Parker, 'Smart's Enlightened Parables', in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment* ed. by Clement Hawes (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp.83-97 (p.91).

Jubilate Agno works to consolidate this conversion experience, as Smart's personal experience of life in a madhouse is unmistakably woven into the text, forming a key part of the poem's performance. If the author-reader relationship has been moulded in the way the poet suggests, then one assumes that individual words like 'authority', '*LUNATICK*', and '*humiliation*' were chosen with care in order to modulate meaning or give an emphasis. In the allusions to madness in *Jubilate Agno*, though, any tendency towards playing the victim becomes a reassertion of divine agency. It is clear that one important aim of the poem was to defend scriptural philosophy, which forms the grounds of a critique of both Locke and Isaac Newton, whose scientific explanations of mind and motion are recast in spiritual terms. It is notable that the conception of the poet's power to influence language is made, as Katz points out, by using the same terminology as Locke, that is 'impression, punching, moulding'.[70] The ability is seen to depend on God, since any activity or reasoning without God (including the deist idea of working towards God) amounts to atheism: '*For Lock supposes that an human creature, at a given time may be an atheist i.e. without God, by the folly of his doctrine concerning innate ideas*' (p.68, B396). In this reversal of Locke, the poem is deeply at odds with the linguistic theory which informs Battie's *Treatise*.

Battie's definition of madness as deluded imagination is heavily reliant upon Locke's theory of language. In the presentation of a new, streamlined medical vocabulary, the text frequently describes objects and processes which, by its own admission, are not clearly seen or only very imperfectly understood. 'The Definition of Madness', the opening section of *Treatise*, immediately attempts to reformulate the terminology of madness, dismissing the old nosology of the humours, which is seen to have clouded the issue by over-determining cause and attributing symptoms to madness that should properly belong to other conditions.[71] Individualized false perception is at the root of Battie's understanding:

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[70] Katz, p.60; and Locke, p142. Perception is described by Locke as an 'imprinting on the mind' of sense 'impressions'.
[71] Battie, pp.3-4.

> [T]hat man and that man alone is properly mad, who is fully and unalterably persuaded of the Existence or of the appearance of any thing, which either does not exist or does not actually appear to him, and who behaves according to such erroneous persuasion.[72]

The understanding of madness as deluded imagination had profound implications for the future of psychiatry since it brought the disease firmly inside the mind of the individual, which is seen to be the source of the error. As Allan Ingram has argued: 'Madness could now be seen as individual: it was brought about by something specific in the individual's life or personality, and its form and progress derived from the nature of the individual imagination'.[73] Battie's position, though, relies on a constructed narrative of disease as much as it does on the presentation of any material evidence, as Monro, among others, noted. Battie presents a series of recommendations for confined patients during the *Treatise* which promote a theory of moral management. The treatment of madness requires removal from anything that excites the nerves, including, 'affecting friends... [as well as those] who think it pastime to converse with Madmen and to play upon their passions'; furthermore, 'the place of confinement should be at some distance from home'; and, 'Every unruly appetite must be checked, every fixed imagination must if possible be diverted'; while 'the air he breaths should be dry and free of noisom steams: his food easy of digestion and simple'; and finally, 'his employment should be about such things as are rather indifferent'.[74] These ideas all become part of the future idea of the asylum. Monro also acknowledges the necessity of confinement, but the Bethlem doctor criticizes Battie for spending more time theorizing about medicine than precisely articulating what management means in practical terms. Battie's argument is seen as an invention of his own mind, totally ungrounded in reality: '... for even adorned with all the arts of circumlocution, so frequently to be met with in this performance, it [Battie's

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[72] Battie, p.6.
[73] Allan Ingram, *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p.112.
[74] Battie, pp.68-9.

commentary on 'Regimen'] stretches to no farther than two pages, while the less important part of

medicine takes up very near thirty'.[75]

Jubilate Agno questions any notion of the kind of deterministic definition of madness that

Battie identifies, and almost every major statement the poem makes opposes the idea of a

containing practical project like moral management. There is no sense that the 'I' of the poem is

under medical treatment at all, though the circumstances of madness and confinement are used as

an adjunct to the speaker's own claims. Supported by the connections between reciprocal lines, the

voice of the poet insists on the right to define his own predicament:

> Let Elizur rejoice with the Partridge, who is a prisoner of state and is proud of his keepers.
> *For I am not without authority in my jeopardy, which I derive inevitably from the glory of the name of the Lord* (p.12, B1).

While disregarding the idea of madness as a medically defined disease entity, these lines present

the poet's relationship with an Anglican God. This is the first line of Fragment B, a long section of

the poem which connects an array of religio-political statements (especially in the 'Let' verses) with

the personal circumstances of the poet (in the 'For' verses). In the above example, the poet is

aligned with other prisoners of state, such as the Biblical character Ezekiel, who prophesized while

a captive of King Jehoichin (Ezekiel 1: 2). The poem asserts its own measure of cultural authority

which presents an eternal allegiance between God and all living creatures. Smart's major

techniques are associative and allusive. He draws connections between Biblical characters ('Elizur'),

ideas (captivity), and people (including the poet himself), often using puns and wordplay. The

poet's self-identity is absorbed into these connections, but at the same time, it informs and

amplifies the identities of the other characters in the corresponding verse. Here, as elsewhere in

Jubilate Agno, the assertion of the poet's authority, and the commentary on state power, is found

to be sanctioned by God. The idea of confinement as a means to treat illness is never admitted into

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[75] Monro, p.37.

the poem's argument. There is rather an insistence on confinement as captivity, made through the delicate use of 'jeopardy', a word that conveys a sense of personal danger and which has overtones of religious persecution.[76] The same sense of 'jeopardy' is used later in the poem to denote the totality of the poet's own experience, both leading up to, and including, his confinement: '… *the Lord direct me in the better way of going on in the Fifth year of my jeopardy June the 17th N.S. 1760*…' (p.79, B560). At a time when many madhouses did not even keep registers, the insistence on dates is significant. The complex spiritual identity of the authoritative but acutely vulnerable poet is seen to be under threat.

In claiming a divine agency for language, Smart eschews any diction suggestive of madness as an organic illness. The possibility of a medical cure for madness, or Battie's idea of 'Regimen' as management of a condition, is not encountered:

> LET PETER rejoice with the MOON FISH who keeps up the life in the waters by night.
> *For I pray the Lord JESUS that cured the LUNATICK to be merciful to all my brethren and sisters in these houses* (p.31, B123).

The commentary on 'these houses' places them in an exclusively religious context, as the poem retains the old sense of lunatic with its supernatural connotations. The lines imply that treatment and cure of madness is only possible within a religious institution, echoing Mrs. Midnight's observation that the architecture of Bethlem Hospital 'seems rather too magnificent for a House of Charity' ('A Survey of Moorfields, humbly address'd to the Whigs and the Tories, by Mrs. Midnight', I, pp.176-82). Lunacy can only be alleviated by prayer, the appeal to a God who is elsewhere described as 'the Physician of body and soul' (p.4, A39). The line given above is part of a series in which each of the twelve apostles is linked to a particular fish. The notion of a valid secular response to madness is absent here. The sequence does, though, present the need for resilience in the face of abuse:

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[76] Hawes notes that 'jeopardy' is used by George Fox in a pastoral epistle, p.160.

> Let Andrew rejoice with the Whale, who is array'd in beauteous blue and is a combination of bulk and activity
> *For they work me with their harping-irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more unguarded than others* (p.32, B124).

Like the creature, the poet is apparently subject to mistreatment, taking on the identity of the 'beauteous blue' of the 'Whale' with its natural majesty ('a combination of bulk and activity'). The poet is also, apparently, more vulnerable, 'more unguarded than others', perhaps an oblique reference to his guardians at the madhouse – the proprietor or the keepers, or even other residents. A few lines later, the personal voice of the poem is associated with the role of a fisherman for Christ: '*For the nets come down from the eyes of the Lord to fish up men to their salvation*' (p.33, B131). The 'I' figure of the poem is both a victim and a reviver of the good news.

Smart's poem resists any notion of the individual as a pathological subject, while positing the immense agency of a divinely authorized language. Against this, secular terminology is regarded as nonsense: '*For all good words are from GOD, and all others are cant*' (p.26, B85). For Battie, language has agency as a means of conceptualizing disease; the lack of 'a precise definition' for madness is a major obstacle for the better treatment of it.[77] Given sufficient time and expertise, a more accurate description of the subject can promote a physical cure, but only if the individual is removed from society. Where Battie makes the individual's erroneous evidence of sense perception the key factor in the determination of madness, Smart presents vision as unmediated and divinely authorized. Underlying this are fundamental philosophical differences between Smart and Locke. Whereas Locke argues that ideas are each distinctly perceived in experience through '*sensation*' and '*reflection*', and are then abstracted, compounded, and rearranged, Smart asserts the relatedness of everything in a primacy of vision and intuition: '*For an IDEA is the mental vision of an object*' (p.68, B395) and '*For I is the organ of vision*' (p.78, B546).[78] Where Locke leads a

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[77] Battie, p.7.
[78] Locke, *Essay*, 'Chapter XII: Of Complex Ideas' (Book II), p.159.

charge against rhetoric as a 'powerful instrument of Error and Deceit', Smart celebrates it.[79] He

adopts and expands Lowth's ideas which endorse the use of rhetorical tropes and figures as part of

the 'Sententious Style' of Hebrew poetry.[80]

Battie confidently asserts a professional role as the arbiter of pathology in the individual,

but Smart's notion of 'jeopardy' is suggestive of the stigma attached to anyone thought to be mad

in the eighteenth century. *Jubilate Agno* – rather like the description of the Collegium Insanorum in

Cowper's *Adelphi* – gives little or no sense of either St. Luke's Hospital or Potter's private madhouse

as institutional spaces. That doctors were ever to be found there would not be clear from a reading

of the poem (and they were probably only sporadically present), and yet the stigma of madness is a

running theme. Even Fragment A, the opening section of the poem which does not have any 'For'

verses, seems to point to the stigmatizing effects of the madhouse, as Smart sympathetically

presents a number of lowly creatures that are habitually judged or condemned by their looks.

Among others, there is the Rat, 'which dwelleth in hardship and peril' (p.4, A33); the Beetle 'whose

life is precious… tho' his appearance is against him' (p.4, A38); the Otter who is 'given to dive and

to burrow for his preservation' (p.4, 40); the Badger with a 'privacy inaccessible to slander' (p.5,

A45); and the 'Worm – the life of the Lord is in Humiliation, the Spirit also and the truth' (p.5, A51).

Later, the poet deftly alludes to dispossession, disinheritance, and homelessness, the privations of

the madhouse. These allusions, however, are always made in the context of religious rejoicing

through salvation, as in the line:

Let Mary rejoice with the Maid – blessed be the name of the immaculate CONCEPTION
For I am in twelve HARDSHIPS, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all (p.34, B139).

In this way, Smart takes on the stigma of the madhouse, and reverses it, to make a form of social

protest which draws together a number of different identities, human and otherwise: '*For tall and*

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[79] Locke, *Essay*, 'Chapter X: Of the Abuse of Words' (Book III), p.452.
[80] Lowth, I, pp.98-9.

stately are against me, but humiliation on humiliation is on my side' (p.30, B112). For Smart,

language is about survival, but it is also about positive affirmation, inclusivity, belonging,

generosity, and the importance and significance of all creation. This would even include the

Crocodile, for instance, 'which is pleasant and pure, when he is interpreted, tho' his look is of terror

and offence' (p.5, A46). The poem is itself a continued act of interpretation, a constant over-turning

of sorrow and misfortune, neatly conveyed in another packed line at the beginning of Fragment B:

> Let Shelumiel rejoice with Olor, who is of a goodly savour, and the very look of him harmonizes the mind.
> *For my existimation is good even amongst the slanderers and my memory shall arise for a sweet savour unto the Lord* (p.12, B3).

The lines bring together the poet's reputation (through a neological adaptation of the Latin word

existimatio) with the idea of sacrifice (through the Biblical story of Prince Shelumiel, and through a

play on the Latin word for swan, *Olor*, which is close to the word for smell or to savour of, *olere*)

(Numbers 7: 36). The lines are multi-directional: one reading of them might focus on the ingenious

way they promote the self-sacrifice of the poet before God as the aesthetic beauty of the Swan

'harmonizes' the mind and merges with the burnt offerings of a Prince. The lines also continue the

large claims made by the voice of *Jubilate Agno*, as the poet's memory is divinely projected as a

'sweet savour' – there is no diffidence in Smart's persona.

In a linguistic sense, *Treatise* moves in one direction only. Battie does not shy away from

the limitations of eighteenth-century medicine – 'Physick in its present imperfect state' is unable to

remove 'original madness' 'by any method' – but he is adamant that a medical definition of

madness is necessary even if only provisional:[81]

> In order therefore to avoid this mischievous confusion of sentiment as well as language, and that we may fix a clear and determinate meaning to the Word *Madness*; we must for some time at least quit the schools of Philosophy, and content ourselves with a vulgar apprehension of things...'.[82]

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[81] Battie, p.61.
[82] Battie, p.4.

These lines contain a major conundrum. How far was it possible, at this time, to pin down madness as an organic, corporeal, scientific concept, and in determinate language? How could this be done without falling prey to the same mixing of sentiment and words, by which Battie condemns earlier understandings? Battie's attempt to marry an empirical approach in medicine – 'a vulgar apprehension of things' – to a determinate approach in language was criticized on both accounts by Monro, who suggests Battie's ideas are insufficiently based in practical experience. Nor does Monro accept the validity of Battie's design to base the treatment of madness on a streamlined definition, dismissing the theory of 'deluded imagination' with the blunt remark: 'Definitions are of no use, unless they convey precise and determinate ideas'.[83] As it is, the sceptical Monro finds that: 'The judgment is as much or more concerned than imagination, and I should rather define madness to be vitiated judgment, though I cannot take upon me to say that even this definition is absolute and perfect'.[84] Monro arguably follows Locke's theory of language more closely than Battie does, and is very alert to whatever is speculative, unobserved, or otherwise vague in Battie's *Treatise*, identifying the danger of an overweening subjectivity in medicine: '… we should not… rely too much on private opinion and conjecture'.[85] He insists that Battie has constructed an imaginary illness (original madness) and strikingly lays out the consequences for persons – like Smart – who are taken to be incurably mad:

> I should never have taken so much notice of this chimerical distemper, had it not been for the terrible doom pronounced against it, that it is not to be cured; by which means it must often happen, that a person labouring under madness (should he chance to be attended by a philosophical physician) must be abandoned as an incurable for no other reason, but because it has pleased this gentleman to create a new distemper… .[86]

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[83] Monro, p.3.
[84] Monro, pp.3-4.
[85] Monro, p.23.
[86] Monro, p.25.

This almost mirrors Locke's attack on enthusiasm. While Monro is well able to condemn Battie's chutzpah, his own criticism is weakened by an over-arching negativity, an absolute uninterest in investigating anything other than the 'effects of this distemper' insofar as they can be managed by traditional measures like vomiting, bleeding, and purging.[87] Notwithstanding a stated concern for close observation and experience, *Remarks* is almost as dismally, not to say comically, resigned on the causes of madness ('which will for ever remain unknown') as the final comments of the entry on madness in Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (which Smart may have read during his confinement): 'Some Authors say, that the Brain of a Cat eaten, produces Madness. 'Tis a Disease very hard to cure, and is generally found to baffle the Physician'.[88]

Jubilate Agno is a riposte to Battie's search for the 'clear and determinate meaning' of words. At the same time, Smart provides a critique of a wider spiritual malaise. In the poem, language performs a variety of roles, not only to signify meaning. In a long sequence of *Jubilate Agno*, Smart advocates the eternal validity, after Hebrew, of the English alphabet (p.76-9, B513-61). The sequence makes manifest the cross-dimensional quality of language, its expansiveness and fluidity, across different cultures and scripts; its reservoir of semantic, imagistic, and phonic associations, even if the English language is held to be particularly sacred: '*For E is eternity – such is the power of the English letters taken singly*' (p.77, B517). Deploying allusiveness and punning, Smart draws out multiple connections between individual letters/words and the things/ideas they are suggestive of. This is ultimately seen to derive from God's immanence as 'the Word'. This belief in the divine Logos has a sustaining power for the faithful in a madhouse:

> *For G is God – whom I pray to be gracious to Live[r]more my fellow prisoner* [at St. Luke's]
> *For H is not a letter, but a spirit – Benedicatur Jesus Christus, sic spirem!*
> *For I is identity. God be gracious to Henry Hatsell'* [a subscriber to Smart's Poems (1752)]
> (p.77, B519-21).

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[87] Monro, p.34 and pp.50-52.
[88] Chambers, II, p.480.

Drawing on the sense of H as an aspirate, this is reflective of Smart's overall emphasis on enunciation and pronunciation in *Jubilate Agno*. For Smart, the Logos is a creative principle, through Christ, and the scriptures, which the poet is defending 'against vain deceit' (p.33, B130). Such deceit is derived, the Biblical allusion of the line suggests, from 'the tradition of men... and not after Christ' (Colossians 2:8). Invoking his own personal circumstances to further the argument, Smart is criticizing a movement away from the primacy of Anglican Christian values.

Not only do all words come from God, but according to Lowth, the 'first office of poetry was to praise the Creator and display His mysteries'.[89] In performing this first office of poetry, *Jubilate Agno* reveals an unresolved tension between a belief in the divine (Logos), and a philosophy of the mind that would reason from nature alone, to 'fix' the definitions of words, as Battie does. Fraser Easton argues that Smart's idea of language pre-empts Marshall McLuhan on mediality: '...the meaning or semantic government of the word (Logos) is barely relevant'.[90] This is diametrically opposed to the stated intentions of Battie and Monro, where a regulation of semantic terminology is seen as the route to greater clarity. Battie and Monro would minimize any potential mediality, and entirely focus on the semantic government of the word, concerned to avoid a multiplicity of meanings. An example occurs in relation to 'weakness of nerves' and Sensation in Battie's *Treatise*: 'By this inaccurate manner of talking, the most distinguishing property of animal nature is in danger of being blended with inanimate matter'.[91] Smart is rather concerned to present a multiplicity of possible inter-related meanings.

What is at stake here in these very different ideas of language? *Jubilate Agno* is not easily understood and given the critical responses to *Song to David* (1763), there is certainly an argument that contemporary readers would have found it difficult to read. Smart's approach runs quite contrary to Samuel Johnson's theory of poetic language, as Walsh explains: 'It was for Johnson as it

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[89] Cited in Rizzo, p.122.
[90] '"Mary's Key" and the Poet's Conception: The Orphic versus the Mimetic Artist in *Jubilate Agno*', in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Clement Hawes (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p.159.
[91] Battie, p.17.

was for Locke a cardinal principle to use words with 'clear and distinct ideas', and the use of affected or archaic vocabulary, or of words in peculiar conjunctions, offends against that principle'.[92] Walsh describes the 'peculiarity' of poetic diction advocated by Smart, after Thomas Gray and Lowth, emphasizing how far against the grain of Johnson's ideas this went: 'The argument against 'peculiarity' runs like a vein through Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*'.[93] One could say that Smart, rather like Blake, makes the reader work to seek out connections, to uncover associations and follow allusions, to actively engage with the text. As well as employing expressions which were archaic in the eighteenth century, Smart widens language by introducing new terminology and enriches the existing vocabulary by punning and by intermixing images and sounds and meanings. *Jubilate Agno* certainly rewards close reading and its deployment of language is so rich that it can be usefully contrasted with other kinds of discourse. Clearly medical texts are not written to open up the glories of language and are defined by their practical purpose, but reading *Jubilate Agno* against Battie's *Treatise* shines a light on an approach to language which was not only limited but potentially very damaging.

   Jubilate Agno, at times, breaks down in obscurity while a comprehensive understanding of the poem would certainly require the reader to be deeply versed in the religious culture that produced it. Battie's *Treatise*, on the other hand, does not regard language carefully enough and gropes for easy solutions to complex problems. Echoing Locke's work on madness as a 'wrong connexion of ideas', and the philosopher's emphasis on the significance of words as conveyors of 'clear and distinct ideas', Battie would present himself as a guardian of language. In a particularly revealing passage, he gives a commentary on its potentially distorting effects.[94] 'Figurative words',

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[92] Marcus Walsh, 'A Very Peculiar Practice: Christopher Smart and the Poetic Language of Early Romanticism', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. by Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.151-165 (p.154).
[93] Walsh, p.152.
[94] Locke, *Essay*, 'Chapter XXXIII: Of the Association of Ideas' (Book II), pp.354-5; and 'Chapter X: Of the Abuse of Words' (Book III), p.437.

Battie argues, are potentially a danger to those 'young Practitioners', who are either 'misguided' by

their literal sense or:

> fancy any thing like personal consciousness and intellectual agency in the animal economy. For in
> such cases of misapprehension these and the like expressions become as absurd as all the exploded
> *Faculties of the Ancients*, and, what is much worse, may be as mischievous as an instrument of death
> in the hands of a Madman.[95]

With characteristic conviction, Battie unites a denunciation of the moral threat that the 'Madman'

represents with the misuse of figurative terminology. Which is the more mischievous though?

Figurative expression that serves to bamboozle a young medic? Or Battie's easy condemnation of

much past thinking on madness alongside an equation of the 'Madman' with 'an instrument of

death'?

'*For I blessed God in St James's Park till I routed all the company*': Unlimited Praise and the

Limitations of Mad-Doctoring

This section discusses the spiritual identity at the heart of *Jubilate Agno*, and draws attention to the

importance of subjective appearances in the treatment and theorizing of a madness understood as

pathologized imagination. As Battie suggests himself, eighteenth-century mad-doctoring in terms

of effective medicine, professionalism, and common standards was not well established. Moreover,

the idea of madness as a coherent single concept was being questioned, as Tom Keymer

comments: '… simple assumptions about madness as a stable natural category – unproblematically

distinct from, and therefore a validation of, normative sanity – were being interrogated and

rethought'.[96] The limitations in understanding aetiology opened up room for psychological and

moral explanations for madness, as Andrews and Scull describe when presenting the causal factors

that emerge in Monro's 1766 case book: '…such calamitous and stressful moral events as

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[95] Battie, p.32.
[96] 'Johnson, Madness, and Smart' in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Clement Hawes (New
York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp.177-92 (p.183).

impoverishment, upset, bereavement, love, fright, shock, rejection, physical and verbal abuse, and economic reversals'.[97] Alongside this, however, medical responses to madness were also characterized by an aversion to religious enthusiasm. Monro was likely to have 'shared the traditional hostility of … Bethlem's largely Anglican board of governors to sectarian religions, the Methodists in particular'.[98] While Methodists were patients and unwelcome visitors at Bethlem, St. Luke's also 'became identified as a backdrop and receptacle for the "Methodically" mad', especially since the site of the hospital was formerly a 'headquarters for Wesley'.[99] *Jubilate Agno* enters this terrain, wholly denying the imputation of madness, but asserting an enthusiastic perspective, albeit one claiming to reform the Anglican church.

Jubilate Agno celebrates the aesthetics of poetry in its dense play of allusions and punning, but it has, above all, a religious message, as witnessed in one of its most celebrated lines:

> Let Hushim rejoice with the King's Fisher, who is of royal beauty, tho' plebeian size.
> *For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God, God hath sent me to sea for pearls* (p.17, B30).

In the allusion to the parable of the merchant seeking for pearls (heaven), and, correspondingly, to the 'King's Fisher' as a symbol of Christ, this line encapsulates much of the poem's message. Whatever may seem contrary to the heavenly search that the poet self-identifies with becomes part of the poem's syncretic and multi-layered project. The line suggests that one can find salvation anywhere – even in a madhouse. Against the role of prophetic visionary, Smart invokes the doings and paraphernalia of the mad-business, which is regarded, above all, as a kind of spiritual folly:

> Let Bukki rejoice with the Buzzard, who is clever, with the reputation of a silly fellow.
> *For silly fellow! silly fellow! is against me and belongeth neither to me nor my family* (p.22, B60).

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[97] *Customers and Patrons of the Mad-Trade*, p.52.
[98] Andrews and Scull, *Undertaker*, p.81.
[99] Andrews and Scull, p.85.

Although always framed by the invitation to 'rejoice', Smart's criticism of the madhouse can be quite explicit:

> Let Hur rejoice with the Water-wag-tail, who is a neighbour, and loves to be looked at.
> *For they pass by me in their tour, and the good Samaritan is not yet come.* – (p.22, B63).

In the pun on Water-wag-tail/wag, as in mischievous, Smart seems to object to the highly symbolic activity of the madhouse 'tour'. The invocation of a '*tour*' is curious, though, given the decision made by St. Luke's to ban public galleries at the hospital's inception, whereas patients were famously subject to ridicule and abuse by paying members of the public at Bethlem. 'The Survey of BEDLAM continued' and 'The Case of Mr. WILL. WIMBLE' in the *Midwife* point to the uneasy reversals and deceptions that the tour could involve (I, pp.260-69). Mrs. Midnight meets an acquaintance – Wimble – who unnerves her by suddenly switching from 'incoherent Madness to solid Reasoning', a parody perhaps of the *Man of Feeling*. Rather than a confined lunatic, Wimble attempts to suggest that he is a visitor showing around a country bumpkin, who is in fact the keeper. When Wimble is discovered, he quickly reverts to the part of the lunatic again: '… when he saw the People come about him, and found that he must submit, he made me a Bow, and walk'd off' (p.264). The tour is represented in this piece as a dark farce, but it nevertheless demonstrates disapproval of the practice: 'Generous Minds [Mrs Midnight comments] will ever be deeply affected with Accidents of this Sort, and especially when they happen within the Compass of their Acquaintance. Poor Mr. Wimble's Misfortune gave me so much Uneasiness, that I was unable to stay any longer in the Place…' (p.264). The role-reversals and deceptions of the madhouse 'tour' are brilliantly satirized later in the century by the young artist, Richard Newton, in his print, *A Visit to Bedlam* (1794) (see Appendix II: Figure 11).

The pejorative sense of 'tour' has a rhetorical force in a review of Smart's 'Ode to the Earl of Northumberland', which slurs the poet's '*tour*' of expression, implying evidence of madness.[100] I

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[100] *Monthly Review*, 31 (1764), p.231.

would suggest that the use of 'tour' in *Jubilate Agno* forms part of the poet's own re-definition of confinement, as the experience of it is conceptualized as a kind of spiritual battle. What might be taken as points of vulnerability are re-engineered as spiritual strengths, as in the memorable line:

> Let Jude bless with the Bream, who is of melancholy from his depth and serenity.
> *For I have a greater compass both of mirth and melancholy than another* (p.33, B132).

Like the deep-swimming Bream, the poet's expression is oriented towards depth of understanding. Even a worm in the intestine – 'Ascarides' – is invoked in a representation of the forces of good and evil, or God and the 'Adversary', which would seem to involve the dark procedures of the madhouse:

> Let Magdiel rejoice with Ascarides, which is the life of the bowels – the worm hath a part in our frame
> *For I rejoice like a worm in the rain in him that cherishes and from him that tramples* (p.18, B37).

The projection of the madhouse experience as a spiritual struggle was continued after Smart left it in a poem written to celebrate the man who had assisted the poet in his release. 'An Epistle to John Sherratt, Esq.' begins by drawing attention to the 'bard's conceit', after which Smart is named in the third person and implicated in a grief-ridden 'tale' of illness and confinement: 'Well nigh sev'n years had fill'd their tale, / From Winter's urn to Autumn's scale, And found no friend to grief, and *Smart*, / Like Thee and Her, thy sweeter part (IV, p.345, 16 and 19-22). Thereafter, the poet is cast as a 'pris'ner free', and likened to a ship saved from worldly cynicism by Sherratt's Godly spirit: 'To run thy keel across the boom, / And save my vessel from her doom, / And cut her from the pirate's port, / Beneath the cannon of the fort' (IV, p.345-347, 32 and 73-6). This concords with the repeated representations of danger and spiritual courage in *Jubilate Agno* as conveyed in lines like: '*For I am ready for the trumpet and alarm to fight, to die and to rise again*' (p.18, B38).

The privatization of a disputed madness is ironically referred to as the poet asserts a status as God's messenger, taking refuge in the surety that both the poet and *Jubilate Agno* itself will

ultimately be favourably interpreted: '*For I have translated in the charity, which makes things better and I shall be translated myself at the last*' (p.14, B11). Nevertheless, Smart undoubtedly suffered privations during this period, and several lines of the poem hint at brutal treatment:[101]

> Let Elkanah rejoice with Cymindis the Lord illuminate us against the powers of darkness.
> *For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me with his staff*
> (pp.26-7, B90).

The thread of dispossession and hardship that runs through much of the first-person lines of the poem makes an awkward parallel to contemporary satires on Battie's accumulation of material wealth.[102] The poet eschews material wealth to sacrifice all for God: '*For tis no more a merit to provide for oneself, but to quit all for the sake of the Lord*' (p.25, B81).

In Fragment C (1-16), Smart's revision of the alphabet sequence advances an overwhelmingly spiritual view of reality by linking letters to botanical herbs and plants, alongside names from the Biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah (which focus on a return from exile and a purification of religious purpose):

> Let Ramah rejoice with Cochineal.
> *For H is a spirit and therefore he is God.*
>
> Let Gaba rejoice with the Prickly Pear, which the Cochineal feeds on.
> *For I is person and therefore he is God* (p.91, C.1-2).

This is a very long way away from eighteenth-century debates on personal identity-as-consciousness, or from Monro's common-sense philosophy in *Remarks*, where 'metaphysical subtleties' are to be avoided, and the physician's personal judgment and knowledge 'are of the

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[101] Betty Rizzo and Nora Mahoney, eds. *The Annotated Letters of Christopher Smart* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), p.xxxv. The editors note that during his confinement, Smart's wife left him, taking their daughters to Dublin.

[102] Scull, *Madness in Civilization*, pp.132-5. Battie 'grew rich and prominent enough to earn a knighthood, become president of the Royal College of Physicians and rise from near-poverty to leave a fortune of between £100,000 and £200,000 – tens of millions in modern money'.

utmost consequence'.[103] The sequence completes the overall sense in the poem that identity is

shared in mutually reinforcing praise, so in the lines just quoted, multiple meanings of cochineal

(the insect; the plant on which it feeds; the dye made from the dried bodies of the insects) are all

invoked to glorify God.[104] *Jubilate Agno* everywhere affirms the stability of an identity within God

just as people and whatever they produce are subject to constant mutability: 'Let Iddo praise the

Lord with the Moth – the writings of man perish as the garment, but the Book of God endureth for

ever' (p.7, A68). Iddo was a writer of genealogies (II Chronicles 12: 15), and Isaiah is referenced in

the garment (Isaiah 51: 8). Smart's approach reinforces the old idea of the soul as the substantial

self, and the over-riding importance of discovering and sharing in God's identity – the major

concern of the Book of Isaiah. In direct contradiction of Locke's theory of personal identity, Smart

contemplates the transmigration of the soul: '*For the Soul is divisible and a portion of the Spirit may

be cut off from one and applied to another*' (p.67, B388). Christopher Fox's commentary elucidates

the gulf between Smart and Locke on this point:

> …. the substantial soul is simply incapable of wholly accounting for human identity, not only because
> of our inability to know the soul, but also because this criterion leaves open the possibility of
> transmigration… Locke also rejects the soul as the criterion of identity because of his belief in the
> absurdity of any claim that human existence can be considered apart from human body and
> shape.[105]

Any sense of Locke's empirical self – the learnt self following the *tabula rasa* – is anathema to

Smart. In *Jubilate Agno*, the self is always already present, participating in the celebration of the

bounty and generosity of God's creation. God can even be found in the wasting away of matter, for

instance, where Smart lends credence to an already questionable theory of equivocal (or

spontaneous) generation: '*For putrifying matter nevertheless will yield up its life in diverse*

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[103] Monro, p.35.
[104] Williamson, p.91.
[105] *Locke and the Scriblerians*, p.31.

creatures and combinations of creatures' (p.69, B410-11). This is the kind of line that supports

Williamson's judgment that Smart had 'a fundamentally unscientific mind'.[106]

Monro and Battie, both orthodox Anglicans and Tories, would surely have objected to

Smart's enthusiastic assertions and claims to a special status as irrationality, but eighteenth-

century medicine made subjective judgments of its own.[107] Drawing upon a new vocabulary,

suggestive of neurophysiology (of nerve 'fibres', and 'pressure' on the 'nervous medullary

substance' [108]), Battie leaves his work open to Locke's criticism that 'the first abuse of words' is the

using of them as 'signs without anything signified'.[109] By Battie's own admission, the internal

processes that he places at the centre of his theory of madness, cannot be seen:

> ... we have no idea whatever, either visible or intellectual, how in what manner those particles are
> by such pressure differently juxtaposed, previously to sensation thereby excited... [Knowledge is]
> limited by the outside of the seat of Sensation; what passes within being meer conjecture.[110]

This anticipates a persistent problem that psychiatry has, whenever it infers from the outside of an

organic process; when diagnoses were made, long before MRIs and PET scans, for instance; when

the brain was described, but could not be seen working *in vitro*. Indeed, it recommends a

scepticism wherever newly introduced language is deployed in relation to brain function. Battie

argues that madness has a material basis, but *Treatise* underlines the difficulties in presenting this

as a medical fact, rather than mere conjecture, as several of his medical readers noted.[111] Among

those who took Monro's side in the 'Great Lunacy Debate' was John Haslam, on the grounds that

the ideas of the Bethlem physician were based 'on the authority of extensive observation and

practice'.[112] If the majority of contemporary medical observers favoured Monro, Battie's location of

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[106] Williamson, p.69.
[107] Andrews and Scull, p.51.
[108] Battie, pp.8-12.
[109] Locke, p.437.
[110] Battie, pp.25-6.
[111] Andrews and Scull, pp.63-64. Crowther, Pargeter, Crichton, and George Man Burrrows are all cited as examples. Von Haller is reported to have observed: 'C'est théorie toute pure, sans ombre d'expérience'.
[112] *Observations on Insanity* (London: Rivington), p.vii.

madness in 'sensation' and the imagination nevertheless retained 'considerable currency' after the

1750s.[113] Twentieth-century historians and scholars, Andrews and Scull add, have tended to reverse

the contemporary verdict, making Battie the progressive figure and Monro the reactionary.[114] My

view is that Battie's ideas are important insofar as they anticipate the moral therapy of the York

Retreat, but at the same time, *Treatise* is over-confident and easily slips into social and cultural

stereotyping. It must be allowed, though, that Battie does at least spark a debate, whereas Monro,

it seems, would not have chosen to shine any light on his practice at all.

Treatise is full of assertion as Battie bluntly states, for instance, that madness is as

'manageable as other distempers... contrary to the opinion of some unthinking persons'.[115] With

implications for Smart, Battie derides excessive drinking as an indirect cause of madness, railing

against those 'wretches' who 'fill our hospitals'.[116] In the same chapter, and as part of the same set

of indirect causes, he also jokily condemns 'the despairing bigot'; 'the moping lover'; 'infirm and

shattered Philosophers'; 'the Epicure'; 'lazy monks'; and even 'the extasies of sendentary and

chlorotic Nuns'.[117] The line between morality and illness blurs here. The passage builds up a

rhetorical momentum, but is disparaging and flippant. In the case of the shattered Philosophers,

'who may without metaphor be said to have cracked their brains', physical causation is

indistinguishable, or inscribed within, moral judgement.[118] Battie underlines a problem that

modern psychiatry still encounters – the difficulty of separating an objective mental science from

crude moral or social judgements of what are perceived to be problem populations.

In the poetic satire, *The Battiad*, the doctor is taken to task for audacity in the face of

questionable results by the Bethlem governor, Moses Mendez, and Paul Whitehead.[119] (The

authors were assisted by Dr. Isaac Schomberg, who Battie had litigated against successfully in his

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[113] Andrews and Scull, pp.63-64.
[114] Andrews and Scull, p.66.
[115] Battie, p.93.
[116] Battie, pp.53-4.
[117] Battie, pp.56-7.
[118] Battie, p.57.
[119] *The Battiad* (London: G. Smith, 1750).

role as president of the College of Physicians. Schomberg had been prevented from practising medicine in England as a German-born Jew with an MD from Leyden).[120] Battie (or 'Battus') is variously indicated as 'deep-read in worldly art' (Canto 1, 17); 'ever in disguise' (Canto 1, 20); 'madly emulous of vulgar Praise' (Canto 1, 27); a 'modern *Janus* with a double Face' (Canto 2, 2); 'the *Man of Guile*' (Canto 2, 44); 'Perhaps a Doctor, and perhaps a Knight' (Canto 2, 102); and 'great Master of the double Tongue' (Canto 2, 148). Battie's authority is mocked through the relationship in the poem between 'Battus' and his midwife 'Pocus', who is guardian of the former's 'offspring' (his ideas and publications). Assuming the voice of Battie, the poem condemns the physician as a quack: ' "With thee I'll misinterpret, meanings strain, / Or wade thro' miry roads of dead chicane... / As *Mountebank* and quaint *Jack-Pudding* join, / So ever mix thy friendly name with mine"' (Canto 2, 97-8 and 101-102). The imputation of madness is turned back on the professional doctor, as Battie/Battus emerges as a consistent figure only in his status as a chameleon. The ambition to pin down the politics of the mad-doctor appear to be as much at issue as Battie's own ambition to pin down madness: 'Know', the poet-narrator states, 'I will hunt you thro' your *Proteus*' Shapes ; / *Whig*, *Jack*, or *Tory*, change to what you will, / Believe me, *BATTUS*, I will hold you still' (Canto 2, 10-12). The sentiment is less surprising when viewed against Battie's own propensity to mock his rivals in *Treatise*, some of whom have 'deserved' the 'suspicion of insanity', which Battie himself may have incurred by 'a solemn confutation of [their] chimeras'.[121]

'Chimera' is a suggestive word in the context of medical understandings of madness at this time, which often turn on the visibility of an assumed condition. According to one sense of the word operative in the eighteenth century, *Chimera*, as the fabled monster, refers to: 'An unreal creature of the imagination, a mere wild fancy; an unfounded conception' (OED sense 3B).[122] Chimeras might be fancied on every side of eighteenth-century madness, medical and religious,

[120] Andrews and Scull, p.281.
[121] Battie, p.16
[122] "chimera | chimaera, n." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2016) [accessed 10 September 2016].

doctor and patient. How far was madness visible? How far could it be given that there was so little

consensus on what madness was? *Jubilate Agno* is a poem of all-embracing praise, but the visible

manifestation of praise in unsocialized behaviour is, according to Samuel Johnson, exactly what

brought Smart into a madhouse:

> My poor friend Smart shewed the disturbance of his mind, by falling upon his knees, and saying his prayers in the street, or in any unusual place. Now although, rationally speaking, it is greater madness not to pray at all, than to pray as Smart did, I am afraid there are so many who do not pray, that their understanding is not called in question. [123]

While mad-doctors at this time (and long after) were almost wholly dependent on external signs for

their management of the condition, Smart's exhortations to prayer were only too visible.[124]

Johnson's remark effectively implies that it was safer to hide, or at least restrain, evangelical

feelings. Smart was arguably confined for no more than flouting a social code, but in any case there

was little by way of what would now be called admission criteria at this point. In *Jubilate Agno*, the

poet explains his circumstances by remarking on the social response of his contemporaries to his

evangelical inclinations: *'For I blessed God in St James's Park till I routed all the company'* (p.26,

B89). This does not encounter any medical rationale for confinement at all, but the Battie-Monro

debate shows that the madness that some doctors saw could be entirely unseen by others, where

Monro, for instance, describes Battie's key criterion of original madness as a 'chimerical

distemper'.[125] Battie depends on the outward manifestations of madness, speculating on cause via

an admission that the internal processes of the organs and nerves affected are invisible.

    Treatise rests on an assumption that a madness of flawed perception begins in the

imagination, but always risks encountering its own chimeras in the shadowy zone between medical

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[123] James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Christopher Hibbert (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), p.97.
[124] Despite his protestations of patriotic Anglicanism, Smart may have been associated with a 'Methodistic' madness which was identified with ' "unseemly" forms of worship'. Andrews and Scull, p.81; and Porter, pp.62-81.
[125] Monro, p.25.

hypothesis and moral and social judgment. Monro condemns Battie for his metaphysical

speculations and instead recommends 'diligent and faithful observation'.[126] His critique of Battie's

Treatise is witty and sharply argued, but Monro also points to the dearth of knowledge in the

medical understanding of madness:

> The effects of this distemper are plain and visible, let us therefore direct our knowledge to relieve
> them, and make use of such methods as are warranted by reason, and founded upon observation
> and experience; leaving the causes of this terrible calamity, which will for ever remain unknown, to
> such as can fancy there is any amusement in a disquisition of so unpleasing a nature.[127]

This passage manages to simultaneously advocate an empirical approach and sink into defeatism.

Monro presents a 'distemper' which can only be understood in terms of its 'effects', which may not

be quite as 'plain and visible' as he suggests. On the one hand, Monro steers a practical line, but on

the other, he invokes the arbitrariness of medical approaches to a protean madness. Madness was

a condition that was understood primarily from the outside, but this could involve an enormous

range of possible signifiers – the regularity and manner of prayer, as Smart's circumstances

indicate, were among them.

'*For by the grace of God I am the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN*': Poetic Identity

and Enthusiasm

In this concluding section, I draw together the main aspects of Smart's enthusiastic poetic identity.

The religio-political perspective on confinement in *Jubilate Agno* provides a counterpoint to the

arguments of Battie and Monro over the management and treatment of the insane.[128] Although

Smart seems to have regarded himself as 'a staunch Anglican', the textual evidence of *Jubilate*

Agno suggests a distinctly evangelical mission, in lines such as, '*For I bless God in the rising*

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[126] Monro, p.20.
[127] Monro, p.34.
[128] Andrews and Scull, p.69. On a practical level, the differences between Battie and Monro may have been
less fundamental than they at first seem: '…the mundane reality is that the plan, administrative procedures,
and therapeutic regime of St Luke's still had much in common with Bethlem'.

generation, which is on my side' (B10).[129] Hawes has convincingly argued that Smart's work combines aspects of orthodox Anglicanism and radical enthusiasm, a 'cross-breeding': 'It is precisely this threshold status – typical as well of many dimensions of eighteenth-century Methodism – that provides the necessary context for rethinking the depth of Smart's subversions in *Jubilate Agno*'.[130] As such, Smart would be better regarded as a religio-political poet, rather than a pathologically 'mad' one.

There is an undeniable self-promotion in Smart's view of his own project within the world, in the 'talent' (*Jubilate Agno*) and 'genius' (Preface to *The Works Of Horace*) of his poetic process. Smart draws on the circumstances of the madhouse to highlight the poet's self-sacrifice. As Walsh suggests, Smart self-consciously invoked a martyrdom: 'The poet is a genius, whose gift testifies to God. Furthermore, in New Testament Greek, as Smart very well knew, a 'witness' is, literally, a martyr… the poet suffers and is excluded for the truth he tells'.[131] The poem is a highly patriotic interpretation of the Bible, based, as Williamson has argued, on 'the concept of the Christian Church [in England] as the 'Israel of God'.[132] The poem's adoration has a national flavour, and is directed to men: '*For by the grace of God I am the Reviver of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN*' (p.63, B332). As Rosalind Powell suggests, Smart advances an 'English identity, bound up with his view of the divine providence of the Anglican Church'.[133] Smart's religious beliefs congregate around the idea that the poet is a participant in the divine will of God, which is reflected in his linguistic practice. Mounsey argues that Smart's poetry is based on the Biblical suggestion that 'man' was created in the image of God and could participate at least to some degree in God's knowledge of the world, with the result that: '… in Smart's poetry there is no disjunction between the self and the world perceived. The two are mutually informing and complementing and not

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[129] Hawes, p.133.
[130] Hawes, p.134.
[131] Walsh, p.159.
[132] Williamson, p.xxvii. After going from Genesis (Fragment A, line 4) to Revelation (ending at Fragment B, line 295), but having taken in successive New Testament books, Smart then reverts back (in Fragment C) to the Old Testament's historical books.
[133] *Christopher Smart's English Lyrics: Translation in the Eighteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.13.

separated as a binary'.[134] Smart's self-identification with Jesus, a key moment of the poem, underlines this point.

An inspired self-determinism shapes those parts of *Jubilate Agno* which have paired verses, but the countering of the 'accusation' of insanity must always be understood as part of a much larger religious project. In sequences that take in both Old and New Testament names, with 'clean' and 'unclean' animals, fish, birds, as well as classically-derived creatures, Smart creates his own system of divine taxonomy. Within this framework, the 'accusation' of madness is repudiated in line with the self-assertion of the poet's own idiosyncratic Christian role. The sense of the poet as a visionary and saviour of humanity culminates with the self-identification with Christ:

> Let Matthan rejoice with the Shark, who is supported by multitudes of small value.
> *For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour – for they said, he is besides himself* (p.36, B151).

John Haslam notes, much later in the century, that, 'Beside one's self most probably originated from the belief of possession by a devil, or evil spirit'.[135] Smart's lines make the religious sense of *besides oneself* a positive quality that the poet shares with the key figure in Christianity, which almost entirely nullifies the idea of madness raised by Battie and Monro. If Christ is mad then would not everyone else want to be? Another reading might emphasize that the poet asserts the role of a 'mad' prophet by utilizing a representation of the bleak life within a madhouse. In either case, Smart is protesting but from a divinely authoritative perspective which defines the world in exclusively spiritual terms. From a position on the margins of society, self-legitimization is found by drawing a parallel with Christ. This draws attention to the 'they' who make the accusation, who are implied by the image of the shark, 'supported by multitudes of small value' (B151). The lines are a key contribution to the overall sense that *Jubilate Agno*, as Keymer has written, denies insanity a status 'as a coherent notion, as an absolute or given, or indeed as anything more than a socially

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[134] Mounsey, p.172.
[135] *Observations on Madness and Melancholy*, 2nd edn (London: John Callow, 1809), p.5.

convenient fiction'.[136] Madness forms part of the rationalistic, materialistic, and mechanistic culture that the poem deplores, wherever it is seen to be encroaching upon the divine. Where madness is implied, it is largely as a label, the 'accusation' that the poet shares with Jesus only to dismiss it (B151).

Jubilate Agno does not present a medical case, but rather incorporates Smart's personal circumstances into an open engagement with contemporary intellectual themes in natural philosophy, nature, and politics, always under an umbrella of evangelically-inspired devotion. As Johnson wrote of his friend, Smart represented more of a challenge to socially acceptable behaviour than anything else:

> His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him, and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as any one else. Another charge was that he did not love clean linen, and I have no passion for it.[137]

Johnson's comment suggests how important the determination of social norms can be in the assignation of madness. As Porter comments, the nature of Smart's devotion – and his manner of expressing it – was not acceptable to a changing society: '… immersed in fundamentalism… [Smart] now had to walk out of step with a secularizing society'.[138] This devotion is at the centre of his poetic identity, extolled throughout *Jubilate Agno*: '*For to worship naked in the Rain is the bravest thing for the refreshing and purifying the body*' (p.67, B384). The nature of Smart's devotion was clearly unacceptable in the eighteenth century, but it is easy to imagine how this might be objected to today in a social sense, perhaps made subject to a legal case like that of the 'Naked Rambler', who walked the length of Great Britain naked, but was arrested following his second attempt and

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[136] Keymer, p.184.
[137] Boswell, p.98.
[138] Porter, p.80.

on further occasions.[139] Social standards are always shifting, though, and it is not always clear where the line is being drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Jubilate Agno represents the richness of felt experience and warns against a rigid determinism. As Battie's *Treatise* makes clear, even when viewed in the contemporary context, there was not a readily agreed upon approach to treat madness, let alone cure it. The question then arises: if confinement does not lead to a cure, then what exactly is it for, and how justifiable is it? For Smart, confinement, at least on one level, meant prison. While the aspiration to cure a disease of the nerves and the brain is not afforded any reality by the poet, Battie's sharp assertion of that reality was, at best, only partially accepted by his contemporaries. The Battie-Monro debate is one indicator of how limited the medical consensus was on the understanding, management, and treatment of madness. However, if the epistemological status of madness was very uncertain, the stigma it generated was unmistakable. Indeed, Smart's alignment with Christ recalls the original Christian sense of stigma as stigmata, alongside its general meaning as a mark of social disgrace. One of the most astonishing aspects of *Jubilate Agno*, in this context, is the joyousness of its overall tone. Given this major note of affirmation, it seems appropriate to end this discussion with one of the most memorable and insightful lines from the poem:

> Let Barkos rejoice with the Black Eagle, which is the least of his species and the best-natured.
> For nature is more various than observation tho' observers be innumerable (p.21, B53).

The Old Testament character of Barkos is aligned to some precise natural description: the Black Eagle, according to Pliny, was the smallest in physical size, and the only species of eagle to nurture its young.[140] In its evocation of an audience looking on a soaring, goodly nature, the line is a testament to the performativity of language. It also seems to point to the difficulty of objectivity in a fledgling medical science of the mind.

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[139] Severin Carrell, 'Naked Rambler', *Guardian* (13 September 2012) https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/sep/13/naked-rambler-back-to-prison [accessed 26 February 2014].
[140] Williamson, p.21.

Chapter 3: Madness, Religious Melancholy, and Self-Identity in Cowper's *Adelphi* (c.1767-70) and Letters (1760s-80s)

'I now began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining'

Adelphi is one of the most comprehensive first-hand accounts of madness in the eighteenth-century. Like *An Authentic Narrative* (1765), written by Cowper's close friend and confidant, the Reverend John Newton, Cowper's text is a spiritual autobiography, but a unique one in the context of the author's self-declared madness.[1] This chapter analyses the representation of the self in Cowper's prose, showing how it is shaped by the genre of spiritual autobiography and by the understanding of religious melancholy as a treatable condition. My reading incorporates a discussion of the poetry and prose of the evangelical doctor, Nathaniel Cotton, who plays an important role in Cowper's conversion. I also look at self-presentation in Cowper's letters, spanning the 1760s and the 1770s, amid recurring themes of anxiety and public trepidation; Calvinistic fears of eternal damnation; spiritual recovery; withdrawal from society and the search for a meaningful occupation through writing.

Cowper's personal experience of madness is described as 'mental derangement' by his contemporary biographer, William Hayley.[2] In *Adelphi*, madness is a dark and menacing phenomenon, but Cowper also represents religious melancholy, a condition which had a degree of social acceptance. The first three parts of this chapter are organised around the reading of *Adelphi*. The opening section considers religious melancholy alongside the genre of spiritual autobiography. The second section looks at madness up to the moment of Cowper's confinement in the text. The third section is concerned with the treatment of madness, both as represented in *Adelphi*, and in

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[1] John Newton, *An Authentic Narrative Of Some Remarkable And Interesting Particulars In The Life Of John Newton, Communicated In A Series Of Letters To Mr. Haweis* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2010). Hereafter, *Authentic Narrative*.

[2] William Hayley, *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, Esq. with Remarks on Epistolary Writers by William Hayley, Esq.*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Baldwin and Others, 1824), I, p.27.

Cotton's work, which included a popular book of poetry, *Visions in Verse for the Entertainment and Instruction of Younger Minds* (1751), reprinted at least twelve times running up to its inclusion as part of Cotton's collected works, *Various Pieces* (1791). The final section refers to a selection of key letters which shed light on Cowper's precarious sense of spiritual identity and the emergence of the published poet.

<u>'My mutinous and disobedient heart': Religious Melancholy and Spiritual Autobiography</u>

The editorial history of *Adelphi* is a reminder of the difficulties that pertain to thinking and writing retrospectively about madness. To what extent is it possible to recall and understand the experience of madness? How far is the understanding of that experience modified by later reflection or the interventions of others? The original memoir of the first part of *Adelphi* was written in c.1767, around four years after the mental crisis of 1763 that Cowper describes within it. After 1770, another section was written, detailing the conversion of Cowper's recently deceased brother, John. As the title indicates ('The Brothers' from the Greek 'adelphoi'), Cowper then seems to have chosen to join the two parts together – neither original holograph is extant. King and Ryskamp convincingly argue that the textual version closest to Cowper's original is a transcription of John Newton's copy of both narratives, made in 1772, by Maria Cowper, in the Commonplace Book of Mrs. Madan. Confusingly, Newton published the second part of Cowper's narrative in 1802 under the full-title of *Adelphi*. In 1816 both narratives were published together for the first time, and are likely to have been based on a text excised by Newton.[3]

For all its first-person narration and vivid description of the apparent experience of madness, *Adelphi* is a polished and controlled piece of prose narrative with significant omissions and emphases. The self-presentation of religious melancholy in *Adelphi* borrows from existing literature which intersects with the pastoral traditions within mainstream Anglicanism and with

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[3] James King and Charles Ryskamp, 'Introduction', *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper; Adelphi; and, Letters, 1750-1781* ed. by James King and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), I, p.xxiii-xxv.

English Calvinism. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Robert Burton's conception of religious melancholy described a mixed disorder which had mental, spiritual and bodily components, and incorporated enthusiasm as one form of religious melancholy 'in excess'. Jeremy Schmidt argues that the critique of enthusiasm launched by Anglicans and by dissenting anti-Calvinists marked an important development in the history of melancholy:

> Where previously the melancholic element of religious melancholy had often been overshadowed by a language that described the affliction of conscience in terms of a harrowing and distracted dark night of the soul, the medical concept of melancholy as a disorder of the body was now foregrounded as the central and perhaps the sole cause of religious despair and disconsolation.[4]

Nevertheless, 'until at least the 1740s', as Schmidt also notes, 'religious melancholy was seen by Anglican clergy themselves as a condition appropriately treated through spiritual consolation and pastoral care'.[5] The matter of causation was still controversial at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as can be seen in the public discussion over the cause of Cowper's madness: was it his evangelical conversion or was his Calvinistic Methodism a symptom of an underlying bodily disorder? Diane Buie has shown that *Adelphi* draws on the language of *Preservatives against Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow*, published in 1713, but written 'above thirty years ago' by the Presbyterian minister Richard Baxter (1615-1691).[6] Baxter's text was re-worked by Samuel Clifford in *Signs and Causes of Melancholy* (1716). While Baxter tends to be unsympathetic to the religious melancholic and attacks Calvinist theology, *Preservatives* nonetheless ratifies a condition that could be treated with spiritual physic: 'And I must tell the Melancholy Person that is Sincere, that the Knowledge of the Devils Agency in his Case, may be more to his Comfort than to his Despair'.[7] In Clifford's repackaging of the Baxter text, both of which Cowper may have read, the opening epistle

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[4] Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p.84.
[5] Schmidt, p.100.
[6] Richard Baxter, *Preservatives against Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow. Or the Cure of both by Faith and Physick* (London: Printed by W.R. and are to be Sold by William Hill, 1713).
[7] Baxter, p.23.

suggests that melancholy can be seen as intrinsic to Christian identity: 'There are few that become

Real Christians, but, at one time or other, are Exercis'd with something of that Melancholy which is

here descried'.[8] Buie argues that most of the thirty-five 'signs' of the condition listed in Clifford's

text are evidenced in *Adelphi*.[9] Religious melancholy, in the eighteenth century, continued to be

understood as a mixed bodily and spiritual condition, and, according to Clifford, incorporated

Calvinistic ideas of predestination.[10] It was understood as a disease of the imagination in which the

melancholic assumes an irrational degree of sin: 'I do not call those Melancholy, who are *rationally*

sorrowful for Sin… But by Melancholy I mean, this Diseased Craziness, Hurt or Error of *the*

Imagination, and consequently of the Understanding'.[11] A number of other texts on religious

melancholy were published during the century, notably Edward Synge's *Sober Thoughts for the*

Cure of Melancholy (1749), and James Robe's *Counsels and Comforts to Troubled Christians* (1749),

the same edition of which included the Baxter-Clifford text alongside Timothy Rogers' 'Advices to

the Friends of the Melancholy'.[12]

The sincerity of Cowper's account of mental and spiritual torment, as 'genuine experience',

is challenged by Buie, who re-evaluates *Adelphi* in the context of Baxter and Clifford. I support the

argument that Cowper self-identified as a religious melancholic, but not that a 'work shy' Cowper

was 'feigning' religious melancholy in order to provoke sympathy (and gain practical and financial

support) for what was a recognized condition.[13] If Cowper drew upon the existing vocabulary of

religious melancholy, and constructed his own narrative of an illness in *Adelphi*, perhaps with some

exaggeration, this does not mean that he necessarily feigned the experience of mental disturbance.

It seems to me equally likely that Cowper genuinely found himself to be a sufferer of an

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[8] Samuel Clifford, *The Signs and Causes of Melancholy, with directions suited to the case of those who are afflicted with it. Collected out of the works of Mr. Richard Baxter* (London: S. Cruttenden & T. Cox, 1716), p.iii.
[9] Diane Buie, 'William Cowper: A Religious Melancholic', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36 (2013), pp.103-19, (p.109).
[10] Clifford, p.7.
[11] Clifford, p.4.
[12] James Robe, *Counsels and Comforts to Troubled Christians* (Glasgow: John Robertson & Mrs. McLean, 1749), pp.255-78.
[13] Buie, p.112.

acknowledged condition. In any case, the question of authenticity is difficult to resolve for the same reason that it is difficult to determine how far the text reflects 'real madness' as opposed to writing about madness. I would also contend that Buie's argument over-simplifies the concept of religious melancholy. Religious melancholy could itself be regarded as a form of madness, albeit one with strong theological associations that might separate it from a Lockean understanding of madness like that recorded in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755): 'Distraction; loss of understanding; perturbation of the faculties… Fury; wildness; rage'.[14] Even the Baxter-Clifford text suggests that melancholy borders on 'distraction' as a result of brain error and diseased imagination:

> Melancholy persons that are near distraction, verily think that they hear *Voices*, and *see Lights* and *Apparitions*, that the curtains are opened on them, that something meets them, and saith this or that to them, when all is but the Error of a crazed Brain, and Sick Imagination.[15]

This is another instance of the protean qualities of madness in the eighteenth century. Buie argues that Cowper portrayed himself as a religious melancholic because this elicited more sympathy than 'general melancholy' or 'madness' could do, but this does not recognise the complexity of melancholy and madness in the culture, where, in their protean movements, the terms were not easily distinguishable and could morph into one another. Nor does it account for the narrator's allusions to self-confessed 'madness' and 'a state of insanity' (p.18 and p.35).[16] I would suggest that *religious melancholy* – which is conceptualized in *Adelphi* but not explicitly named as such – and *madness* – which *is* named – are better understood as closely related ideas and experiences.

 Adelphi corresponds to an established Puritan tradition of spiritual autobiography going back to the early seventeenth century, and forms part of a resurgence of conversion narratives in

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[14] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital* Edition, ed. By Brandi Besalke. Last modified: November 25, 2013, http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/./Johnson's Dictionary/ [accessed 1 March 2015]. Johnson cites Locke: 'There are degrees of *madness* as of folly, the disorderly jumbling ideas together, in some more, some less. *Locke'*.
[15] Clifford, p.27.
[16] Buie, p.111.

the eighteenth century which gathers pace from the 1730s and 1740s during the time of the

Evangelical Revival.[17] Several important aspects of the Puritan spiritual autobiography are present

in *Adelphi*, most notably the basic focus on individuality, on selfhood, self-examination,

introspection, and self-consciousness before God.[18] Next to this is the importance of the

corresponding relationship between religious law and the gospel, or as Hindmarsh puts it, 'the

inward testimony of the Spirit and the outward evidence of sanctification'.[19] In order to record the

moments of divergence in Cowper, it is helpful to consider the pattern of the Puritan conversion

narrative presented in John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666) and *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).

Hindmarsh offers a useful summary:

> These [Puritan] accounts typically begin with serious religious impressions in childhood, followed by
> descent into 'worldliness' and hardness of heart, followed by an awakening or pricking of religious
> conscience, and then a period of self-exertion and attempted moral rectitude, which only aggravates
> the conscience and ends in self-despair. This self-despair, paradoxically, leads to the possibility of
> experiencing a divinely wrought repentance and the free gift of justification in Christ. Forgiveness of
> sins comes, thus, as a climax and a psychological release from guilt, and ideally introduces a life of
> service to God predicated on gratitude for undeserved mercy.[20]

Adelphi follows this outline, but Cowper's conversion-narrative also reflects an eighteenth-century

emphasis on the importance of religious experience over tradition, and a Calvinism anchored in the

'golden chain' of providence, election, calling, justification by faith, sanctification, and

glorification.[21]

The central crisis takes place in a private madhouse, and Cowper dramatizes experience

through the representation of his psyche more often than through external events. As a result, the

conversion process is bound up with the representation of madness. While the autobiographer's

sense that conversion might be a sign of madness was a motif in earlier spiritual narratives, the

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[17] Bruce D. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.35 and p.62.
[18] Hindmarsh, pp.38-41.
[19] Hindmarsh, p.36.
[20] Hindmarsh, pp.51-2.
[21] Grayson Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: Taylor Francis Ltd, 1998), p.32.

descent into madness is rarely so embedded in the narrative structure as it is in Cowper's

memoir.[22] Where the text is most problematic – where it draws most attention to its own

subjectivity – is also where the narrative turns: Cowper's willing on and then re-emergence from

madness towards spiritual enlightenment. Although this presents the symptoms of religious

melancholy, as set down by Baxter-Clifford, the narrative cannot be reduced to them alone.

To situate *Adelphi* in aesthetic and theological terms, I will contrast the presentation of the

narrator and the circumstances of its circulation with that of Newton's *Authentic Narrative* (1765).

While their accounts were produced independently, Newton was very much involved in the

transcription of Cowper's narrative, and clearly influenced Cowper's authorial persona prior to the

publication of *Poems* (1782), as I explore in the next chapter. *Authentic Narrative* made Newton a

recognizable public figure. Following a wide distribution of the fourteen letters that make up the

text, it was published in order to avoid an unauthorized edition. The title picks up on eighteenth-

century crime-adventures, as well as Puritan conversion-narratives, and straddles different genres,

but Newton makes a clear statement of authorial identity. Looking towards a career in the ministry,

Newton's hopes are unmixed with any lingering self-doubt:

> I could not but wish for such a public opportunity to testify the riches of divine grace… as my life had
> been full of remarkable turns, and I seemed selected to shew what the Lord could do, I was in some
> hope that, perhaps, sooner or later, he might call me into this service.[23]

The text markets Newton's own employability, and by its conclusion there are no remaining

quibbles over the writer's newly discovered identity, as Hindmarsh observes:

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[22] John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* ed. by John Stachniewski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.13.
'But, I say, my Neighbours were amazed at this my great Conversion, from prodigious prophaneness, to
something like a moral life; And truly so they well might, for this my Conversion was as great, as for Tom of
Bedlam to become a sober man'.
[23] Newton, p.166.

> …like all writing about oneself, his narrative was fundamentally a response to the imponderable question, 'Who am I?' Newton's answer was unequivocal. In 1764 he wanted the world to know that he was above all a converted person… .[24]

The resolution of Cowper's testimony in *Adelphi* is less clear-cut. Towards the end of the narrative, anxious to move in with the deeply pious Unwin family, there are notes of anger, irresolution, and inadequacy, as the narrator contemplates an ever uncertain spiritual future in the guise of a disbelieving religious melancholic:

> But still the language of my mutinous and disobedient heart was, give me this blessing or I die… [And after hearing some comforting words from God] But my unbelief and fearfulness robbed me of much of the comfort they were intended to convey, though I have since had many and blessed experiences of the same kind for which I can never be sufficiently thankful (p.46).[25]

In further contrast to Newton's confident public declaration, *Adelphi* was only read by a small circle of friends and relatives, until it was published posthumously in 1816. It seems to have been written with an essentially private aim – with personal religious assurance, perhaps, the principal goal. An important letter sent by Cowper to Mrs. Madan which comments on his attitude towards his close cousin, Lady Hesketh, suggests both how circumspect he could be about who read the manuscript, and the extent to which Newton was involved in the process:

> At first I was very unwilling to shew it to her, but having consulted with Mr. Newton about the Propriety of doing so, and finding Him of Opinion that it might be done safely, I consented; but restrained it absolutely to her own Perusal, and she assures me no Eye has seen it but her own. I have always thought it unfit to be trusted in the Hands of an unenlighten'd Person, the Lord having dealt with me in a way so much out of the common Course of his Proceeding, nor do I intend that any such shall hereafter read it (11 June 1768, pp.196-97).

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[24] Bruce D. Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), p.48.

[25] Clifford, p.11. Compare to symptom 13: 'Yet while they thus Consent, and would give a World to *be sure that Christ were theirs*, and to be *perfectly Holy*, yet they think they believe not, because they believe not that he will forgive or save them'.

Exactly the same could have been said about Newton's 'Course', and yet the Reverend was ready to leave a mark for posterity. It is hard not to infer that the stigma of madness, and a wariness over how Cowper's conversion would be received, meant that none but a few trusted evangelical associates were given access it. The Newtons were positively invited to view the manuscript, as Cowper comments to Mrs. Madan: 'Pray tell him [Martin Madan] he is a bit of a Traytor for not sending my Narrative at the same time with his own, for I want much to shew it to Mr. and Mrs. Newton' (26 September 1767, p.181). According to its opening page, the memoir is nothing other than 'a history of my heart so far as religion has been its object' (p.5). Self-identity is, though, fraught in *Adelphi*. Unlike Newton, whose narrative helped to launch his career and was predicated on external events, such as the shipwreck which precipitated his conversion, Cowper traces an inner trajectory which brings multiple suicide-attempts to the front of the narrative. Negotiating the stigma of a recent association with madness, and a sudden loss of social standing, Cowper gives the same answer as Newton to the question, *Who am I?* but with nothing like the same degree of self-assurance.

'Now came the great temptation': Self-Declared Madness and Religious Melancholy in *Adelphi*

Adelphi is a carefully compiled text which draws on a range of sources from the literature of spiritual autobiography and religious melancholy. An important distinction between a sinful heart and the true religion of Christ's salvation is made at the beginning, and reflects not only a central aspect of spiritual autobiography, but also a precise sense of religious melancholy as a malady. The narrative absorbs Baxter's suggestion that a self-conscious awareness of the spiritual danger of an unregenerate heart leads to a pathological condition: '… many awakened Souls under the work of Conversion, think they can never have Sorrow enough, and that their danger lies in *hardheartedness*, and they never fear *overmuch Sorrow* till it hath *swallowed them up*'.[26] The

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[26] Baxter, p.7.

spiritual development of the narrator's heart drives the narrative, as references to the heart in various stages of religious conversion are detailed.

The selection and interpretation of events owes much to the genre of spiritual autobiography. 'I cannot recollect', the narrator writes, 'that, till… the thirty-second year of my life, I had ever had any serious impressions of the religious kind, or at all bethought myself of the things of salvation, except in two or three instances' (p.5). Cowper closely correlates mental experience with the path of a sinner. Each of the 'instances' alluded to are primarily psychical events that indicate how inner-life is made entirely dependent on the will of God. The narrator gives a curtailed description of being bullied as part of God's 'business continually to persecute me', before hearing the words of the Psalmist, ' "I will not fear of what man can do unto me" '. This immediately generates a positive perception: 'I instantly perceived in myself a briskness of spirits…' (p.5). The narrator then describes being struck on a leg by a skull, while walking past a gravedigger at work in a churchyard:

> I began to entertain with no small complacence a notion that possibly I might never die. This notion was, however, very short lived, for I was soon after struck with a lowness of spirits uncommon at that age, and had frequent intimations of a consumptive habit… This messenger from the Lord… perfectly convinced me that I was mortal (p.6).

The passage highlights the sinner's notion of immortality as dangerous, as the narrator's religious melancholy is signalled through the presentation of a flawed conscience. The demonstration of spiritual complacency is not uncommon in conversion-narratives generally, and nor is the representation of a tormented conscience during childhood, but the narrator here is not only an inveterate sinner but also the most severely rebuked.[27] The distance from God that this implies is a measure of the diseased conscience. The boy has independent thoughts and as such moves away from 'a dependence upon the Blessed God' (p.5) – an early indication of his opposition to God.

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[27] Bunyan, p.7. 'These things, I say, when I was but a childe, did so distress my Soul, that when in the midst of my many sports and childish vanities, … I was often much cast down and afflicted in my mind therewith…'.

In the narrator's reflection on his twenty-one year old self at the Temple, wickedness results in religious despair:

> This being a critical season of my life, and one upon which much depended, it pleased my all-merciful Father in Jesus Christ to give a check to my rash and ruinous career of wickedness at the very outset. I was struck, not long after my settlement in the Temple with such a dejection of spirits as none but they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair (p.8).

The passage anticipates the later attempts at self-murder, and generates pathos by laying bare the suffering of the tormented religious melancholic, unable to believe in salvation. By invoking his 'rash and ruinous career', Cowper was using a similar paradigm of melancholy as Baxter, who suggests that its most common cause is 'at first some worldly Discontent and Care… and then when the Discontent hath muddied and diseased a Man's Mind, Temptations about his Soul do come in afterwards'.[28] This opposition between the rightful course of the soul and worldliness is reiterated in Cowper's later work.

The narrator's description of extreme mental affliction accords with the rigorous requirements of spiritual self-reflection as described by writers like Philip Doddridge (1702-51), who was strongly influenced by Baxter.[29] According to Doddridge's *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745), in order to secure salvation, a committed Christian must '"apply to Christ, with a deep Abhorrence of your former Sins, and a firm Resolution of forsaking them; forming that Resolution in the Strength of His Grace, and fixing your Dependance on Him"'.[30] Cowper was 'highly delighted with' this text, which he read at Cotton's madhouse, alongside Doddridge's *Hymns Founded on Various Texts in the Holy Scriptures* (Letter to Madan, 19 July 1765, p.107; and Letter to Mrs. Madan, 10 August 1767, p.177). It advised a continuous process of

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[28] Baxter, p.43.

[29] Robert Strivens, *Philip Doddridge and the Shaping of Evangelical Dissent* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p.44. Doddrige 'followed a Baxterian line on the potential salvation of the heathen, on the question of the fundamentals of the faith… on the freedom of the will, on his understanding of the nature of Christ's satisfaction and on the extent of atonement…'.

[30] Phillip Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, 4th edn (London: J Waugh & J. Buckland, 1748), pp.78-9.

investigation into affliction: 'Examine your Life, your Words, and your Heart; and pray, that God would so guide your Enquiries, that you may return unto the Lord that smiteth you'.[31] The influence of Baxter and Doddridge can be seen in several *Adelphi* passages; where the narrator describes himself as being 'adept in the infernal art of lying' (p.7); where prayer is embarked upon as an afterthought (p.9); and where Cowper records disputes with deists, which reveal a discord between rational enquiry into religion and rebellion within the self, 'Lamentable inconsistency of a convinced judgment with an unsanctified heart!' (p.11).[32] The narrator's 'melancholy' is suddenly alleviated by the work of the 'Redeemer' at Southampton:

> Here it was that, on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled that instant in the heavens on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all my misery taken off. My heart became light and joyous in a moment, and had I been alone, I could have wept with transport (p.9).

The sequence established an exclusively spiritual remedy for mental affliction, and goes on to equate London with pride and vanity, anticipating its later connection with madness in Cowper's poetry. Only when the narrator describes his removal to the countryside does his recovery appear to take hold, while the return to London at this early stage is associated with the indulgence of appetite and a godless self-destruction, 'a hellish principle' (p.10).

The emphasis on the sinner's chastisement becomes a more problematic question when madness enters into the punishment. The generic requirements of spiritual autobiography encourage enquiry into affliction as a means of triumphing over sin, and in *Adelphi* this leads to the narrator's defensive contemplation of enthusiasm. While madness is mapped on to the religious narrative of descent into sin, before conversion and recovery, the narrator guardedly admits that such an account could be read as enthusiasm. Cowper presents a typological story of a sheep lured to the edge of a cliff by a dog, which emblematically represents, as the narrator puts it, 'my great

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[31] Doddridge, p.251.
[32] Strivens, p.36. The author argues that both Doddridge and Baxter held to a view of reprobation which made it clear that 'damnation, although indeed part of God's degree of election, is the consequence of human sin'.

danger' (p.11). The narrator resists the charge of enthusiasm on the grounds that he is performing the will of God:

> The grace and mercy of God are His own, and He dispenses them in what measure and manner He pleases, not regarding the merit of the object (which is infinitely less than nothing in the best of us) but His own glory. It is the same nature with the facts which follow, and which, though they may expose me to the suspicion of enthusiasm, I dare not omit… (p.12).

The narrator displays a self-conscious awareness that recovery in these terms could be interpreted – and indeed was interpreted – as enthusiastic madness. The narrator's self-confessed proximity to enthusiasm is offset by an insistence on the plain narration of facts, which echoes other spiritual autobiographers.[33] Having awkwardly met the possibility of exposure as an enthusiast, the narrator describes an anecdote in which a shepherd's dog seizes a sheep from the flock and gallops with it towards the edge of a cliff:

> The sheep immediately faced about looking wistfully at the flock he had left, and trembling as conscious of his danger. The dog laid down before him, so near that their noses met. In this position they remained to the best of my remembrance two minutes when the sheep began to creep forward a little. The dog raised himself upon his feet but followed him no further. They took different ways, the sheep stealing by degrees into a quicker pace after having taken a large circle, joined the flock close by the shepherd; and the dog trotted up towards the headmost sheep, behaving himself after this incident quietly enough (p.12).

The passage codifies the madness that will later seize the narrator, recalling the principal meaning of enthusiasm as: 'Possession by a god, supernatural inspiration, prophetic or poetic frenzy' (OED sense 1a).[34] Earlier on, the narrator refers to God as 'the great Shepherd of the sheep', and is at pains to claim that there is a 'supernatural agency' at work: '… that the dog should do it without instruction cannot I think be accounted for otherwise than by supposing a supernatural agency' (p.11-13). The passage prepares the ground for the idea that God is the corrective agent of the

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[33] Bunyan, p.5. 'I could also have stept into a stile much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more then here I have seemed to do: but I dare not: God did not play in convincing of me… wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was…'.

[34] "enthusiasm, n." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2016) [accessed 18 September 2016].

narrator's madness. As Max Byrd suggests, this touches on 'the ancient notion' that madness was a punishment from the Gods, but with the significant proviso that in this case the victim was not destroyed but a Christian 'saved'.[35] In Cowper's text, the actual experience of madness is channelled through Satan, but the implication is that God permits it. The rationale might have been taken directly from Baxter. According to *Preservatives*, in the case of madness, Satan 'doth Work by the Disease itself'.[36] But this does not mean that a 'mad' person is necessarily condemned: '[God will not] … condemn you for those ill Effects which are unavoidable from the Power of a bodily Disease, any more than he will condemn a Man for raving Thoughts or Words in a Fever, Frensy, or utter Madness'.[37] *Adelphi* similarly represents the experience of madness as derangement, as Satanic possession, and so corresponds to a superstition which was surprisingly durable, as can be seen in works like *An Essay on the Demoniacs of the New Testament* (1775) by the theologian Hugh Farmer (1714-1787), who asked why possession should be ascribed to madness and epilepsy but not to other disorders.[38]

In *Adelphi's* litany of sins, it is that of attempted self-murder that takes central place, but the immediate context for it is public trepidation over an appointment to a parliamentary sinecure in the House of Lords. When called upon to justify his appointment to the role of Clerk of the Journals (which follows an initial acceptance and then rejection of two other more lucrative public posts), the narrator describes a perfect storm of anxiety.[39] His original desire for the post is likened to an act of murder: 'Thus did I covet what God had commanded me not to covet, and involved myself in still deeper guilt by doing it in the spirit of a murderer' (p.13). This is also a personal and

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[35] Max Byrd, *Visits to Bedlam: Madness and Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1974), p. 156.
[36] Baxter, p.25.
[37] Baxter, p.28.
[38] Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine, eds., *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry 1535-1860* (New York: Carlisle Publishing, 1982), pp.458-461 (p.458).
[39]*Adelphi*, pp.13-15. Cowper is first offered the Clerkship of the Journals by his uncle, Ashley Cowper, 'who had the place in his disposal' (p.13). When the man in post [Francis Macklay] dies, and another more senior man resigns [William De Grey], two further, more lucrative positions became vacant – the Office of Reading Clerk and the Clerk of the Committees. Francis Macklay had served as deputy to De Grey in these two other positions, and had purchased the office of the Clerk of Journals from Ashley Cowper in 1736. Cowper initially accepts the two public posts, but then asks to be given the less profitable position.

familial matter, wherein the narrator becomes enmeshed in an area of political controversy with his uncle, 'the patentee of these appointments' (p.14). The narrator is profoundly discomforted by the potential compromising of his relative (p.15). A sense of shame in relation to personal patronage and fear of the public sphere become anxieties in their own right, which immediately precipitate the mental crisis that follows in the narrative. Religious melancholy frames the sequence. Torn between his feelings of guilt for the position a rejection of the post would put his benefactor in, and his own conviction that he would fail the test, the narrator lays bare a fractious relationship with God:

> In this situation such a fit of passion has sometimes seized me when alone in my chambers that I have cried out aloud and cursed the very hour of my birth, lifting my eyes to heaven at the same time not as suppliant but in the hellish spirit of rancorous reproach and blasphemy against my Maker (p.17).

This chimes with another of the Baxter-Clifford signs of melancholy:

> WHEN Melancholy groweth strong, they are almost always troubled with hideous Blasphemous Temptations, against God or Christ, or the Scripture, and against the Immortality of the Soul, which cometh partly from their own Fears, which make them think most (against their Will) of that which they are most afraid of thinking.[40]

The fear and rancour of the narrator leads on to the question of self-murder, which is also covered by Clifford's determination of melancholy: 'Some are strongly tempted to murder themselves, and they are haunted with the Temptation so restlessly, that they can get no whither, but they feel as if somewhat within them put them on, and said, *Do it* '.[41] In *Adelphi*, this temptation reflects a madness of unbelief which brings the narrator to the precipice, to the brink of self-destruction, but through this experience, the narrator is ultimately delivered. Such a process with madness at its core is, perhaps appropriately, beyond explanation:

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[40] Clifford, p.19.
[41] Clifford, p.27.

> How wonderful are the works of the Lord and His ways past finding out! … Working by means which in all human contemplation must needs seem directly opposite to that purpose, but which in His wise and gracious disposal have, I trust, effectually accomplished it (p.16).

Before the attempts at self-murder are detailed, a self-comparison with Saul in an allusion to the Biblical story of the witch of Endor, strengthens the point that madness is seen to be divinely authorized: 'Ask at His hands I would not, but as Saul sought to the witch, so did I to the physician, and was so dilligent in the use of drugs as if they would have healed my wounded spirit or have made 'the rough places plain'' (p.17)(I Samuel 28). The allusion to Isaiah (40: 4) at the end of this citation shows that only the gospel counts in terms of recovery. The treatment of mental disturbance – or 'nervous fever' (p.16) – by any other than spiritual means is not encountered here. The self-parallel with Saul, though, underlines the difference between Cowper's account of madness and Smart's self-association with Jesus in *Jubilate Agno*. Almost an inversion of Jesus, Saul is a figure of ideal sinning, who eventually falls on his sword during battle against the Philistines (I Samuel 31: 3-4). Like the narrator, Saul has a restive relationship with God: 'And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not' (I Samuel 28: 6). He is later punished by supernatural forces for his rebelliousness: 'Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD… therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day' (I Samuel 28: 18). The reference links chastisement with a form of supernatural mind-alteration which plays upon Cowper's key notes of terror, self-delusion and spiritual abandonment – which all point towards religious melancholy under the Baxter-Clifford criteria. The narrator's self-deception, like Saul's, is punished by divine will.[42]

In *Adelphi*, 'the state of insanity' is represented as the Satanic burden of sin (p.35). In the immediate context of the narrator's foreboding at the idea of appearing in public to defend a parliamentary position, madness is willed on as a last opportunity to escape scrutiny:

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[42] Bunyan also compares himself to Saul after doubting the existence of God and after having noted that 'I should be bereft of my wits', p.30.

> I now began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining… My chief fear was that my senses would not fail me time enough to excuse my appearance in the House, which was the only purpose I wanted it to answer (p.18).

A circumscribed desire masks the deeper function that madness has in the future conversion of the subject. In a crucial passage, the temptations of Satan and the madness of unbelief lead to an open contemplation of suicidal and atheistic thoughts:

> Now came the great temptation, the point to which Satan had all the while been drawing me, the dark and hellish purpose of self-murder. I grew more sullen and reserved, fled from all society, even of the most intimate friends, and shut myself up in my chambers. The ruin of my fortune, the contempt of my relations and acquaintances, the prejudice I should do my patron, were all urged upon me with irresistible energy. Being reconciled to the apprehension of madness, I began to be reconciled to the apprehension of death. Though formerly in my happiest hours I had never been able to glance a single thought that way without shuddering at the idea of dissolution, I now wished for it… Perhaps, thought I, there is no God; or if there be, the Scripture may be false, and if so then God has nowhere forbid suicide… (p.18).

By first willing on madness in a godless state, the narrator comes to will on self-murder. The key word is 'apprehension', which conveys a powerful sense of learnt anxiety and painful dread.[43] It points to the ultimate anxiety for the religious melancholic and Calvinist subject: the question of salvation (as election) or damnation (as reprobation). The word links the passage to the defining moment of the memoir, the day of conversion, where the narrator is 'yet still trembling with apprehensions lest my new-born hope should prove a dream, and doubtful whether I had most reason to expect deliverance or an eternal dungeon' (p.39). In the context of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (1666), John Stachniewski points out that this characteristic anxiety of the Puritan spiritual autobiography can never be entirely accounted for: '… there was constant pressure to nag at the contradictory evidence, to keep experience under daily review; to try to argue anxiety away, certainly, but without evading the apparent grounds of anxiety'.[44] Where the questions of madness

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[43] Johnson, *Dictionary*. 'Fear' is defined as 'Dread; horrour; painful apprehension of danger' and also as 'Anxiety; solicitude'.

[44] 'Introduction', in John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.xiv.

and self-murder are right inside this central anxiety, this must be doubly so. The comprehensive representation of social withdrawal, and the very organised representation of madness across the memoir, leave the sense that Cowper was attempting to explain the inexplicable, to contain what could not be contained.

It may be true that, as Stachniewski goes on to assert of Bunyan, this kind of anxiety 'disciplines the writing' and encourages 'intellectual honesty', but it also means that any final resolution is probably elusive.[45] It leaves hanging the kind of strong statement by which this passage ends: 'But above all I was persuaded to believe that if the fact was ever so unlawful [self-murder] and even supposing Christianity to be true, my misery even in hell itself would be more supportable' (p.18). The attempts at self-murder are a product of madness, but self-murder itself was viewed by orthodox Christians as an affront against God, 'a deliberate and daring act of human volition that contradicts God's holy providence'.[46] The Graveyard poets, Robert Blair and Edward Young expressed this view in a national context.[47]

When the narrator returns to the emblematic story of the sheep and the dog, the attempted self-murder that has now taken him to the edge of the precipice, becomes the site of an important shift in his beliefs: 'Conviction of sin took place, especially the sin I had just committed… This sense of it secured me from the repetition of a crime which I could not now reflect upon without the greatest abhorrence…' (p.25). This is in accordance with the conventions of spiritual autobiography where the subject progresses from a legal call to an evangelical call: 'I understood neither the Law nor the Gospel – the condemning nature of the one or the restoring and reconciling mercies of the other' (p.25). The narrator has the religious melancholic's inextinguishable guilt at having committed what is described shortly afterwards as an

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[45] Stachniewski, p.xiv.

[46] Eric Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p.109.

[47] Parisot, p.109. 'Young grieves over his country's lamentable reputation as a nation of suicides when he addresses 'Britannia's Shame' (*Night Thoughts*, V, 436)… [Blair's *The Grave*]: "Self-murther! name it not: Our Island's Shame! / That makes her the Reproach of neighbouring States' (403-4).

'unpardonable sin' (p.27). While such assertions of irredeemable sin in spiritual autobiography

could yet be replaced by later assurances of salvation, this is not the case in *Adelphi*. From this

point onwards, arguably the most powerful sections of the memoir invoke the figure of a wrathful

God, rather than any evangelical sense of the 'God of my Salvation' (p.41). Newton considers his

own conscience in a comparable passage of *Authentic Narrative*:

> Whether I looked inward or outward, I could perceive nothing but darkness and misery. I think no case, except that of a conscience pounded by the wrath of God, could be more dreadful than mine... and when I could see it no longer [the English shore], I was tempted to throw myself into the sea, which (according to the wicked system I had adopted) would put a period to all my sorrows at once. But the secret hand of God restrained me.[48]

The narrator of *Adelphi* presents the self as a nightmare from which it is impossible to escape. The

relation of the experimental knowledge of affliction expounds on the terror of a wrathful God,

pounding on the conscience just as Newton had described:

> The eyes of men I could not bear, but to think that the eye of God was upon me (which I was now well assured of) gave me the most intolerable anguish... If for a moment either a book or a companion stole away my attention from myself, a flash from Hell seemed to be thrown into my mind immediately, and I said within myself, 'What are these things to me who am damned? (p.27).

Shut out of mercy, the narrator faces an authoritarian God and unremitting terror. The sense of

being locked in on all sides, and caught in a downward spiral, is reiterated shortly afterwards by

Cowper's words to his brother: ''Oh my brother, I am damned – damned. Think of eternity, and

then think what it is to be damned'' (p.29). This sense of having transgressed irreparably also

appears in Cowper's letters, and at significant moments in his poetry. Both present Calvinistic fears

of damnation under the doctrine of Predestination, which was itself an indication of religious

melancholy according to Baxter-Clifford: 'THEY are oft tempted to gather despairing Thoughts from

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[48] Newton, p.48.

the Doctrine of *Predestination*, and to think that if God hath reprobated them; or hath not elected

them, all that they can do, or that all the World can do, cannot save them'.[49]

The strength of the narrator's conviction underlines a key problem in the argument of

Adelphi: the thin line that Cowper is treading in seeking to counter any suspicion that the relation

of an evangelical conversion during an episode of madness might not itself be taken as proof of

delusion.[50] The narrator briefly alludes to a shift in perspective on the question of enthusiasm

through the figure of Martin Madan (1726-90), who is sent for despite the admission: 'I had used to

think him an enthusiast' (p.29). Madan's enthusiasm is indexed to Cowper's recovery through the

exploration of the Gospel, 'the only remedy' for the narrator's 'disorder' (p.30). The proximity

between the visits of Madan and confinement in a madhouse risk blurring the line between

madness and enthusiasm, so they are carefully separated here. With fear of death and damnation

overwhelming, Madan is represented as a calming influence and the Gospel a balm for the

narrator's conscience. However, on his departure, the terrors return, and the descent into madness

is precisely signposted: 'At eleven o'clock my brother called on me, and in about an hour after his

arrival that distemper of mind which I had so ardently wished for actually seized me' (pp.31-32).

Notwithstanding the over-riding point that the state of insanity becomes part of the

passage of divine providence, madness itself is represented as entirely negative. Lodged in the

drama of a puritanical warfare taking place within the self, madness marks the descent of the

ravaged conscience into darkness and disorder, a ransacking of the imagination:

> While I traversed the room in the most terrible dismay of soul, expecting every moment the earth
> would open her mouth and swallow me, my conscience scaring me… a strange and horrible darkness
> fell upon me. If it were possible that a heavy blow could light upon the brain immediately without
> touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt…
>   At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and incoherent. When they
> ceased, they left nothing but disorder and a confused imagination behind them; all that remained
> clear was the sense of sin and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all
> the way through my illness without interruption or abatement (p.32).

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[49] Clifford, pp.7-8.

[50] Cowper comments in a letter to Lady Hesketh: 'It gives me some concern, though at the same time it increases my gratitude, to reflect that a convert made in Bedlam is more likely to be a stumbling-block to others, than to advance their faith' (4 July 1765, p.100). I return to this important letter below.

Even the felt sensation of madness as a heavy blow is represented as beyond logic, but Cowper is

clear that this is an illness, albeit one defined in terms of sin. The extremity of affliction may have

been exaggerated so as better to reveal, as the text has it, the 'Redemption that is in Christ Jesus'

(p.37). However, there is no doubt that madness is seen to be a terrible experience, and the extent

to which *Adelphi* bypasses any possibility of a more medical-materialist understanding of it is well

captured by the summary of Cowper's period within the madhouse prior to conversion: 'All that

passed in this long interval of eight months may be classed under the two general heads –

conviction of sin and despair of mercy' (p.34). Outside of the events in the 'heart' and 'mind' of the

narrator, that lead up to evangelical conversion, nothing else that takes place there is accorded any

significance.

'Sweet communion': Cotton's Collegium Insanorum and the Moral Treatment of Madness

On a variety of subjects, including religious melancholy and madness, Cotton's writing is often in

harmony with Cowper's own. The practice of Cowper's physician can be seen as a precursor to the

late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century moral treatment given at the York Retreat, a point I

return to in the following chapter. Cotton can also be linked to an earlier tradition of curative

healing based on religious principles, as seen in the work of writers like Burton and Baxter, as well

as Simon Patrick (1626-1707), Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), and Timothy Rogers (1658-1728),

although these figures displayed quite different levels of sympathy for melancholy.[51] Cotton has a

similar outlook to those Physicians of the Soul who asserted the values of air, labour, and a homely

environment, which were in turn shared by the later exponents of moral treatment. He is in the

same mould as the kindly, attentive, and pious clergyman that, according to Schmidt, was Burnet's

ideal figure: '…. very involved, not just with the sufferer's body, but with their beliefs; he treats

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[51] Schmidt, p.127. 'Rogers had none of Baxter's sharp-edged skepticism about the sorrows of the godly. From Rogers' point of view, it was entirely natural and understandable that pious souls would feel abandoned by God in times of outward affliction, as well as in times of melancholic trouble of mind'.

them as an individual with fears and anxieties which are to be addressed with sensitivity and attention'.[52] Cotton reflects Baxter's advice for physicians in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650): 'And whether you see they are for life or death, teach them both how to live and die, and give them some physic for their souls, as you do for their bodies'.[53] Before returning to *Adelphi*, I want to introduce Cotton's own poetry which helps to establish the concordance of ideas between him and Cowper.

Both as poet and physician, there is a studied anonymity around Cotton. A sketch of his life, by Robert Anderson in *The Poets of Great Britain* (1795), begins by upbraiding the editor of Cotton's collected works, *Various Pieces* (1791), for the laxity of its presentation.[54] Given that the editor in question was Cotton's son, the Reverend Nathaniel Cotton, these omissions were possibly deliberate. Cotton's best known work, *Visions in Verse* was first published anonymously in 1751, and then reprinted at least twelve times running up to *Various Pieces*.[55] This explicitly pedagogical text wears its didacticism relatively lightly, as the poet presents nine visions of moral themes: 'Slander'; 'Pleasure'; 'Health'; 'Content'; 'Happiness'; 'Friendship'; 'Marriage'; 'Life'; and 'Death'.

The 'Epistle to the Reader' captures the essence of *Visions* in its celebration of a modest, quiet life in a rural setting. The reader is solemnly warned against the corruptions of pleasure and the vanities of society, as Cotton advocates a similar idea of the value of the countryside to that Cowper later espouses in 'Retirement': 'I pass the silent rural hour, / No slave to wealth, no tool to power. / My mansion's warm, and very neat; / You'd say, a pretty snug retreat' (I, p.132). In the continuing explication of anonymity, the 'Epistle' establishes a stark sense of the limitations of mad-doctoring: 'Now, should the sage omit his name, / Wou'd not the cure remain the same? / Not

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[52] Schmidt, p.101.

[53] Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: Selected Treatises* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), pp.3-122 (p.62).

[54] Robert Anderson, *A Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain,* 14 vols (London: John & Arthur Arch, 1794), xi, p.1105

[55] Nathaniel Cotton, *Visions in Verse for the Entertainment and Instruction of Younger Minds* in *Various Pieces in Verses and Prose*, 2 vols (London: J. Dodsley, 1791). All subsequent references to Cotton's work are taken from this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text alongside the volume in question with the exception of *Observations on a particular kind of Scarlet Fever* (1749).

but physicians sign their bill, / Or when they cure, or when they kill' (I, p.132). Cotton's notion of 'cure' emphasizes the religious sense of a spiritual charge as in the office of a curate. Drawing attention to the produce of the garden, the importance of humility and devotion, the good sense of a removed, independent politics, and the sufficiency of familial life, the 'Epistle' amounts to a short parable of eighteenth-century mental health. It accords with a comment made by Cotton's correspondent and key influence on Cowper, the dissenting minister, Philip Doddridge, on the importance of a practical religious approach to worldly knowledge: 'Let me continually endeavour to make all my studies subservient to practical religion and Ministerial usefulness'.[56]

Cotton chose not to make his religious position explicit, inviting the reader to decide: 'Now the religion of your poet – / Does not this little preface show it? / My Visions if you scan with care, / 'Tis ten to one you'll find it there' (I, p.137). In fact, Cotton's church affiliation remains uncertain, though, like Doddridge, he corresponded with, and was clearly influenced by the Presbyterian minister Samuel Clark. The large house which constituted the Collegium Insanorum was on the same St. Albans street – Dagnall – as Clark's Presbyterian church. In Cotton's valedictory poem, 'To the Memory of the Reverend Mr. Samuel Clark', he writes approvingly that, 'In his ministerial capacity / He possessed every valuable and happy talent / To rectify the judgment, and improve the heart' (I, p.126). Leaving aside the riddle of religious position, however, what is important in the 'Epistle' is the doing itself, the tilling of the 'mental soil', as the poet suggests in the second vision concerning 'Pleasure': 'Now take a simile at hand, / Compare the mental soil to land./ Shall fields be till'd with annual care, / And minds lie fallow ev'ry year?' (I, p.147). The importance of mental occupation through a morally and religiously conceived pedagogy is apparent throughout *Visions*, while time-wasting and idleness – as they are in Cowper's moral satires – are repeatedly reproached as sin.

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[56] Philip Doddridge, *The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge,* ed. by John Doddridge Humphreys, 5 vols (London: Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley, 1829), I, p.97.

In *Adelphi*, Cotton is co-opted at every step of the way to support the text's evangelical arguments. The doctor's value is inscribed within his Christianity, right from the moment when the narrator interprets his 'sudden ecstasy of joy' at being sent to St. Albans as a providential sign:

> I fell on my knees to thank God for the joy I felt… I mention this sudden, and extraordinary change because I believe it was affected on purpose to incline me to go willingly to a physician who would treat me with skill and tenderness, who was himself a pious man and able to converse with me on the subject which was so near my heart (p.33).

The madhouse is portrayed less as an institution – or even an external space – than as another recess of a mind already imprisoned in its conviction of eternal damnation. Earlier, in the lead-up to confinement, the narrator comments that, 'No convicted criminal ever feared death more or was more assured of dying' (p.31). The material reality of confinement is duly noted when it arrives, as the narrator's initial ecstasy is suddenly converted into fear and anger:

> We arrived at the doctor's house. He had no sooner taken me by the hand than my spirits sunk, and all my jealousy returned… But perceiving now that I had trepanned myself into danger of close confinement, I refused to go in, and made such resistance that three or four persons were employed to compel me, and as many to take me out again, when I arrived at the place of destination (p.33).

Cowper's use of the word 'trepanned' seemingly recalls a treatment in which a *trephine* would be used to drill or bore a hole into the scull in order to draw out the 'stone' of madness.[57] Cowper presents confinement in a way which is both elusive and revealing:

> It will be proper to draw a veil over the 'secrets of my prison house.' Let it suffice to say that the low state both of body and mind to which I was here reduced was perfectly well calculated to humble the natural pride and vainglory of my heart. These were the efficacious means which infinite wisdom thought meet to make use of for these purposes (p.33).

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[57] The procedure is illustrated by Hieronymous Bosch in *The Extraction of the Stone of Madness* (c.1490). This reflects an ancient belief that madness had 'physical roots'. Scull notes, however, that it was a 'relatively common practice… to relieve headaches or pressure, or cauterization of the scull'. *Madness in Civilization*, p.121.

The allusion to the ghost's appearance before Hamlet here brings with it associations of murder, revenge, and purgatory, which add powerfully to the representation of mental disturbance.[58] Cowper refers to the prison house in Isaiah, and creates an ambiguity through the stated intention 'to draw a veil'.[59] The emphasis is placed on the spiritual purgatory of the narrator – his own mental and spiritual prison house. The material details of Cotton's institution become almost irrelevant. There is no indication of any other patients who may have been there at the same time as Cowper, for instance, and little indication of what may have occurred on a daily basis, or what 'close confinement' meant in actual physical terms.

Only a few aspects of the arrangement are discernible in *Adelphi* or made apparent in Cowper's letters. Cowper states that his brother and friends had 'agreed among them' that, given the circumstances, the Collegium was a suitable option for him (p.32). As an expensive institution that only catered for small numbers of patients, it clearly had a reputation to protect, and commanded fees that Cowper relied on Joseph Hill to pay long after he had left the area (see Letter, 23 August 1766, p.148). It had a manifestly religious atmosphere in which the reading of the Bible appears to have been encouraged as an aspect of care. A chance reading of a Bible (opened at Romans 25) precedes Cowper's conversion. He was allowed visitors and there was a garden to which he had access, where he describes having an important conversation with his brother (p.37). Cotton is presented as a kindly and attentive Christian friend, important insofar as he brings Cowper back into the spirit of the gospel, though there are some discrepancies between his own notion of recovery and the 'doctor's representation' (p.37). The over-riding sense, however, is that of a mutual understanding between doctor and patient based on a belief in the 'only Physician of value' (Letter to Mrs. Cowper, 5 March 1770). The meaning of confinement in the memoir is clearly

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[58] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.661. Ghost to Hamlet: 'But that I am forbid / To tell the secrets of my prison-house / I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul' (Act I, Scene V, 13-15). This occurs immediately before Hamlet states that he will 'put an antic disposition on' (p.662, 174).
[59] 'I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee… To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house' (Isaiah 42: 6-7).

organized around the moment of evangelical conversion, which marks a simple divide between slavery and liberty: 'On the 7th June 1765, having spent more than eighteen months at St. Albans, partly in bondage [eight months] and partly in the liberty [twelve months] wherewith Christ made me free, I took leave of the place…' (p.42). The specificity of the date suggests that there was an additional sense of liberation upon departure from the madhouse, but this passes without further comment.

This portrait of the Collegium Insanorum is less surprising when it becomes clear that Cotton himself combined an evangelical's understanding of illness, and a pious stoicism in the face of disease and old age, with a deeply rooted scepticism over the contemporary possibilities of medicine. As he revealingly comments in an extract from a letter to another unnamed doctor: 'I have said candle-snuffers, as bearing some allusion to our profession; for you know we trim the wick of life. Indeed, we sometimes snuff the candle out, and, what is worse, cannot blow it in again when we have done it' (II, p.163). Given its connotations of religious hope and faith, the candle is a suggestive metaphor, and the imagery lends an almost farcical sense of impotence and mismanagement to medical endeavours in Cotton's time. It is not doctors that keep the light of life aflame – they merely keep off the smoke. The clear sense of a hierarchy running down from the soul to the body is well conveyed in the 'Pleasure' vision. Like Cowper, Cotton adopts an evangelical focus on the mind-soul and heart as spiritual sites for growth or sinful aberration:

> Deformity of heart I call
> The worst deformity of all.
> Your cares to Body are confin'd,
> Few fear obliquity of Mind.
> Why not adorn the better part?
> This is a nobler theme for art.
> For what is form, or what is face,
> But the soul's index, or its case? (I, pp.146-47).

This passage immediately precedes the simile of 'the mental soil' mentioned earlier. The ideal types that are to be produced from this tilling of the mind are those who combine the fruits of natural

inquiry with reasonable religion. Cotton claims Francis Bacon, for instance, 'whose vast capacious

plan / Bespoke him angel, more than man!' (I, p.149). A similar alignment is made by Cotton's son

in the preface to *Various Pieces*, where the elder Cotton is regarded alongside Boyle, Locke, Isaac

Newton, and Addison, 'that being *laymen*, and having no temporal *interests* relative to religion,

their influence in support of it has been extensive and effectual' (I, p.vi). Commitment to natural

inquiry is framed by a belief in God the creator, but also, in Cotton's work, by a realism regarding

the state of contemporary medical knowledge.

Observations on a Particular Kind of Scarlet Fever (1749) candidly describes Cotton's

attempts to manage an outbreak of the disease in St. Albans. Displaying a flexible approach based

on precise observation and a sensitivity to variable factors of age and symptomatology, the efficacy

of traditional treatments such as bleeding, purging, and blistering comes under close scrutiny in

Cotton's 'careful representation of facts'.[60] In his *Observations*, Cotton is judicious and even-

handed. Blistering, for instance, 'oftentimes no good effect accrued hereby to the fever', though

the pulse of the patient 'was generally raised', 'the difficulty of deglutition [swallowing] somewhat

abated', and the 'spirits too were improved' (p.18). Cotton is alive to the shattering effects of the

illness upon 'the nervous system…', but also 'the dejection of spirits, which had accompanied the

disease thro' all its stages' (p.13). There is a sense of the psychological effects of the illness. The

approach adopted to counter this is not '*nervous* medicines', though, but 'air and a restorative diet'

(p.21). A sceptical tone holds throughout. In implied criticism of other physicians as writers, Cotton

baldly states that he will not 'obtrude upon you any vague conjectures, or precarious hypotheses,

relating to the cause of this disease; much less take up your valuable moments in the pursuit of

useless, unmeaning quotations from other authors' (p.3). In reference to medical writers: 'We are

apt to expect too much from them' (p.21). Like Monro, what counts is the physician's own

judgement, since the collective endeavour of medicine is a navigation through uncertain ground:

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[60] Nathaniel Cotton, *Observations on a Particular Kind of Scarlet Fever* (London: R. Manby & H.S. Cox, 1749),
p.3. Further references to this edition are given in the text.

> Rules may be laid down, and Charts exhibited; but when a man hath made himself master of all these, he will often find himself among shelves and quicksands; and must at last have recourse to his own natural sagacity, to extricate himself out of these difficulties (p.22).

As one of Cotton's sermons makes clear, this 'natural sagacity' is understood to be a mind receptive to God: '… there is nothing which so effectually contributes to our advancements in self-knowledge as frequent and fervent prayer' (II, p.71). A mind, it seems, not unlike Smart's.

The 'Health' vision seems calculated to dampen any faith in the professional prestige of medicine. The poet begins by warning of the dangers of vice and folly: 'Poison shall rage in ev'ry vein, – / Nor penitence dilute the stain: / And when each hour shall urge his fate, / Thought, like the doctor, comes too late' (I, p.157). The limitations of medicine are laid bare:

> How fruitless the physician's skill,
> How vain the penitential pill,
> The marble monuments proclaim,
> The humbler turf confirms the same!
> Prevention is the better cure,
> So says the proverb, and 'tis sure (I, p.158).

Seen in the context of present-day understandings of mental health, the emphasis on prevention appears quite modern if drawn from an old proverb. In his *Sermon on Ecclesiastes* (12: 1-8), Cotton questions contemporary knowledge of the body even as he draws attention to its material operations:

> …as the human body is a complicated structure, and as little more than the external parts of the building have been considered at present, let us carry our researches further, and examine what is doing in the more private and retired chambers of this wonderful fabric (II, p.33).

The brain and spinal cord are represented in religio-physical terms as Cotton presents the debilitating effects of old age as a fillip to increased devotion. The brain is a source of wonder which should reaffirm a sense of the 'all-wise Creator [who] hath securely lodged it in a strong citadel of bone, which, from its circular cavity, and the inestimable value of its treasures, may with

propriety be styled the golden bowl' (II, p.35). The sermon ends by describing the return of the spirit to God after death. Health is, then, a religious and moralistic concept for Cotton, albeit one which acknowledges harsh physical realities.

A similar concept of health emerges in *Adelphi*. Cotton is represented as a kind of facilitator of the evangelical remedy. In the period leading up to conversion, despite Cotton's having told him that 'he thought me greatly amended', Cowper's brother is surprised to find that the patient is still 'as silent and reserved as ever' (p.37). Even after conversion, the physician 'began to fear lest the sudden transition from despair to joy should terminate in a fatal frenzy' (p.40). The line reflects James Robe's advice after the case of Timothy Rogers, in a text which argued that true religion should not be implicated in the causes of melancholy: 'I cannot omitt cautioning all who have been under religious Melancholy, against the extream of excessive Mirth… '.[61] Cotton is important insofar as he helps to bring the narrator back into the spirit of the Gospel, but the period that Cowper spent in confinement after conversion is passed over as lightly as any detail on Cotton's technical expertise or the physical lay-out of the madhouse:

> In a short time Dr. Cotton became satisfied and acquiesced in the soundness of the cure, and much sweet communion I had with him concerning the things of our salvation. He visited me every morning while I stayed with him, which was near twelve months after my recovery, and the Gospel was always the delightful theme of our conversation (pp.40-41).

The relationship is presented as one of shared understanding with patient and doctor united in their belief that there is only one cure, and madness has its spiritual defeat in the 'triumph' of salvation (p.41). The battle metaphor is appropriate, because the representation of madness is clearly seen in terms of the puritanical idea of mental struggle: 'No trial has befallen me since nor any temptation assailed me, greater than must needs be expected in a state of warfare' (p.41). The

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[61] Robe, p.xxii.

expectation of further struggle ahead is indicative of the constraints that spiritual autobiography

puts on a narrative with an exploration of madness and self-murder at its centre.

In the quest for spiritual health, both poets advocate retirement: 'Hail, thou sweet, calm,

unenvied seat! / I said, and bless'd the fair retreat: / Here would I pass my remnant days, /

Unknown to censure, or to praise; / Forget the world, and be forgot…' (I, p.160). At the extremity of

life, 'med'cines cannot save' (I. p.159). The logic behind Cotton's recourse to visions adds to the

sense of the circumscribed importance of the physician's medical role: '… morals, unadorn'd by art,

/ Are seldom known to reach the heart. / I'll therefore strive to raise my theme / With all the

scenery of dream' (I, p.159). In a physical sense, 'Health' is an illusion, but in a spiritual sense, it

remains a worthy ideal. At the end of the vision, the queen of 'Health' is restored to the skies after

war with an array of foes including 'Disease' and 'Excess':

> For where her stricter law prevails,
> Tho' Passion prompts, or Vice assails;
> Long shall the cloudless skies behold,
> And their calm sun-set beam with gold (I, p.166).

Cotton's own evangelical sympathies are underlined here in the themes of salvation and sanctuary

and the evocation of Health's 'stricter law' which 'those wiser few' still regard (I, p.166).

In the vision on 'Life', the poet treads an uneasy line between an outright dismissal of life

with all its attendant miseries, and the embrace of faith on a reasonable footing. A self-conscious

pessimism reaffirms the physician's undertaking in almost exclusively religious terms: ' 'Tis truth

(receive it ill or well) / 'Tis melancholy truth I tell. / Why should the preacher take your pence, / And

smother truth to flatter sense? / I'm sure, physicians have no merit, / Who kill, thro' lenity of spirit'

(I, p.218). Nevertheless, the overall message is not an austere one, and the melancholic stance

adopted within the 'Life' vision makes way for an affirmation of faith in the contemplation of

'Death': 'I wear no melancholy hue, / No wreaths of cypress or of yew' (I, p.223). The

recommendations have striking parallels with *Adelphi*. At the heart of Cotton's didacticism is the

same kind of self-examination which runs throughout *Adelphi*, and corresponds to the same Puritan tradition of spiritual autobiography. Cotton links his exhortations to the spiritual value of retirement, where self-examination is seen to be easier: 'Go, man, and act a wiser part, / Study the science of your heart' (I, p.237). As a marker of identity, this self-examination triumphs over all other sources of knowledge: 'This nobler Self with rapture scan, / 'Tis mind alone which makes the man' (I, p.238). The absolute centrality of the mind-soul is also seen through the imagery of confinement and liberation: 'As sure as Sense (that tyrant!) reigns, / She holds the empress, Soul, in chains. / Inglorious bondage to the mind, / Heaven-born, sublime, and unconfin'd!' (I, p.239). These lines are mirrored in *Adelphi*, where the concentration on the liberation of the narrator's soul shapes the narrative in a way that actual physical confinement does not. Self-examination is more problematic for Cowper, though, since it raises the continuing instability of melancholy and the past experience of mental derangement, and invokes the possibility of relapse as a punishment for sin.

Within the genre of spiritual autobiography, as Stachniewski points out, conversion was regarded as a process, and though there was a 'broadly conceived sequence' of Christian experience discernible within it, these 'categories' should be seen as 'interpenetrating' rather than simply sequential; the categories are conviction, vocation, justification, sanctification, and glorification.[62] Conversion itself could be seen as temporary or fake, and the instability of conversion was a major issue, and in *Adelphi*, instability is increased by the position that madness occupies in relation to conversion. Each aspect of the conversion process poses a problem for the narrator of a self-declared madness which is said to have occurred shortly before conversion. The fear of relapse – which Cotton expresses in the narrative – parallels the instability of conversion. The idea of glorification – the anticipation of future glory in a heavenly vision – seems remote in *Adelphi*. The descriptions of the two visions that the narrator has inside Cotton's establishment, prior to conversion, are heavily laden with an unmodified sense of irreparable loss and terror –

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[62] Stachniewski, p.xix-xx.

unrelieved religious melancholy. The first vision, which details the appearance of an imaginary

cathedral, gives a dramatic sense that the narrator is trapped in a circularity of yearning and regret:

> At first I was willing to draw some favourable inferences to myself from so extraordinary an exhibition. But Satan quickly persuaded me that it has been made with no other view than to increase my regret for the loss of that glory which I had just seen a glimpse of, but which was now irrecoverably lost (p.35).

The doubting self pushes the pendulum towards spiritual abandonment – the plight of the religious

melancholic. It is soon accompanied by another vision in which the 'fiery hand' of God is 'clenching

a bolt or arrow of lightning' (p.36):

> My chief surprise was that I had only seen it without suffering the wrath which I believed had kindled it. I looked upon it, however, as a rebuke to me for denying the existence of what the Scripture asserted, and as a divine threatening of what would speedily be fulfilled upon me (p.36).

Again, the narrator has been disqualified from mercy. While these examples are of course

portrayed as preparatory stages in the narrator's spiritual journey, even the moment of conversion

itself is instantly qualified. Sanctification appears assured by a chance reading of Romans (3: 25):

> But the happy period that was to strike off my fetters and to afford me a clear opening into the free mercy of the Blessed God in Jesus was now arrived. I flung myself into a chair near the window seat and, seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction (p.39).

And yet despite the pronouncement of the sufficiency of atonement and the accessibility of mercy,

the assertion of more lasting self-doubt immediately follows: 'Oh that this ardour of my first love

had continued! But I have known many a lifeless and unhallowed hour since – long intervals of

darkness interrupted by short returns of joy, and peace in believing' (p.40). To some extent this

echoes the conventional representation of the conversion process in spiritual autobiography,

where doubts could zero-in straight after apparent liberation, and where the ongoing fear of

reprobation might be seen as part of a vicious circle, wherein every act of transgression would only

seem to confirm reprobate status. [63] Nevertheless, the fullness of conversion appears unobtainable

in *Adelphi.* The break in consciousness and positive self-destruction that Misty Anderson comments

on in relation to the Methodist moment of conversion is not evident in *Adelphi* – if anything, the

narrator's self-conscious, doubting self is reinforced at the moment of conversion.[64] Unlike

Authentic Narrative, there is no sense that a great spiritual battle has been won. Travelling in an

opposite direction to Newton, who was moving towards the public world with the appearance of

his memoir, the first part of Cowper's narrative ends on the splintering of retirement and

withdrawal. Unlike Newton (and Bunyan), Cowper did not edge away from personal doubts by

entering into the ministry.[65] The proximity of madness to conversion makes acceptance in a

spiritual community – the central purpose of conversion narratives – more difficult to achieve.

Towards the end of *Adelphi*, disavowal and trepidation stand over the narrator's re-entry

into the world after a long period in a madhouse: 'I remembered the pollution that is in the world

and the sad share I have had in it… and my very heart ached at the thought of my returning to it

again after having been so long sequestered from it' (p.43). Comfort is taken in the largely spiritual,

mental world experienced within Collegium Insanorum which is threatened by the world outside.

In permanently withdrawing from London to go and live with the Unwins, Cowper was leaving

behind the madness of unbelief, not only within the self, but across urban society as a whole, as

suggested in the Hymn included at the end of the narrative: 'Far from the world, O Lord, I flee'. The

Hymn invokes the 'calm retreat' celebrated by Cotton, but the narrator of *Adelphi* continues to be

plagued by the symptoms of religious melancholy:

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[63] Cowper's description resembles Bunyan's: 'Now did my chains fall off my Legs indeed, I was loosed from
my affliction and irons, my temptations fled away… So when I came home, I looked to see if I could find that
Sentence, *Thy Righteousness is in Heaven*, but could not find such a Saying, wherefore my Heart began to sink
again…'. Bunyan, p.66.
[64] *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief and the Borders of the Self*
(Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), p.4.
[65] 'It was in Bunyan's case a strong way of affirming his integration into the Christian community and shifting
emphasis away from personal doubts'. Stachniewski, p.xxiv.

> I walked forth towards the close of the day in this melancholy frame of mind, and having wandered about a mile from the town I found my heart at length so powerfully drawn towards the Lord that, having gained a retired and secret nook in the corner of the field, I knelt under a bank and poured out my complaints before Him (p.43).

Despite this inscription of melancholy as a state of soul, reflective of a still troubled conscience, the narrator expresses gratitude and relief that he has been allotted a place of rest in a religious society, and given 'abundant means of furtherance in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, both by the study of His word and by communion with His dear disciples' (p.46). But in retirement at Olney, Cowper was soon writing as if he had fallen off the metaphorical precipice written into the heart of the memoir.

'Gentleman Performer': The Emergence of the Poet in the Letters of the 1760s and 1770s

After his release from confinement, the letters suggest that Cowper was drawn to dark reflections on his spiritual destination, especially after hearing the words, 'crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te, periisti* (It is all over with you, thou hast perished)' (Letter to Newton, 21 August 1781, p.510). I do not agree with Buie's assertion that the despairing tone of much of Cowper's poetry is at odds with 'the light-hearted tone of the majority of his letters'.[66] Many of the letters in this period, at least, are not light-hearted. During major periods of mental disturbance, Cowper seems not to have written at all, as in the 1763-5 crisis (Letter to Joseph Hill, 24 June 1765, p.94); and the 1772-6 crisis (Letter to Joseph Hill 14 November 1772, p.259). For Cowper, writing can be interpreted as a sign of health. The fact of articulation itself is often made significant in the letters, where Cowper declares that he has nothing to say or nothing worth hearing. There is a paradox in his apparent determination to articulate the inarticulate, to say something out of nothing.

Writing on the self is often portrayed as a last resort, the least worst option, as in a letter sent to Maria Cowper:

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[66] Buie, p.115.

> Being rather scantily furnished with Subjects that are good for any thing, and Corresponding only with those who have no Relish for such as are good for Nothing, I often find myself reduced to the Necessity, the disagreeable Necessity of Writing about Myself.

Nevertheless, as Cowper goes on, in such writing, 'I discover abundant Materials to Employ my Pen upon (20 July 1780, p.368). The comment follows a damning self-description in which Cowper draws a parallel between himself and King Lear, simultaneously dramatizing passivity and inviting sympathy: 'My Days steal away Silently and March on (as poor Mad King Lear would have made his Soldiers March) as if they were Shod with Felt' (p.368). This was two years before Cowper's emergence as a public poet, and its demonstration of powerlessness flies in the face of his earlier evangelicalism:

> Perhaps I have many friends who pity me, ruined in my profession – stript of my preferment – and banished from all my old acquaintances. They wonder I can sustain myself under these evils, and expect that I should die broken hearted – and if myself were all I had to trust to, so perhaps I might, nay I believe, should, but the Disciples of Christ have bread to eat which the world knows not of...
> (Letter to Joseph Hill, 8 November 1765, p.129).

This section of the chapter analyses how an evangelical Cowper, cut out of the world, under the cloud of madness, reformulated an identity as a published poet.

Self-consciousness is a recurring theme in the letters. Whether addressing a 'bird of paradise' as a letter-writing owl in 1760 from the perspective of the President of the Nonsense Club (c. 1760, p.88-89), or delicately referring to recent personal events in a letter sent to a formidable first cousin, Major Cowper (18 October 1765, pp.119-120), many of the letters present a figure of the self at one or more remove, looking in from the outside, as it were, to report back on what is happening. In the context of the opprobrium that surrounded madness, this level of self-consciousness is an assertion of agency. By writing a letter, Cowper was, after all, entering into social discourse, and he always demonstrates his acute awareness of epistolary conventions. Cowper is adept at using polite forms of address to move through the difficult aspects of his personal situation:

You are so kind as to inquire after my health, for which reason I must tell you, what otherwise would not be worth mentioning, that I have lately been just enough indisposed to convince me, that not only human life in general, but mine in particular, hangs by a slender thread. I am stout enough in appearance, yet a little illness demolishes me. I have had a severe shake, and the building is not so firm as it was. But I bless God for it with all my heart… He has in a manner raised me from the dead (Letter to Maria Cowper, 3 September 1766, p.150).

In this self-absorbed reflection on evangelical rebirth, several different considerations merge together almost imperceptibly. He begins by suggesting that a recent indisposition is hardly worth a second thought, which ironically leads the way into a full meditation on human mortality. The meaning and sense of the passage sway back and forth. Having begun with self-deprecation, the fragility of human life in general then appears to matter less than it does in Cowper's own case ('mine in particular'). An allusion to the effects of a much more serious crisis figures the self as a building subject to a 'severe shake'. Clare Brant notes that evangelicals used particular conventions to articulate spiritual distress, and, as such, warns against reading Cowper's letters merely as illustrative of Calvinism and spiritual abandonment. She suggests that Cowper's 'self-conscious invocations of epistolary etiquette' can be read as an attempt to 'reconcile politeness with a rawness sanctioned in religious letter-writing'.[67] Cowper makes this point himself: 'I thank God that I have those amongst my kindred to whom I can write without reserve of sentiments' (3 September 1766, p.151). However, self-consciousness also plays into the vexed question of madness and strong religious feelings.

The letter sent to Major Cowper, cited at the beginning of the last paragraph, has the self-consciousness of social embarrassment. The obstacles the writer faces are repeatedly identified in the letters, where Cowper is variously lacking the means, the capacity, the subject-matter, the inclination, or the health to write, even while, more often than not, *he is writing*. In the letter to Major Cowper, the reasons behind Cowper's silence are cautiously alluded to:

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[67] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.25.

> The History of those things which have from time to time prevented my scribbling, would be not only insipid but extremely voluminous, for which reasons they will not make their Appearance at present, nor probably at [any time] hereafter. If my Neglecting to write to you were a [Proof] that I had never Thought of you, and that had b[een] really the case, five Shillings a piece would have been much too little to give for the Sight of such a Monster; but I am no such Monster, nor do I perceive in myself the least Tendency to such a Transformation (18 October 1765, pp.119-20).

This was written in the same year that Cowper left Cotton's Collegium Insanorum to live in Huntingdon with the Unwins, and the tone is primarily upbeat. 'The History of those things which have from time to time prevented my scribbling' is a phrase so vague that it can be read to refer to just about anything. It recalls the line from *Adelphi* where Cowper draws 'a veil over "the secrets of of my prison house"'. Even if it is narrowly read as the letter-writer's conventional excuse for a recent lack of communication, it leaves the sense that something important has been deliberately left unstated. It seems to assume that the addressee knows what Cowper is referring to, but also suggests conflicted aims. What Cowper has to say about the subject is 'extremely voluminous', but also 'insipid' to report. What stands out is the negative assertion of identity, which deftly alludes to the public demand for spectacle (perhaps even that available at Bethlem Hospital) : '… but I am no such Monster'. Countering this negative self-imaging, is the presentation of a happy, newly socialized, and thoroughly regenerated Christian:

> Here are three Families who have received me with the utmost Civility… As to my own personal Condition, I am much happier than the Day is long… I trust that He who has bestowed so many Blessings upon me, will give me Gratitude to crown them all (pp.120-21).

The assertion of an evangelical Christian identity apparently contends with a self-conscious awareness of recent personal events. This is a constant factor in the letters from 24 June 1765 (Cowper's first extant letter to anyone for almost two years) until at least June 1768 (when Cowper is reflecting upon the distribution of his memoir to friends and relatives).

The evidence in the earliest letters suggests that there is nothing inevitable about this fashioning of a positive spiritual identity. Cowper represents himself there as something of a dandy,

'a queer kind of Youth' and 'the Flower of the Age' (10 October 1755, p.78). Just prior to the 1763 crisis, Cowper informs Lady Hesketh that he is destined to forever disappoint:

> Many years ago, Cousin, there was a possibility that I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixt, and rivetted fast upon me, and, between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination (9 August 1763, p.93).

While demonstrating the degree to which Cowper's self-representation can oscillate, this comment is instructive in its imagery, where character is drawn as a predetermined sentence, 'rivetted fast upon me'. It suggests that the mournful and doom-laden tone of some of Cowper's later musings on his personal identity should not only be seen in conjunction with a Calvinistic evangelicalism. The emergence of a Christian identity is actually preceded by a deep sense of personal failure in relation to occupation, social position, and marriage, registered before, and then amplified by confinement in a madhouse. Cowper's early comments on his confinement take into account its social effects, but an evangelical perspective enables him to make a virtue out of the loss of social relationships:

> I have lost none of my acquaintance, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry this class is so numerous. What would I not give that every friend I have in the world, were not almost but altogether Christians (1 August 1765, p.108).

However, when this purely evangelical perspective is no longer maintained, a sense of personal failure remains a common theme in the letters, apparent in relation to Cowper's comments on occupation, writing, and public affairs.

In an important letter to Lady Hesketh, Cowper presents the central anxiety surrounding his religious convictions:

> It gives me some concern, though at the same time it increases my gratitude, to reflect that a convert made in Bedlam is more likely to be a stumbling-block to others, than to advance their faith. But if it has that effect upon any, it is owing to their reasoning amiss, and drawing their conclusions from false premises. He who can ascribe an amendment of life and manners, and a reformation of

the heart itself, to madness, is guilty of an absurdity that in any other case would fasten the imputation of madness upon himself; for, by so doing, he ascribes a reasonable effect to an unreasonable cause, and a positive effect to a negative. But when Christianity only is to be sacrificed, he that stabs deepest is always the wisest man. You, my dear Cousin, yourself, will be apt to think I carry the matter too far, and that in the present warmth of my heart, I make too ample a concession in saying that I am only now a convert… I called myself indeed a Christian, but he who knows my heart knows that I never did a right thing, nor abstained from a wrong one, because I was so… (4 July 1765, pp.100-1).

The passage concords with *Adelphi* in the way madness as a concept and an experience (both an 'unreasonable cause' and a 'negative effect') is disconnected from the positive role it has as part of a providential plan. The affliction is what counts, with madness the 'deepest' stab. This requires an almost impossible balancing act: 'in any other case' it would be absurd. The intricate point that the letter makes – that faith can and must be promoted *reasonably* even from such an unlikely quarter as this – acknowledges that there may be reason within the contrary point of view: those 'reasoning amiss' from 'false premises'. The phrase, 'a convert made in Bedlam', denies any further enquiry into madness itself, which is significant only when it is contained in popular language. The charge that might be made about madness and evangelicalism, that they could be said to reflect one another, is brought to the surface only to be the more fully dismissed. For all the dexterity of the argument, the constricting image of that charge ('which would *fasten* the imputation of madness upon himself') resonates throughout the remainder of the letter:

I reckon it one instance of the Providence that has attended me throughout this whole event, that instead of being delivered into the hands of the London physicians, who were so much nearer that I wonder I was not, I was carried to Doctor Cotton. I was not only treated by him with the greatest tenderness, while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind upon the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for that purpose. My eagerness and anxiety to settle my opinions upon that long neglected point, made it necessary that while my mind was yet weak, and my spirits uncertain, I should have some assistance. The Doctor was as ready to administer relief to me in this article likewise, and as well qualified to do it as in that which was more immediately his province. How many physicians would have thought this an irregular appetite, and a symptom of remaining madness! But if it were so, my friend was as mad as myself, and it is well for me that he was so (4 July 1765, p.101).

The threat of a mistaken imputation of madness returns with force at the end of the passage, where Cowper expresses his relief that Cotton was not among those other physicians who may

have misread his symptoms. (As in *Adelphi*, Cotton is more of a 'religious friend' than a doctor of medicine). Notwithstanding this, the tension between the desire to express religious principles 'without reserve', and the anxiety that in so doing Cowper would leave himself open to the charge of madness, appears to dissolve in the unfettered feeling of the final line. For a moment, the imputation is thrown off. This entails, along the way, the rejection of medical authority – there is palpable fear of the diagnostic abilities of the London physicians here, the most prominent of which were discussed in the previous chapter.

In *Adelphi* and the letters, a belief in providence supersedes medicine as the exemplar of sanity. The validity of an organic medical treatment for madness is as absent here as it is in *Jubilate Agno*: 'At the end of that period it pleased God, at once, and as it were by a touch, to restore me to the use of my reason…' (19 July 1765, p.107).[68] There is no sense of medical procedure in Cowper's emphatic understanding of spiritual recovery: 'The only Recompense I can make you for your friendly Attention to my Affairs, during my Illness, is to tell you that by the Mercy of God I am restored to perfect Health both of Mind and Body' (24 June 1765, p.94). This is the first sentence of the first letter sent by Cowper after a hiatus of almost two years following his confinement. In another letter of the same time to Lady Hesketh, the 'salutary properties' of medicine are applauded only as part of God's bounty, 'for it were presumption and enthusiasm to neglect them… Death itself must be welcome to who has this faith, and he who has it not, must aim at it if he is not a madman' (Wednesday, 4 September 1765, p.114). The imputation of madness points in different directions, and as befits a reasoned approach to religion, Cowper looks towards the scriptures to defend his sense of where madness should be located: 'My dear Cousin! one half of the Christian world would call this [i.e. his conversion] madness, fanaticism, and folly: but are not these things warranted by the word of God, not only in the passages I have cited [Hebrews 12: 22-4], but in many others?' (Letter to Lady Hesketh, Thursday, 6 March 1766, p.131). But if reason determines

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[68] Byron also uses the word 'touch' in association with madness, but in an opposite sense to cure: 'I don't much like describing people mad, / For fear of seeming rather touch'd myself' (Canto IV, 588-9). *Don Juan*, in *The Major Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp-373-879 (p.537).

where the die is cast in terms of an imputation of madness, there is a clear sense of its limits when applied to religious questions:

> As in Matters unattainable by Reason, and unrevealed in the Scripture, it is impossible to Argue at all; so in Matters concerning which Reason can only give a probable Guess, and the Scripture has made no explicit Discovery, it is, though not impossible to Argue at all, yet impossible to Argue to any certain Conclusion (Letter to Mrs. Cowper, Thursday, 17 April 1766, p.139).

Reason has a very uncertain provenance here, even leaving aside how it is configured in relation to a self-declared experience of madness.

The letters written shortly before Cowper's arrival at Olney in September 1767 are generally emphatic in their assertion of an evangelical identity. Some sense of the reception of Cowper's thought is indicated by a comment written by Lady Hesketh above a letter addressed to Joseph Hill in 1766: 'This is a charming letter full of good Sense Piety & Truth, without any of the methodistical Cant wch. I dislike extremely –' (10 November 1767, p.186). In the letter that Hesketh commends, Cowper performs a gentle Christian ministry, advising Hill to attend to the eternal verities, while offering a brief summary of his own coming to God: 'Remember that Morality has two parts, Our Duty towards God, as well as towards our Neighbour' (10 November 1767, p.186). This stands against other letters which reflect a tension between Cowper's strong sense of the requirements of Christian duty, and a deep circumspection over whether he is qualified to meet them.

Letters had an important social and communicative role in eighteenth-century Christian society as a means by which religious ideas could be shared, hopes and fears expressed, and faith renewed. Brant suggests that three main discourses were operative:

> The devotional registers of praise, comfort and gloom had particular dynamics: praise involved longing; comfort, an active closeness; gloom, paralysis… Between the elevated language of praise and the 'low worm' who felt gloom lay a language of mood which it was understood letters could express.[69]

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[69] Brant, p.318

Whether these discourses can be applied to Cowper's letters is complicated by the question of madness. The praise of God is coloured by an acutely self-conscious awareness that such praise might be regarded as enthusiasm, as Cowper comments in a letter to Lady Hesketh: 'What I have written would appear like enthusiasm to many, for we are apt to give that name to every warm affection of the mind in others, which we have not experienced in ourselves' (1 July 1765, p.97). Such circumspection means that there is no sense of the unfettered, all-involving praise of God that lights up Smart's *Jubilate Agno*. When Cowper praises the reception he is given by a Christian community in Huntingdon, it is attached to a brutal sense of divine justice, linked to the experience of social removal:

> Surely it is a gracious finishing given to those means, which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion – after having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those, whom God regards as the excellent of the earth… (Letter to Lady Hesketh, 18 October 1765, p.119).

The constriction of social relations that this new qualification entails is apparent not long after this when Cowper 'surmises' (and later confirms) that the town regards him (and the Unwins) as Methodists:

> I doubt not that there are many who having heard it surmised that I am become mighty Religious, and perhaps that I am turned Methodist, say, ay! no great wonder – Distempers of that kind are apt to take such a turn; well, it may wear off in time perhaps, and if it should not, it's better than being confined (11 March 1766, p.134).

In the same letter, Cowper states bluntly of his 'friends': 'The inference I am apt to draw from their Silence is that they wish me to be Silent too…' (p.133). Self-consciousness around the charge of Methodism is pronounced in the letters, which show awareness of the associations made between Methodism and madness by writers like George Lavington in *The Enthusiasm of Methodists & Papists Combined* (1754). Lavington asserted that the words used by Methodists revealed them to

be insane, something that would be obvious even to their families. The charge-sheet is comprehensive:

> [Methodists] … have been *looked upon as mad* (on account of their wild & frantic Actions) by *Friends & Relations*, by *indifferent* Persons, by *regular Physicians* (the most *proper Judges*), by the *World* in general; and have been sent to *Bedlam*, & adjudged there to be *persons distracted*… the most absurd, irregular, & frantic Behaviour & Imaginations are obtruded as the Marks & Proofs of *true Piety*. Any Person in his *Senses* will certainly form such a Conclusion even from *their own Narratives*, related, no doubt, in the most favourable Manner to themselves.[70]

Cowper strikes a delicate balance to resist the epithet of a Methodist. When he discusses his religious principles, he represents himself as a melancholic Calvinist who believes that he is damned, a convoluted 'solution' which he recognizes could itself make him appear insane:

> That a Calvinist in principle, should know himself to have been Elected, and yet believe that he is lost, is indeed a Riddle, and so obscure that it Sounds like a Solecism in terms, and may well bring the assertor of it under the Suspicion of Insanity (Letter to Newton, 10 May 1780, p.341).

He later describes taking on a nurturing role when the anxiety of a former Methodist minister is interpreted as insanity: 'He has at times that flashing wildness in his eyes, and is of a constitution and temperament that give those who wish him well, but too much reason to apprehend the worst' (29 October 1780, p.401). Cowper becomes the arbiter of reason here, a position he also assumed in the run up to the publication of *Poems* (1782), as I explore in the following chapter.

In many letters, intense concern over religious matters mixes with a self-conscious grasp of uncomfortable social realities. The letters that Cowper sends to the very pious Mrs. Cowper, in which he gives spiritual advice, and shares personal reflections, certainly do involve 'an active closeness' (to recall Brant's phrase). Nevertheless, Cowper is often reticent, as in a letter to Mrs. Cowper that follows her criticism of him for a 'long Silence' (dating back to October 1766):

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[70] George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists & Papists Compared* (London: J & P Knapton, 1754), p.10.

Conscious that my Religious Principles are generally excepted against, and that the Conduct they produce wherever they are heartily maintained, is still more the Object of Disapprobation than those Principles themselves, and rememb'ring that I had made both the one and the other known to you, without having any clear Assurance that our Faith in Jesus was of the same Stamp & Character, I could not help thinking it possible that you might disapprove both my Sentiments and Practise… (11 March 1767, p.159).

Underlying the insecurity evident in this long undulating sentence is the deeper one that relates to

Cowper's 'story', then being written down as memoir. The damaging social effects of it are

apparent in another letter to her:

To this Moment I believe it is matter of Speculation in the Place, whence I came, and to whom I belong. My Story is of such a Nature that I cannot satisfy this Curiosity by relating it, and to be close and reserved as I am obliged to be, is in a manner to plead Guilty to any Charge their Jealousy may bring against me (3 April 1767, p.162).

The sense of being hemmed in as a result of malicious gossip does not abate, and eventually results

in rejection and retreat and the narrowing of social horizons:

I am weary of this Place… I want to be with the Lord's People, having great Need of quickening Intercourse and the Communion of his Saints. Possibly, the black and shocking Aspersions which our Neighbours here amuse themselves with casting upon our Names & Conduct, may add to my Impatience to be gone… (10 August 1767, p.176).

The subtext of 'Aspersions' invokes the association of madness with Methodism, leading to a

partial defence of the latter:

Our Friends here define a Methodist to be – One who committs every Sin he can think of and invents New Ones every Day,- That he may be saved by Faith. How truly pitiable is their Blindness & Enmity to the Truth!' (10 August 1767, p.177).

The looseness in the public understanding of Methodism which Cowper complains about here

clearly threatens his own precise but 'obscure' sense of an evangelical identity as an admirer of

George Whitefield.

The gloom and paralysis that feature in Cowper's letters are socially as well as religiously informed. The dread of public performance, for instance, underlies why Cowper does not enter into a religious ministry:

> Indeed, they who have the least Idea of what I have suffered from the Dread of public Exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the mean time, if it please the Almighty, I may be an Instrument of turning many to the Truth, in a private way… (Letter to Mrs. Cowper, October 1766, p.153).

This is one aspect of a movement away from the public world which limits the scope of the Christian vocation. Even during the most heightened phase of Cowper's evangelicalism, the social fall-out of confinement in a madhouse is a recurring theme, and when there appears to be a cooling of the 'heart' in terms of his evangelical belief, this social factor becomes increasingly prominent. On the one hand, Cowper's evangelicalism can be seen as a bulwark against the unravelling of social relationships, and on the other, it promotes the movement away from all but an exclusively evangelical society. The letters document the dissolution of his relationship with Edward Thurlow, who was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1778:

> But my Connection with him having entirely ceased, (for I have never had the least Correspondence with him since my Journey to St. Albans,) it would be extremely painfull to me to deal with him as if upon the Terms of a Friendship which I look upon as absolutely extinct (Letter to Mrs. Cowper, 4 May 1767, p.164).

Cowper's acute awareness of social norms extends to an anxiety in relation to social position, to labour, personal finance, and also in relation to national events experienced from a retirement.

Cowper's evangelical identity is solidified thorough the denunciation of worldliness and a corresponding erasure of his past self:

> [T]he World is filled with such, who furnish a continual Proof of God's almost unprovokeable Mercy, who set up for themselves in a Spirit of Independence upon Him who made them… You remember Me, my dear Cousin, one of this trifling and deluded Multitude… (Letter to Lady Hesketh, 30 January 1767, p.157).

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It is evident reading Cowper that such a full-scale rejection of the world on religious principles diminishes the scope of the writer, particularly when his faith is tempered. Shortly after his arrival in Olney, Cowper begins to despair of subjects for his letters, as he comments to Mrs. Madan: 'I would not always be complaining of barrenness and deadness, yet alas! I have little else to write about' (15 January 1768, p.189). The combined obligations of Christian duty and politeness are invoked when a self-loathing Cowper starts again at the same letter:

> I profess myself a servant of God, I am writing to a servant of God, and about the things of God, and yet can hardly get forward so as to fill my paper… I cannot *speak* any more than I can *do* the things that I would… (p.189-90).

When Cowper's fears over public speaking resurface as he is called upon to lead prayers at Olney, the anxiety over his health almost recapitulates the logic of *Adelphi*:

> I trembled at the Apprehension of it, and… my Health was not a little affected by it. But there was no Remedy, and I hope the Lord brought me to that point, to chuse Death rather than a Retreat from Duty… How much of that Monster Self has He taken Occasion to shew me by this Incident. Pride, Ostentation and Vain Glory have always been my Hindrance in these Attempts. These lie at the Root of that Evil Tree which the world Good natur'dly calls Bashfullness. Evil indeed, in the Character of a Disciple of Christ. May our gracious Teacher, Mortify them all to Death, and never leave me 'till he has made the Dumb to speak, and the Stammering Tongue like the Pen of a ready Writer! (Letter to Mrs. Madan, 1 March 1768, p.191).

Cowper is brought to the precipice only to see himself just in time as 'that Monster Self' in dereliction of his duty. Nevertheless, the anxieties on display here – of character, of morality, and of public performance, as well as of illness – can be alleviated through writing as well as evangelicalism. The lack of agency that his earlier monstrous self-identity entailed can be rehabilitated: the stammering tongue can be replaced by the Christian writer.

The experience of madness seems to be acknowledged in the 'thousand deliriums and delusions' that Cowper refers to in a letter to Lady Hesketh, which describes the quite miraculous benefits of his brother's company (5 July 1765, p.102). When Cowper acknowledges the episode of madness and confinement, though, it is to negate the possibility of writing about it:

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> I visited St. Albans about a Fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The Recollection of what passed there and the Consequences that followed it, fill my Mind continually, and make the Circumstances of a poor transient half spent Life, so insipid and unaffecting, that I have no Heart to think or write about them (Letter to Joseph Hill, 18 June 1768, p.198).

Cowper's 'Life' is premised on a crushing sense of social and personal disaster, linked to the boredom and frustration experienced at Olney: '… Occurrences here are as scarce as Cucumbers at Christmas' (p.198). The letters present an ongoing self-identification with religious melancholy, but understandably tend to avoid any allusion to the madness of frenzy and disorder described in *Adelphi*.

The rejection of worldliness is almost total between the 1763 and 1773 crises and it emerges as an important theme in Cowper's *Poems* (1782). This was 'a World polluted with Sin, and therefore, devoted to Destruction' (December 1768, p.202). With sufficient spiritual sustenance, writing can be a salve:

> My barrenness in spiritual things has been the cause of my silence; when I can declare what God hath done for my soul with some sense of His goodness, then writing is a pleasant employment, but to mention the blessed name of my Lord and Master with dryness and hardness of heart is painful and irksome to me! (December 1768, p.204).

This understanding of writing as an activity that is pleasurable only insofar as it is spiritually informed is significantly modified in later letters. Here, though, religion furnishes the only means through which human life can be understood, as it does when the confinement of a relative [probably Theodora] leads to the same framing of the madhouse experience as a religious affliction that Cowper applied to himself in *Adelphi*: 'I find that the Vacancy I left at St. Albans is filled up by a near Relation. May the same Hand which struck off my Fetters, deliever Her also out of the House of Bondage' (5 August 1769, p.207). Other letters around this time – which takes in the death of Cowper's brother in March 1770 – also document the attempt to make sense of suffering in religious terms, crystallised in the description of God as 'the only Physician of Value' (5 March 1770,

p.216). The dominance of Cowper's spiritual understanding of 'the Storm of 63' is total, but the letters also record its damaging social consequences (25 September 1770, p.235). The degree of social exclusion, for instance, is palpable when Cowper remarks, 'It was not judged proper that I should attend the Funeral [of his brother]' (Letter to Mrs. Madan, 24 March 1770, p.226).

Approaching the severe crisis that began in 1772, Cowper refers to a 'spiritual distress':

> [In] my experience there is a sad swerving aside, a spirit that would prescribe to the only wise God, and teach Him how He shall deal with me: I weary myself with ineffectual struggles against His will, and then sink into an idle despondence equally unbecoming a solder of Christ Jesus. A seaman terrified at a storm who creeps down into the hold, when he should be busy, when he should be busy amongst the tackling aloft, is just my picture (Letter to Mrs. Madan, 9 June 1772, pp.253-4).

There is a sense of religious melancholy as a lasting condition here, perhaps one unamenable to treatment. The self-figuring of a rebellious conscience at war with the will of God reveals the tension between a defined sense of character and the observance of religious duty. The final result is a guilt over labour – 'idle despondence'.

Following the dream, 'before the recollection of which, all consolation vanishes', there is a major break with the religious focus of the letters.[71] This comes despite the fact that Mrs. Unwin takes the same measure of the treatment available for the 'most violent temptations & distressing delusions', as Cowper himself in *Adelphi*: 'As nothing short of Omnipotence could have supported him through this sharp Affliction so nothing less can set him free from it' (Mrs. Unwin to Mrs. Newton, 7 October 1773, p.260). The diminishing of an exclusive focus on religious affairs is reflected in the tailing off of certain correspondences – no further letters to Mrs. Madan and far fewer to Mrs. Cowper – but more in the emergence of Cowper's relationship with William Unwin. From 1776-78, Cowper's correspondence is primarily with Joseph Hill, and the sense of a less religiously centred existence is well captured by a witty comment on earthly matters: 'I want

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[71] Brunström notes that, after 1773, Cowper stopped saying prayers in public and going to church, absenting himself from 'formal collective worship'. *William Cowper: Religion, Satire, Society*, p.16.

Money – not to lend, nor to give, but for my own personal and particular Use, and want it so much, that I can't go on without it' (18 May 1776, p.261). The letters to Hill usually deal in practical concerns, though there is a marked new curiosity, as Cowper requests books on the microscope and the voyages of Cook (13 July 1777, p.271-2). There is also an engagement with contemporary politics, and here Cowper's first extensive comments on the writing of poetry come through.

It is in the correspondence with William Unwin where Cowper can be seen to forge a new identity as a poet, partly, it seems, as a means of escaping religious melancholy. Divested of any theological content, the letters to Unwin, a young man, are open, fatherly, and exploratory. The addressee seems to shape Cowper's authorial persona, and the letters are characterized, above all, by re-engagement in current affairs, as shown in a 1779 letter to Unwin, which finds Cowper reading Dodsley's *Annual Register* and commenting on his own efforts at writing poetry:

> I have no more Right to the Name of a Poet, than a Maker of Mousetraps has to That of an Engineer, but my little Exploits in this way have at times amused me so much, that I have often wish'd myself a good one. Such a Talent in Verse as mine, is like a Child's Rattle, very entertaining to the Trifler that uses it, and very disagreeable to all beside. But it has served to rid me of some melancholy Moments, for I only take it up as a gentleman Performer does his Fiddle. I have this Peculiarity belonging to me as a Rhimist, that though I am charmed to a great Degree with my own Work while it is on the Anvil, I can seldom bear to Look at it when it is once finish'd. The more I contemplate it, the more it loses of its Value, 'till I am at last quite disgusted with it (c. 7 February 1779, pp.289-90).

This construction of poetic identity around the figure of an occasional gentleman performer clearly plays down Cowper's ability as a poet, but also takes poetry out of an evangelical context. Cowper presents his ideas about poetry as a technical skill and evaluates the merits of other poets, discussing the value of poetry *per se*. All this feeds into the production of *Poems*, where Unwin is a kind of prototype public audience, as Cowper describes:

> You are my Mahogany Box with a Slit in the Lid of it, to which I Committ my Productions of the Lyric kind, in perfect Confidence that there they are safe, & will go no further. All who are attach'd to the Jingling Art have this Peculiarity, that they would find no Pleasure in the Exercise, had they not one Friend at least to whom they might Publish what they have composed (1 May 1779, p.291).

The designation of Unwin as the metaphorical 'Mahogany Box' underlines Cowper's great wariness of entering the public sphere and points to an undecided approach to authorship at this point. Unwin was clearly a sympathetic reader for Cowper. In the letters to Unwin between 1779-82, Cowper includes sixteen poems.[72] As well as an important manuscript source for the poetry itself, the correspondence also contains commentary on several important works in *Poems*.[73] As Cowper's editors note of all the poems produced in this period, what links them is their 'topicality'.[74] It is significant though that Cowper comments on 'my Productions of the Lyric kind', a phrase which suggests he viewed his poetry as personally revealing. In my Appendix (II: Figure 6), I have included a 1792 portrait of Cowper which shows the now very successful poet sitting by a writing slope which supports an opened book of his classical translation work. As Nicola Durbridge describes, the portrait depicts a 'rather private public man; one who seemed reluctant to shout about his considerable literary standing… but someone who nevertheless chose to be publicly displayed as a man of letters'.[75] This paradoxical sense of a retired and reticent private individual who has nevertheless asserted his authority in published verse can be traced to the Unwin letters and *Adelphi*. The image of the mahogany box highlights a need for privacy, but also shows the poet tentatively reaching out for a readership, balancing a concern, perhaps, for the reception of a religiously-minded poet reborn in a madhouse, with the desire to write, partly as a means of staying off melancholy.[76]

I have argued in this chapter that the presentation of spiritual identity in *Adelphi*, and the letters, mediates between self-revelation of madness and self-conscious awareness of the hostility towards enthusiasm. Cowper's spiritual identity, which blended together Calvinistic sentiments of

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[72] John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 'Textual Introduction' in *The Poems of William Cowper, 1748-1782* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I, pp.xxvii-xl (p.xxxi).
[73] Baird and Ryskamp, 'Commentary on the Poems', pp.527-51.
[74] Baird and Ryskamp, 'Cowper and his Poetry, 1731-1782', pp.ix-xxv (p.xxii).
[75] 'Cowper's Writing Slope', *The Cowper and Newton Museum Olney* (2012) http://www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/mw_writing_slope.pdf [accessed 1 June 2016], pp.1-20 (p.15).
[76] Durbridge, p.7. The writing slope is not the mahogany box of the letter, which would have been 'a fairly ordinary rectangular box with a fitting in the lid that dropped open to hold papers'.

religious melancholy, and the shame and stigma of mental derangement, was precarious from the start. In Nathaniel Cotton, Cowper found a doctor who shared his understanding of the spiritual basis of health and sickness, and whose advice was again sought by Newton when Cowper had the third major mental crisis of his life from 1772-76. Writing, it seems, gradually became something of a salve, a respite and salutary diversion from religious terror, and also, importantly, an appropriate activity for a gentleman living in retirement: the William Cowper Esq. of *Poems*. The personal despair that is recorded in *Adelphi* now enters into a new authorial identity as Cowper enters the public sphere as a poet primed to morally censure society.

Chapter 4: Madness, Religious Melancholy, and Poetic Identity in *Poems by William Cowper, Of the Inner Temple, Esq* (1782)

'Self-searching with an introverted eye'

This chapter offers a reading of *Poems* (1782) in the context of personal and national anxieties, and draws attention to the way in which madness is represented both externally (as a social disease) and internally (as religious melancholy). Cowper became one of the most successful poets of the eighteenth century with the publication of *The Task* (1785), but, as Scott Hess notes, even after this, 'he continued to construct his identity as a retired gentleman amateur, writing for his own "amusement" and recreation rather than as a vocation'.[1] Comments on writing as an 'amusement' extend back to Cowper's correspondence with Unwin, but Cowper's use of the term reflects a darkened version of its eighteenth-century sense as a pleasant pastime or diversion (OED sense 6): 'Amusements are necessary in a Retirement like mine, & especially in such a State of Mind as I Labour under. The Necessity of Amusement makes me sometimes write Verses' (Letter to Unwin, 6 April 1780, p.329).[2] Cowper runs into the other concurrent senses of amusement in the eighteenth century as mental *abstraction* and unprofitable *distraction* (OED senses 1 and 2). His discomfort over his lyrical poetry has consequences for the content, selection, and ordering of *Poems*, which, from the title-page onwards, has a self-conscious styling in terms of national themes. It also includes more personal poetry. 'To the Rev. William Cawthorne Unwin' refers to both the man of the poem's title, and to man-kind generally, in a comment on the placement of the poem itself in the collection: ''Tis where it should be, in a plan / That holds in view the good of man'.[3] One poem, 'The Shrubbery', with its subtitle, '*Written in a Time of Affliction*', quite clearly presents the

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[1] *Authoring the Self*, pp.22-3.
[2] "amusement, n." OED Online (Oxford University Press, September 2016) [accessed 18 September 2016].
[3] *The Poems of William Cowper, 1748-1782*, ed. by John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I, p.437, 23-4. Volume I includes *Poems* (1782) (pp.240-438); Newton's Preface ('Appendix I', pp.567-70); and an editorial 'Commentary' (pp.506-558), which will all be given parenthetically within the text.

vulnerability of the poet (p.425). Not all the poetry which appears to be self-reflective employs the first person, however, and what seem to be self-references are veiled.

In the first section, I detail the pressing public concerns surrounding this collection in the context of the Gordon Riots (1780) which brought fears about the security of the nation. Cowper's position as an interested observer at some remove from these national events exacerbates an existing anxiety over his social standing as a retired gentleman. *Poems* is the product of an attempt to bring together a complex set of literary influences, leading to anxiety over form, as I describe in the second section. The third section traces the volume's exposure of a moral madness, which tends to be associated with a worldliness defined against an evangelical standard of truth. However, as I explore in the fourth section, Cowper's fragmented self-presentation as a religious melancholic and the wariness with which enthusiasm continues to be regarded show that anxiety underlies the poet's response to society. My final section looks at Cowper's evangelical and poetic identity next to an emerging model of authorship. Cowper muses long on poetic failure in *Poems* but the volume helped him to become a successful poet. Unlike Smart and Blake, Cowper suggests that he does not want to unite 'the prophetical and the poetical character', as he retracts some politically themed verses, claiming that: 'Henceforth I have done with Politics... ' (Letter to Newton, 4 December 1781, p.551). Nevertheless, in this volume's most exhortative and uncompromising poems, Cowper does present himself as a prophetic poet. The collection – which would aspire to be religious poetry and yet is informed by profound spiritual doubt – has inconsistent and paradoxical aims. The mixed reviews of the collection seem to reflect this.[4]

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[4] *Poems* was applauded for originality in the *Monthly Review* (67). *The London's Magazine* (51) was decidedly mixed: 'An entertaining collection upon a variety of subjects, temporary, moral, and satirical; composed with sound judgment, good taste, and no small share of wit and humour. *Table Talk*, the *Progress of Error*, *Truth*, *Hope*, and *Charity*, are laboured pieces of considerable length, but the greatest part of the volume consists of lively sallies... '. *The Critical Review* (53) was largely negative: 'Towards the end of this volume are some little pieces of a lighter kind, which, after dragging through Mr. Cowper's long moral lectures, afforded us some relief... It is a pity that our author had not confined himself altogether to this species of poetry [i.e. the fables], without entering into a system of ethics, for which his genius seems but ill adapted'. James King, *William Cowper: A Biography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), pp.116-7.

'That cheap Ingredient, the name of the Author': Nationalism and Interiority

In *William Cowper: Religion, Satire, Society* (2004), Conrad Brunström refers to a 'current reclamation of Cowper as a central and representative historical voice, someone who absorbed, refined and disseminated much of the "mainstream" thought of the age in which he lived'.[5] *Poems* merits closer attention since it marks the point at which Cowper established a public persona as an author. The collection tends to be defined in terms of its relation to *The Task* (1785), but it is a rich and layered publication in its own right which compellingly reflects the anxieties of its time, such as the trauma of the Gordon Riots and the failures of the American War. The political crisis in England at the time *Poems* was published informs the content and arrangement of sometimes opposing literary traditions. Newton's Preface provides a commentary on its composition in the context of Cowper's own ongoing spiritual and mental crisis. These political and compositional contexts are connected in the long moral satires which are the leading part of *Poems*, as a national perspective seemingly provides some cover for the self-presentation of the poet.

As well as diminishing Cowper's 'madness', the collection's national themes help to make the evangelical beliefs espoused in *Poems* more respectable as aspects of a reformed English Christianity. Composed between December 1780 and October 1781, the moral satires were written at an extremely tense moment in British history. On June 2 1780, between 40,000 and 50,000 people gathered on London's St George's Fields to present a petition to Parliament against the 1778 Catholic Relief Act. Led by Lord George Gordon's Protestant Association, the crowd was aggrieved by the removal of the requirement to condemn the Catholic Church when taking the oath of allegiance to the British crown. The Act also lifted restrictions on land ownership, preaching and publishing, and enabled Catholics to join the army so they might contribute to the war effort in the American colonies.[6] John Newton, an important evangelical figure in London at the time, had nearly joined the PA, but was congratulated by Cowper for not doing so (12 June 1780, p.352).

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[5] Brunströn, *William Cowper: Religion, Satire, Society*, p.12.
[6] Ian Haywood and John Seed, 'Introduction', in *The Gordon Riots*, ed. by Ian Haywood and John Seed (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.1-18 (pp.1-7).

'Table Talk', and a number of short pieces from *Poems*, demonstrate how disturbed the poet was by the course of events, which included the sacking of Newgate prison, attacks on the Bank of England, and the burning down of the Lord Chief Justice's library. Cowper wrote two short poems on the latter subject: 'On the Burning of Lord Mansfield's Library, Together with his MSS. By the Mob, in the Month of June, 1780' and 'On the Same'. The first invokes the 'Vandals of our isle', who are 'Sworn foes to sense and law', while the second puts the trajectory of the country alongside the fall of Rome (p.411, 1-2). Cowper gave a sardonic appraisal of rebellion in 'The Modern Patriot', which invoked the mob as 'mad outright' (line 19, p.408). He was not alone in such condemnation, as both at the time and after, the Gordon Riots have been characterised as an outbreak of collective madness.[7] Gordon himself was written off as a mad fanatic by, among others, the legal reformer, Samuel Romilly (1757-1818).[8]

The content and order of *Poems* reflects the sense of a threat to the security of the nation, with the potential hazard of the Armed Neutrality, a 1780 alliance of countries against Britain comprising Russia, Sweden, and Denmark, and later joined by Holland and Prussia (p.455). The response to these events is marked in the patriotic stance of the poet. In 'Boadicea, An Ode', a British Bard imagines a new native imperialism built in resistance to, and greater than that of the Roman 'Ruffians': 'Empire is on us bestow'd, / Shame and ruin wait for you' (p.432, 43-4). 'Expostulation' begins by asking: 'Why weeps the muse for England? What appears / In England's case to move the muse to tears' (p.297, 1-2). *Poems* was to have had a 'compliment' to the King by way of what were initially projected as the opening and closing poems of the collection: 'Table Talk' and 'Heroism' (p.557). 'Heroism' (composed in 1779) celebrates the British monarchy at the expense of unspecified others in an extended metaphor which likens European monarchical behaviour to the unpredictable eruptions of Mount Aetna (p.556). 'Table Talk' also defends the

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[7] Catharine Arnold, *Bedlam: London and its Mad* (London: Pocket Books, 2009), p.140.
[8] Haywood and Seed, p.2. Romilly's observation: 'What! – summon 40,000 fanatics to meet together, and expect them to be orderly! What is it but to invite hungry wretches to a banquet, and at the same time to enjoin them not to eat?' According to the authors, this was a 'widely shared' view.

King, while attacking social degeneracy and effeminacy, citing John Brown (1715-66), clergyman

and author of *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757). The pervasive sense of a

widespread moral sickness is encapsulated in the image of England as a 'devoted deer' in 'Table

Talk', which precedes, in a social context, the celebrated self-image of Cowper himself in *The Task*:

> Poor England! thou art a devoted deer,
> Beset with ev'ry ill but that of fear.
> The nations hunt; all mark thee for a prey,
> They swarm around thee, and thou standst at bay (p.251, 362-5).

The deer image develops from one that describes the nation having fallen prey to its enemies, both

inside and out, to a self-reflection of the poet as wounded and apart from society:

> I was a stricken deer that left the herd
> Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt
> My panting side was charged when I withdrew
> To seek a tranquil death in distant shades (Book III: The Garden; ii, p.165, 108-11).

There are several anticipations of this self-image in *Poems*, a collection which dramatically reflects

on the poet's decision to leave 'the herd'.

The blending of personal and national concerns is apparent in a revealing letter to John

Newton in which Cowper exerted control over his impending public appearance as an author (5

March 1781, pp.454-56). The immediate context of the collection was the controversy over

Thelypthora (1780), a treatise written by Cowper's cousin, Martin Madan, already witnessed in

Adelphi. Madan's treatise defended polygamy on scriptural grounds as a means of protecting

'fallen' women, and Cowper responded with a satirical poem, *Antithelyphthora* (1781), which

provided the impetus for a concerted period of composition (pp.501-2). The letter demonstrates

how highly controlled Cowper's entry into the public sphere was, beginning with a heavily qualified

admission that he would like to see his verses published: '… I should be sorry to suppress them

entirely, or to publish them to no purpose for want of that cheap Ingredient, the name of the

Author' (p.454). Social status is a matter of trepidation : 'If my Name… will serve them in any degree as a passport into the public Notice, they are welcome to it' (p.454). Cowper made the removal of references to Madan in 'The Progress of Error' a condition of his agreement to lend his name to the poetry. Other verses can be left in since they 'are of such a kind as to stand fairly acquitted of the charge of Personality' (p.455). 'Table Talk' – clearly written as a sop to popular opinion – should open the collection since it deals in subjects which might reasonably 'catch the public by the Ear' (p.455). After ensuring that the author of *Antithelyphthora* and the author of *Poems* would not be connected in the public mind, Cowper gave instructions to his publisher: 'Mr. [Joseph] Johnson will therefore if he pleases announce me to the World by the Stile and title of William Cowper Esqr. of the Inner Temple' (p.456). The concept of 'the World' is here a synecdoche meaning entry into public life, but this was, strictly speaking, a re-entry into public life, after an episode of madness which followed an aborted career in the law, and an earlier entrance into literature as a member of the Nonsense Club.[9] The term 'world' has multiple senses in Cowper's work, which gives several citations to the OED (senses 2; 6a; 6b; 7b; 12; 14; and 15a).[10]

Poems was published in a period which is often defined by what came before (Popean satire) and what came after (Romanticism), and competing literary traditions give rise to conflicts of style and content. Cowper drew on a wide range of literary and religious writers that do not easily complement one another. On the one hand, there are the Nonsense Club writers like Charles Churchill who attacked 'mystification' in what was seen as the apolitical poetry of Thomas Gray and Edward Young, both of whom influenced Cowper.[11] On the other, there are the evangelical influences and the connection to the Calvinistic Methodism of George Whitefield. Brunström finds that Cowper's understanding of contemporary literature was strongly influenced by figures that were very important in the 1750s and early 1760s, including Alexander Gerard, Lord Kames,

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[9] King, p.118. 'In 1782, the "world's verdict" was neither overwhelmingly favourable nor crushingly unfavourable, but Cowper had commenced his career as an author in earnest…'.
[10] "world, n." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2016) [accessed 18 September 2016].
[11] Brunström, p.26. The author comments: '… yet Cowper himself would in later life inherit and adapt this same rhetoric of emotionalist inexactitude'.

Thomas Sheridan, Hugh Blair, Edmund Burke, and Young.[12] Gerard and Kames emphasized the neo-classical values of clarity, communication and refining the written and spoken word, but Blair and Young were criticized for their obscurity of expression. Matthew Prior, who Cowper translates into Latin in *Poems*, combined serious moral poetry and religious pessimism with light digressive verse – this would not be a misleading description of *Poems* itself. To stake a claim for religious poetry in 1782, though, particularly through the use of satire, was a project fraught with difficulties. Both enthusiasm and the figure of the enthusiastic poet had been mercilessly satirized as mad by Swift and Pope earlier in the century. George Whitefield, who Cowper pointedly defends in *Poems*, received a damning verdict as a self-deceived purveyor of madness in *The Dunciad* (1743).[13] In *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift's Calvinistic Jack delivers a sermon in a kennel on the virtues of blindness.[14] Cowper was writing religious poetry precisely when Samuel Johnson was suggesting how ill-advisable this was in the *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81): 'All that pious verse can do is to help the memory and delight the ear, and for these purposes it may be very useful, but it supplies nothing to the mind'.[15] Nevertheless, in this potentially hostile atmosphere, Cowper presents delicate self-references to religious melancholy and makes a claim for the rationality of religion.

There are two quite different ways in which the diction of madness is used in the collection. Firstly, Cowper metaphorically describes a social and moral sickness – the madness of society. Secondly, he reveals, if only partially, a more personal association with madness which colours his sense of poetic identity. Newton's Preface anticipates criticism of the collection on the grounds of enthusiasm and pre-emptively defends Cowper as an author, poet, and moralist (p. 569). Cowper

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[12] Brunström, p.39. The author notes that, 'Kames, Warton, Blair, and Gerard are unclear or ambiguous about the relationship between moral rectitude and literary enthusiasm'.

[13] *The Dunciad*, in *The Major Works*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), (pp.411-569) p.477. 'So swells each wind-pipe; ass intones to ass, / Harmonic twang! of leather, horn, and brass; / Such as from labouring lungs th' enthusiast blow, / High sound, attempered to the vocal nose; / Or such as bellow from the deep divine; / There Webster! pealed thy voice, and Whitfield! thine' (Book the Second, 253-8).

[14] *A Tale of a Tub* (London: Routledge, 1889), p.129. 'Of such great emolument is a tincture of this vapour, which the world calls madness, that without its help the world would not only be deprived of those two great blessings, conquests and systems, but even all mankind would unhappily be reduced to the same belief in things invisible'.

[15] *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Arthur Murphy (London: Jones & Company, 1825), p.80.

raised the possibility of an explanatory preface for the moral satire, 'Truth', which might otherwise

be misunderstood by the 'unenlighten'd Reader', or, alternatively, a preface for the collection as a

whole (Cowper to Newton, 8 April 1781, p.462). When Newton pursued the latter course, Joseph

Johnson encouraged Cowper to cancel it at the last minute, having argued that, while it might

'recommend the volume to the Religious, it would disgust the profane… ' (p.567). The episode

shows how both market considerations and personal and religious misgivings come into the

publication. It also touches on the importance of Newton in the production of *Poems*, where

Cowper describes how they went 'arm in arm' to publication, and where Newton describes Cowper

as an '*alter idem*' (second self, p.568). Newton defends Cowper's retirement and withdrawal from

society, and advises that, after his removal to the countryside, 'he was still more secluded by a long

indisposition' (p.569). The poetry is seen as 'the first fruits of his recovery' (p.569). Newton also

clarifies Cowper's satiric aims:

> His satire, if it may be called so, is benevolent, (like the operations of the skilful and humane surgeon who wounds only to heal) dictated by a just regard for the honour of God, an indignant grief excited by the profligacy of the age, and a tender compassion for the souls of men (p.569).

The volume is above all motivated by Cowper's desire to present the 'truth, beauty, and influence

of the religion of the Bible' (p.569). Finally, and importantly, the Preface suggests that this religion

is the best means of 'relieving the mind of man from painful and unavoidable anxieties… to

produce a conduct worthy of a rational creature' (p.569). Newton cements the point by drawing

attention to this religion of the Bible as 'experimental', despite the acknowledgment of 'they who

affect to despise the inward feelings which religious persons speak of, and to treat them as

enthusiasm and folly…' (p.570).

'Experimental religion' was a term frequently employed by Wesley, where it was connected

to the value of experience over tradition.[16] Newton's discussion validates an expression of faith

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[16] Grayson Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p.32. '… John Wesley constantly referred to 'experimental' religion, meaning the use of the evidence of experience, his own and that of

under the suspicion of madness, and affirms Cowper's own writing in *Adelphi* as it makes Biblical

knowledge the key criterion of health and identity: 'When we were led to read it [i.e. the Bible]

with attention, we found *ourselves* described. – We learnt the causes of our inquietude – we were

directed to a method of relief' (p.570). *Poems* is a didactic text concerned with a religio-moralistic

standard of truth which is projected over national affairs, but at the same time, it is attuned to the

limits of self-knowledge. Two suggestive quotations placed on the title-page illustrate these points.

The first reference to Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book VIII, 22-5) is a metaphor of the care-worn mind on the

eve of battle, an apt reflection, perhaps, of the nervous Cowper:

> So water trembling in a polish'd vase,
> Reflects the beam that plays upon its face,
> The sportive light, uncertain where it falls,
> Now strikes the roof, now flashes on the walls (p.240).

If this points to an uncertain mind in search of the truth, then the difficulty of the search is

indicated through a quotation from *La Jouissance de Soi-Même* (Chapter XI, 'De La Vérité) by Louis

Antoine de Carraccioli (1721-1803):

> We are born to face the truth and yet we cannot bear to face it. Symbols, parables, and emblems are
> necessary adornments in which to present it. We are afraid that the truth will blatantly show up the
> fault we wish to hide. Or, we feel that the truth to be told is readily available to anyone with
> common sense. Or, we want the truth to be presented in an elaborate guise (Translated in *Letters*,
> p.539).

Cowper attaches great importance to these lines, as a 'motto… [which] strikes me as peculiarly

apposite to my purpose' (Letter to Newton, 7 November 1781, p.539). The citation suggests the

centrality of the religio-moralistic message of *Poems*, after which formal devices are subordinate,

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others, to advance his arguments. The elevation of experience over tradition – and sometimes over authority
– was a hallmark of evangelicalism'.

and it proposes an understanding of the truth as an essential objective, but one which is likely to be uncomfortable to witness. It is a strange kind of motto since it presents a description of a problem rather than a set of guiding principles. Cowper's religious goal involves a struggle between virtue and sin which meets the uncertainties of the human mind. He frequently referred to his own mind as unstable or deficient, claiming that the 'amusement' of writing poetry was his most effective means of dispelling melancholy thoughts (Letter to Newton, 18 March 1781). Notwithstanding its public themes, the collection has much to say about interiority and the self. The OED entry on 'Introverted' takes the first citation from Cowper to illustrate the adjective's meaning as: 'Of the mind or thought: Directed inwards upon itself, or upon that which is inward or spiritual' (OED sense 1). The OED refers to the moral satire, 'Conversation': 'Self-searching with an introverted eye' (p.363, 364). The second meaning of the adjective – 'Turned or bent inwards (physically)(OED sense 2) – also takes the first citation from Cowper, this time from *The Task*: 'His awkward gait, his introverted toes…' (Book IV, line 633).[17]

'This Bedlam part': Formal Anxiety and Poetic Voice

Here I use 'Table Talk' as a platform to unpack the question of poetic voice in *Poems*, describing a formal anxiety which is a reflection of the attempt to bring together evangelical and neo-classical traditions in poetry. Poetic voice balances an interest in national concerns like patriotism and monarchy (in 'Table Talk'), with severe treatments of religio-moralistic themes like justice and sin (in 'Truth', 'The Progress of Error', and 'Expostulation'), amid apparent self-references to melancholy, bashfulness, and social withdrawal (in 'Conversation' and 'Retirement'). The moral satires are broadly similar in form and length, but range markedly in tone, from the very shrill 'Expostulation' to the much lighter 'Conversation'. Voice is not integrated across the collection, and a divided voice is reflected in the appeals to the second person of the reader, and in variations of first- and third-person references to the poet. 'Table Talk' was deliberately placed first in the

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[17] "introverted, adj." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2016) [accessed 18 September 2016].

collection, 'with some regard to the prevailing taste, and that those who are governed by it may not be discouraged at the very threshold from proceeding' (p.569). It is not as Calvinistic or evangelical a poem as either 'Truth', 'The Progress of Error' or 'Expostulation', but it does nevertheless advocate serious objectives for religious poetry. Unlike the other moral satires, it explicitly engages with public issues, unfolding into an argument for a repentant state – a steering away from a 'mad' course – as the poet calls for a new kind of poetry, both evangelically inspired and rational (p.253, 435).

'Table Talk' presents two fundamental anxieties which loom large over the whole collection: firstly, the moral state of the nation; and secondly, the requisite individual and poetic response to it. The poem begins with a discussion of political corruption, war and royalty conducted by Cowper's two speakers (which he terms 'A' and 'B'). The speakers consider the state of British politics with great alarm, referring to various forms of malpractice and the 'eternal infamy' of unscrupulous rulers (p.242, 29). Religion and a narrowly conceived freedom are seen to be under threat, but as the motto from Horace suggests, Cowper is both insistent and self-mocking: 'If by chance the heavy burden of my poem should chafe you, throw it away' (p.507). Even the title of the poem has a dismissive air. As Cowper's editors note, 'tabletalk' was defined by Johnson as ''Conversation at meals or entertainments; table discourse', with a citation from Atterbury: 'No fair adversary would urge loose tabletalk in controversy, and build serious inferences upon what was spoken but in jest'' (p.507). Speaker 'B' defends the crown, and questions the aims of political dissent, expressing 'pity' for 'thwarted' kings who are subject to malicious gossip:

> To be the Table Talk of clubs up stairs,
> To which th'unwash'd artificer repairs,
> T'indulge his genius after long fatigues,
> By diving into cabinet intrigue... (p.245, 151-4).

The reference to dirty clubs casts doubt on the speakers themselves as commentators, and puts mockery at the centre of the poem, as if it were all a jest. The debate is an exclusive one, as Susan

Matthews notes, seemingly open only to the male of education.[18] Cowper invokes social madness

and the parlous moral state of the nation through a discussion about the purpose of poetry.

Weighty themes of slavery, the social order, and patriotism inform the commentary, but a self-

condemning note is apparent in the suggestion offered by 'A' on the causes of the Gordon Riots:

> Sing where you please, in such a cause I grant
> An English Poet's privilege to rant,
> But is not freedom, at least is not our's
> Too apt to play the wanton with her pow'rs,
> Grow freakish, and o'er leaping ev'ry mound
> Spread anarchy and terror all around? (p.249, 298-303).

The use of the word 'rant' with its connotations of madness and unorthodox religion through the

seventeenth-century sect, the Ranters, is an arresting one next to the position that speaker 'B'

advances in relation to the Gordon Riots. Far from a chaste and blushing liberty, the riots represent

a moral sin as the lamentable product of a 'fierce licentiousness' (p.250, 329). But the 'privilege to

rant' undercuts the validity of what speaker 'B' says, and clouds the authorial voice. The passage

describes a fear that the serious moral preoccupation of the poem – which ascribes madness to the

body politic – might be considered the rantings of a mad poet. The very cautious appraisal of

freedom can be seen in the fear that it may 'Grow freakish'. The word 'freakish' had significant

connotations, seen, for instance, in the poem 'Bedlam' by Thomas Fitzgerald (1695-1752), where it

is employed in a discussion of the 'Distraction' among Bedlamite types, including the melancholic

poet and the religious enthusiast:

> If brisk the circulating Tides advance,
> And nimble Spirits through the Fibres dance,
> Then all the Images delightful rise,
> The tickled Fancy sparkles through the Eyes;

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[18] ' 'Mad misrule': The Gordon Riots and Conservative Memory', in *The Gordon Riots*, ed. by Ian Haywood and John Seed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.225-42 (pp.233-4).

> The Mortal, all to Mirth and Joy resign'd,
> In ev'ry Gesture shews his freakish Mind.[19]

In 'Table Talk', the use of 'freakish' underlines the idea that unrestrained freedom leads to social and political madness, a point which influenced other writers. Hannah More, for instance, in her poem, 'The Slave Trade' (1790), warns of the 'unlicens'd monster' of the crowd, and an illicit liberty:

> Of Rash Sedition born, and mad Misrule;
> Whose stubborn mouth, rejecting Reason's reign,
> No strength can govern, and no skill restrain,
> Whose magic cries the frantic vulgar draw
> To spurn at Order, and to outrage Law.[20]

As Susan Matthews observes, More 'derived' her view of a dangerously sexualized liberty 'from Cowper's account of the Gordon Riots' in 'Table Talk'.[21]

During the course of the ensuing 'rant', speaker 'B' registers an evangelical sense of moral degradation, where the pursuit of pleasure and effeminacy are seen as aspects of a comprehensive social disease. Unlike the other moral satires, 'Table Talk' is ostensibly a debate. Speaker 'A' casts some uncertainty over 'B' by invoking the figure of John Brown, the clergyman who cut his throat in 1766 and so had actually committed the madness of self-murder according to the legal report.[22] Cowper's reference picks up Brown's *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757) which had warned of a luxurious and vain effeminacy ''that must destroy us'' (pp.509-510). In

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[19] Thomas Fitzgerald, 'Bedlam Verses', in *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry: 1535-1860*, ed. by Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp.355-6 (p.356).
[20] *The Works of Hannah More*, 8 vols (London: Cadell and Davis, 1801), I, pp.98-9
[21] *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.62.
[22] *Report of the Coroner's Inquest into the Death of John Brown, in Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader*, ed. by Allan Ingram, pp.152-5.

Brown's text, the public body is described as if it really were a physical body amid fears it stood to be 'weakened, or rather *mutilated* in all its limbs'.[23] In Cowper's *Poems*, as in Brown's text, social anxieties appear to compound personal ones, and *vice versa*. While speaker 'A' suggests that Brown has been proved wrong, 'B' posits that Brown's argument was substantially correct, and then goes on to exhort the nation to take a different path in an extended warning that refers to 'a land once Christian, fall'n and lost' (p.252, 428). Using the examples of 'Nineveh, Babylon, and antient Rome', speaker 'B' suggests that the same moral madness dominates contemporary society:

> They cry aloud in ev'ry careless ear,
> Stop, while ye may, suspend your mad career;
> O learn from our example and our fate,
> Learn wisdom and repentance e'er too late (p.253, 434-7).

At the crux of the poem is a terror that this message will not be heeded, that a moral and social madness will be allowed to continue, until 'providence himself will intervene' (p.253, 444). At this point, 'B' is cast as the lonely voice of reason against the folly and madness of the multitude – an extraordinary position in the context of Cowper's personal circumstances. The social order seems to take on Cowper's own terror as an individual, fearing damnation, at the mercy of providence. Mirroring Cowper's commentary on his own sinful behaviour in *Adelphi*, the entire populace will go on regardless of the Calvinistic God they scorn:

> The reprobated race grows judgment proof:
> Earth shakes beneath them, and heav'n roars above,
> But nothing scares them from the course they love;
> To the lascivious pipe and wanton song
> That charm down fear, they frolic it along,
> With mad rapidity and unconcern,

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[23] John Brown, An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times, 2 vols (London: Printed for L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1758), I, p.134.

Down to the gulph from which is no return (p.253, 459-65).

In the poem's pervasive anxiety, personal and social, real and imagined, Calvinistic strictures are seen as qualities that the reprobates of society lack. Following a brutal but effective image of the total defeat of liberty at the hands of tyranny, the poem pulls back as speaker 'A' asks: 'Such lofty strains embellish what you teach, / Mean you to prophecy, or but to preach? (p.254, 478-9). The question is a pertinent one, which sets up the discussion of poetry which dominates the remainder of the poem, and resonates throughout the collection. Having claimed a knowledge of the prophetic poet's mind, and having noted that prophets and poets were one and the same in ancient Rome, the sequence ends in bathos and irony as 'B' reports: 'But no prophetic fires to me belong, / I play with syllables, and sport in song' (p.254, 504-5). It is hard to make a case for the sportive tone of this poem, and a prophetic poet certainly maintains a presence in the remainder of the collection.

As the discussion in 'Table Talk' suggests, the voice of the poem is conflicted between the aspiration to produce religious poetry which is self-evidently true and morally certain, and a self-conscious sense of poetic inadequacy, which coalesces around the idea that evangelical convictions could be interpreted as the madness of enthusiasm. The discussion registers an attempt to bring together a Puritan tradition of plain style with an eighteenth-century neo-classical tradition (pp.258-9, 642-90). Cowper suggests that there is little of value in contemporary poetry, and harshly criticizes much poetry of the past with only a few figures commended outright (Homer, Virgil, Milton; p.256, 556-9). The discussion is also self-damning as Cowper absorbs the grand pedagogical aims of poetry – that it can help to police and regulate the nation – before concluding that his own poetry falls short. The aim is undoubtedly to teach through poetry, as 'Table Talk' expresses regret that religion 'has so seldom found / A skilful guide into poetic ground' (p.260, 716-7). Against this, a non-moralistic, sensuous poetry is rendered by the speaker's evangelical criteria a Bacchanalian madness, 'This Bedlam part' of Anacreon and Horace (p.257, 609). The condemnation

refers to the 'wild imagination' of the profane poets – the same criterion used to criticize

enthusiastic poets in the eighteenth century (p.257, 605). An evangelically inspired poetry is

proffered as the best hope of the age, against the madness of sin, whether represented by

contemporary politics, or by the poets of previous ages. Arguably the most compelling image in this

sequence comes earlier, though, and expresses a quite contrary sense of personal poetic limitation:

> The nightingale may claim the topmost bough,
> While the poor grasshopper must chirp below,
> Like him unnotic'd, I, and such as I,
> Spread little wings, and rather skip than fly (p.256, 576-9).

In a suggestion of the degree to which national and personal concerns intermix in *Poems*,

grasshoppers are later seen as nations before the 'awful sight' of an angry God in 'Expostulation'

(p.305, 345). Notwithstanding this passing expression of anonymity and creative uncertainty, 'Table

Talk' promotes an all empowering, divinely ordained poetry of spiritual redemption. This is set up

against a withering verdict on contemporary poetic style (pp.254-55, 506-19). The reflections that

Speaker 'A' makes on 'little poets' at Westminster, and the dangers of writing sensuous verse of 'a

creamy smoothness', have clear autobiographical resonances.[24]

 The authorial conundrum for Cowper is laid out in the final section of 'Table Talk' which

invokes the power of nature to present an ideal spiritual poetry united with neo-classical poetics:

> Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought,
> Harmony, strength, words exquisitely sought,
> Fancy that from the bow that spans the sky,
> Bring colours dipt in heav'n that never die,
> A soul exalted above the earth, a mind
> Skill'd in the characters that form mankind (p.260, 700-5).

This advances a visual poetry in an extended metaphor which links the beauty of natural forms to

God and the poet, who should have, 'An eye like his to catch the distant goal / Or e'er the wheels of

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[24] Cowper had Westminster connections with Charles Churchill and Bonnell Thornton. King, p.12.

verse begin to roll' (p.260, 710-11). In exalting the soul of the religious poet soaring above the

earth, the ideal is expressed in terms which are directly opposed to Cowper's own agonies of poetic

self-burial elsewhere, as I discuss below. This commendation of a spiritual poetry borne out of

natural observation, clarity of expression, and formal harmony, comes directly after the poet has

espoused the virtues of the Augustan poets, Addison, Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift (pp.258-59, 642-

61). As Vincent Newey notes, the overall critique of poetry in 'Table Talk' relays the essential ideas

of Pope in his *Essay on Criticism*.[25] It presents a standard almost impossible to reach, and Cowper

makes no claim to approach it (although Hayley defended *Poems* on the grounds that Cowper had

met precisely these terms).[26] 'Table Talk' looks back to older models, but at the same time warns

against the self-idolization produced by eighteenth-century print culture:

> Or if to see the name of idol self
> Stamp'd on the well-bound quarto, grace the shelf,
> To float a bubble on the breath of fame,
> Prompt his endeavour, and engage his aim,
> Debas'd to servile purposes of pride,
> How are the powers of genius misapplied? (p.261, 744-49).

The self-presentation of the poet balances a nearly impossible formal and religious aspiration with

a distaste for an emerging model of authorship driven by the commercial marketplace, which is

seen to pander to the vanities of self-worship. This is a problem which the whole collection

encounters. Truly great poetry, according to the standard just described, is self-evident, but

anything removed from its divine purpose is not only worthless but spiritually pernicious:

> To purchase at the fool-frequented fair
> Of vanity, a wreath for self to wear,
> Is profanation of the basest kind,
> Proof of a trifling and a worthless mind (p.261, 756-59).

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[25] *Cowper's Poetry: A Critical Study and Reassessment* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1982), p.55.
[26] Hayley, *The Life and Letters of William Cowper,* I, pp.259-60.

A new kind of authorial self based in eighteenth-century print culture is rejected here, a model of the self, which, according to Hess, becomes the lyric self of Romantic poetry.[27] Other passages in the collection, however, suggest that Cowper was both drawn to, and repelled by, a poetry of self-exploration. In 'Table Talk', the notion of a popular authorial self is presented as a threat to contemporary morals, a signature of the vanity and pride of author and reader alike. The poem underlines the difficulty of appealing to popular sympathies while at the same time fiercely attacking popular attitudes. Throughout *Poems*, there is a persistent self-doubt about poetic status, but this has to be weighed up against the narrow criterion given for a religio-moralistic poetry, which dismisses the Restoration poets, for example, as 'rank obscenity' (p.258, 631). 'Table Talk' ends in tongue-in-cheek praise for the metrical psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins, and the insight of Speaker 'A' that a strict religio-moralistic standard for poetry would eliminate many good poets: ''Twould thin the ranks of the poetic tribe, / To dash the pen through all that you proscribe' (p.261, 768-9).

Formally, the moral satires reflect a general difficulty that attached to satire after the death of Pope. As Thomas Lockwood argues, there is no Augustan sense of a divided audience when Cowper turns to the form, and the moral satires are in places more like sermons than anything else: 'His audience is the world… [and Cowper] sets out upon the assumption that expostulating with the world will do more real good than satirizing it'.[28] 'Table Talk' has a damning verdict on contemporary satirical poetry: 'Satyr has long since done his best, and curst / And loathsome ribaldry has done his worst' (p.260, 728-9). Cowper follows Pope's advice in the *Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue II* (1738): 'O sacred weapon! left for truth's defence, / Sole dread of folly, vice, and insolence! / To all, but heav'n-directed hands, deny'd, / The muse may give thee, but the Gods

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[27] Hess, p.4.

[28] Thomas Lockwood, *Charles Churchill and Satirical Poetry*, 1750-1800 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), p.159.

must guide'.[29] Satire is mobilized to defend evangelical values and eternal verities, but not the poet

himself, who frequently expresses pessimistic doubts about his poetic abilities.

'Charity' presents the nature of the problem quite clearly by sternly criticizing satire in a

purportedly satirical poem. Since it is rarely aligned with virtue, satire is given a narrow remit:

> Most sat'rists are indeed a public scourge,
> Their mildest physic is a farrier's purge,
> Their acrid temper turns as soon as stirr'd
> The milk of their good purpose all to curd,
> Their zeal begotten as their works rehearse,
> By lean despair upon an empty purse;
> The wild assassins start into the street,
> Prepar'd to poignard whomsoe'er they meet;
> No skill in swordsmanship however just,
> Can be secure against a madman's thrust,
> And even virtue so unfairly match'd,
> Although immortal, may be prick'd or scratch'd (pp.349-50, 501-12).

These lines demonstrate how readily Cowper became an arbiter of reason, but there is something

incongruous about an ostensible satirist associating satire with 'a madman's thrust', even leaving to

one side the biographical reverberations. Not even immortal virtue is quite safe from the 'wild

assassins' of the form, a judgment which draws on Pope's claim in *The First Satire of the Second*

Book of Horace Imitated (1733): 'Satire's my weapon, but I'm too discreet / To run amuck, and tilt

at all I meet'.[30] The weaponry imagery continues later in 'Charity' when Cowper draws a parallel

between the 'polish'd points' of satirical wit (p.350, 544), and the arms within the Tower of

London: 'Guns, halberts, swords and pistols, great and small' (p.351, 551). Unless satire acts in

tandem with truth, and in harmony with God's grace– with charity the chief grace – then it is

arbitrary and dangerous. This leads to the disquiet presented in the portrait of 'the world's last

doting years' (p.352, 604). The authority to write poetry is recognized only in the sense that

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[29] Pope, pp.400-8 (pp.406-7).
[30] Pope, pp.265-9 (p.267).

Cowper's subject matter is set above the potentially self-deceiving dreams of the ever uncertain poet:

> Thus have I sought to grace a serious lay
> With many a wild indeed, but flow'ry spray,
> In hopes to gain what else I must have lost,
> Th'attention pleasure has so much engross'd.
> But if unhappily deceiv'd I dream,
> And prove too weak for so divine a theme,
> Let Charity forgive me a mistake
> That zeal not vanity has chanc'd to make,
> And spare the poet for his subject sake (p.353, 628-36).

The confession of 'zeal' attached to strong self-criticism acknowledges that a strident evangelicalism may have a negative bearing on poetry. Voice is conflicted in seeking to combine a serious moral poetry with 'wild' or pleasure-inducing satire, and in the uneasy balance between preaching and social commentary. It is far from the only poem in the collection to express doubts about the reception of its message.

'The sin and madness of mankind': Madness and Worldliness

Representations of moral madness are found in key oppositions in *Poems*. The second piece on the burning of Lord Mansfield's library, 'On the Same', presents the sanctity of a gentleman – 'His sacred head' – cruelly wronged by the mob in an act of cultural vandalism (p.411, 8). The enlightened individual is contrasted with the madness of the multitude, as the fate of the Lord Chief Justice becomes analogous with the 'fate of Rome' (p.411, 3), recalling the 'mad rapidity' associated with the fall of Rome in 'Table Talk' (p.253, 464), and the description of the mob as 'mad outright' in 'The Modern Patriot' (p.408, 19). In 'Retirement', the countryside is represented as the locus of sane and peaceful natural contemplation, set against the mad tumult of the city where 'freakish fancy' may succumb to temptation (p.381, 128). Madness is repeatedly invoked alongside the worldliness of sin, where it is contrasted with evangelical truth as sane and rational. A

conflicted sense of both *the world* and evangelicalism, however, places anxiety on both sides of this opposition.

 Several variations of the noun 'world' are illustrated with reference to Cowper's work (senses 2; 6b; 7a; 7b; 12; 14; and 15a).[31] There is a particularly strong sense of *the world* meaning: 'the interests, pursuits, and concerns associated with human existence on earth, esp. (in Christian use) those regarded as earthly and sinful; temporal or mundane affairs' (OED sense 2). This is illustrated with a line from, 'The Love of the World Reproved, or, Hypocrisy Detected': 'Renounce the world, the preacher cries' (p.413). The poem attacks sophistry by directing attention to the way in which subjective understandings of what it means to renounce the world – likened to various interpretations of the Prophet Mahomet's advice on eating pork – increase hypocrisy and sin: 'Revil'd and lov'd, renounc'd and follow'd, / Thus bit by bit the world is swallow'd; / Each thinks his neighbour makes too free, / Yet likes a slice as well as he' (p.413, 33-6). The poem has an acute awareness of double-edged humour as its uncovering of Muslim hypocrisy is turned on to a readership presumed to include wavering Christians: 'You laugh – 'tis well – the tale apply'd / May make you laugh on t'other side' (p.413, 23-4). There is a keen sense in key moments of several poems that this laughter with a sting could be visited upon the poet himself despite attempts to deflect it.

 The sinfulness of the world is represented as a kind of madness in *Poems*, but the evangelical values which would stand to counterbalance it are not unambiguously or confidently given. The moral madness of sin is succinctly expressed in the fable, 'The Pine Apple and the Bee', where the bee's appetite for pineapples as 'the spoiler' is indexed to human nature as a whole: 'Methinks, I said, in thee I find / The sin and madness of mankind; / To joys forbidden man aspires, / Consumes his soul with vain desires' (p.418, 13-16). Having given a couple of instances in which forbidden joy takes hold of a love-struck 'Cynthio' and then an acquisitive maid, the poem baldly concludes: 'But they whom truth and wisdom lead, / Can gather honey from a weed' (p.419, 35-6).

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[31] "world, n." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2016) [accessed 18 September 2016].

The longer poems, however, suggest how difficult it is to express honey-gathering from the weeds of moral degradation. In the most hard-line of the moral satires – 'The Progress of Error', 'Truth', and 'Expostulation' – the case against the world is so grave that any positive sense of Christian values is submerged under exhortation and moral upbraiding.

Hard-line evangelicalism is both a source of authority and a source of anxiety for the poet. 'Truth', 'The Progress of Error', and 'Expostulation' are uncompromising poems, but they also contain passages of considerable doubt. Newton's Preface was initially conceived to introduce 'Truth', where Cowper adopts a fully didactic stance, attacking such figures as the sage hermit who is unfavourably compared to a Brahmin (p.283, 105-12); a hypocritical female church-goer with past sins of the flesh (pp.283-4, 131-64); and even Voltaire on his death-bed (pp.288-9, 317-30). When the poet advocates the values of 'the favour'd few, th'enthusiasts you despise', the poem is defensively set up against the folly of human society – the world (p.286, 229-32). A portrait of the redeemed sinner is given with the injunction, 'A soul redeem'd demands a life of praise, / Hence the complexion of his future days, / Hence a demeanor holy and unspeck'd, / And the world's hatred as its sure effect' (p.287, 279-83). This statement of implacable worldly hostility contributes to a sense of uneasiness that pervades the poem. The prevailing tone is despondent:

> How readily upon the gospel plan,
> That question has its answer – what is man?
> Sinful and weak, in ev'ry sense a wretch,
> An instrument whose chords upon the stretch
> And strain'd to the last screw that he can bear,
> Yield only discord in his maker's ear (p.290, 383-86).

What was personal in *Adelphi* has now become general. Later, in 'Retirement', this imagery is significantly modified in the much more positive 'Man is a harp' sequence, but here the dominant mode of expression is a hard pessimism, bordering on despair, at humanity's madly wilful rejection

of evangelical values. It is not so much the individual religious melancholic that requires a spiritual cure, but society as a whole.

The self-representation of the poet is extremely defensive in 'Truth', 'The Progress of Error', and 'Expostulation', as all three poems struggle to balance religious, personal, and national anxieties. In 'Truth', Cowper imagines a world without scripture and makes evangelicalism a bulwark against a despair which is seen as a kind of madness, as indeed it was by eighteenth-century medics like Thomas Arnold:[32]

> Sorrow might muse herself to madness then,
> And seeking exile from the sight of men,
> Bury herself in solitude profound,
> Grow frantic with her pangs and bite the ground (p.292, 441-4).

The poem has obvious autobiographical echoes in the references to exile and solitude, and in the suggestion that an absence of religiosity leads into madness. The poem is at one with Cotton's view when it claims, 'That scripture is the only cure of woe' (p.292, 451). The evidence of the letters, however, suggests that Cowper did not believe that he himself was cured. The moral strictness of the poem gains a certain pathos when set next to Cowper's personal reflections on his own chances of salvation, as he explained them to Newton:

> Your sentiments with respect to me, are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance and often tells me so. I make but one Answer, and sometimes none at all. That Answer gives *Her* no pleasure, and would give *You* as little (21 December 1780, p.425).

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[32] Arnold describes religious despair as a 'mental affection', and places it under a category called the 'Distresses', experienced by 'such mortals as imagine they have committed crimes which can never be forgiven by an offended deity, and for which they are inevitably doomed to everlasting torment'. *Observations*, II, p.240.

'Truth' has stark themes of spiritual abandonment, solitude, and grief, and leaves behind the same uncomfortable questions that *Adelphi* poses. When devoid of faith in salvation, how does one countenance loneliness, grief, and mental unrest? The polarity between madness and belief presented in the poem is dreadfully weighted towards madness, where belief as salvation is in question, as it was for Cowper personally. The madness of unbelief has no redeeming features in the poem, first explicitly linked to self-murder, and then equated with ignorance:

> Thus often unbelief grown sick of life,
> Flies to the tempting pool or felon knife,
> The jury meet, the coroner is short,
> And lunacy is the verdict of the court:
> Reverse the sentence, let the truth be known,
> Such lunacy is ignorance alone;
> They knew not, what some bishops may not know,
> That scripture is the only cure of woe… (p.292, 445-52).

Personal and political preoccupations merge as the madness of sin, and, with it, criminality, are made the cost of scriptural ignorance. The sequence recapitulates the narrative of *Adelphi*. Scripture is the cure for society as it was for Cowper himself.

'The Progress of Error' defends rational religion against fatalism, deism, the folly of pleasure, and the buffoonery within the culture of learning. As in 'Truth', madness forms part of the wages of sin, and the poem itself is written as a curative: 'Discern the fraud beneath the specious lure, / Prevent the danger, or prescribe the cure' (p.262, 263). Madness is portrayed as an adjunct to the sordid pursuit of pleasure, greed, and earthly ambition: 'There beauty woes him with expanded arms, / E'en Bacchanalian madness has its charms' (p.263, 55-56). The poet so forcefully advances the stance of John Newton's 'rational creature' of faith (from the Preface) that the contrary position, whichever form it takes, is relegated to the status of madness (p.569). This is the case, for example, with Sabbath observance, where the situation in the country is so deleterious that it begins to look like Italy, with 'God's worship and the mountebank between' (p.266, 156). In

'The Progress of Error', as in 'Truth', the poet assumes the position of a moral guardian, teasing out the manifestations of 'The serpent error' in a widespread attack on contemporary morals (p.262, 4). The conflicted voice of the poem is reflected in the motto, taken from Horace's *Odes* (IV, ii), which seems both strident and lacking in any authority: 'If I say anything worth hearing' (p.262). A similar doubleness is conveyed by the first reflections of the poet's admonishing role: 'Take, if ye can, ye careless and supine! / Counsel and caution from a voice like mine; / Truths that the theorist could never reach, / And observation taught me, I would teach' (p.262, 9-12). According to Hayley, the poem, the first of the moral satires to be written, came after a solicitation by Mrs. Unwin that Cowper devote his thoughts to poetry after a 'long fit of mental dejection' (p.514). In its criticism of 'the fatalist's unrighteous plan', the narrator establishes a small space for benevolent volition, but the assault on the world is so total that the poem gives an overwhelmingly negative impression of human existence (p.262, 27).

Cowper uses the 'enthusiast' label in both directions in *Poems*. The 'favour'd few' of 'Truth' are pleasure-seekers in 'The Progress of Error', as the poet protests against a creeping secularism and directs himself against irreligious behaviour: 'Ye devotees to your ador'd employ, / Enthusiasts, drunk with an unreal joy, / Heav'ns harmony is universal love, / Love makes the music of the blest above' (p.264, 75-8). Later, enthusiasts are mad preachers: 'No wild enthusiast ever yet could rest, / Till half mankind were like himself possess'd' (p.275, 470-1). Attacks on the 'regular' clergy as enthusiastic were condemned by William Mason (1719-91), who warned of the enthusiasm of the 'seducing' Methodists in a text first published in 1756 (and reprinted in 1786):

> An *Enthusiast*! What is that? Oh, it is the Cant Word of the Day for the many-headed Monster; the Bugbear of the Times, thrown out by those, who are influenced by the *Father of Lies*… All the true Ministers of our *Church* are now called *Enthusiasts*… But, Reader, when thou hearest of a Minister, whom the World calls an Enthusiast, don't suffer this to prejudice thee against him.[33]

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[33] *Methodism Displayed, And Enthusiasm Detected,* 2nd edn (Dublin: Printed, and Sold at Henry Whitestone's, 1786), pp.24-5.

Cowper participates in the bandying about of *enthusiast* as an insult, but the rejection of 'life's mad

scene' in 'The Progress of Error' is so comprehensive that almost no group or individual is spared

rebuke (p.264, 88). Having expressed horror at the press – 'Thou God of our idolatry' (p.276, 461) –

the poem attacks empiricism: 'Philosophers, who darken and put out / Eternal truth by everlasting

doubt' (p.276, 472-3). Hard on this, Cowper points the finger at 'Church Quacks' as 'the blind that

lead the blind' (p.276, 474-7). Throughout the poem, the primary concern to promote a rational

evangelicalism uses madness and its associations as terms of opprobrium for immoral behaviour:

'The breach, though small at first, soon op'ning wide, / In rushes folly with a full moon tide' (p.269,

282-3). The depth and severity of its criticism is justified by an ever-present Calvinist equation of

error with eternal damnation: 'Death and the pains of hell attend him there' (p.277, 547). Terror

undergirds the logic of the poem, condemning 'free-thinkers' who deserve no clemency:

> But if you pass the threshold, you are caught,
> Die *then*, if pow'r Almighty save you not.
> There hard'ning by degrees, 'till double steel'd,
> Take leave of nature's God, and God reveal'd,
> Then laugh at all you trembl'd at before,
> And joining the free-thinkers brutal roar,
> Swallow the two grand nostrums they dispense,
> That scripture lies, and blasphemy is sense:
> If clemency revolted by abuse
> Be damnable, then damn'd without excuse (pp.278-79, 588-97).

Anything outside the truth of 'the cross' is madness as a sentence of everlasting torment here,

'Delusions strong as hell' (p.279, 609). Alternative positions are condemned as the ravings of the

'deist' and the base slavery of the 'atheist' (p.279, 614-15). Just as the denial of the cross is

delusion, so the cross is the only site where no 'delusive hope invited despair' (p.279, 617). The

same point is simply stated in both directions. No one is ever too far away from the self-deluding

arguments that lead to spiritual disaster, rendering any bid for poetic authority a perilous quest.

The sense of constriction is neatly captured by the circular relationship given between a wandering morality and consequent organic brain dysfunction: 'Faults in the life breed errors in the brain, / And these, reciprocally, those again… ' (p.278, 564-9). There is no sense that the poet is secure from this dreadful reckoning: 'I am no preacher, let this hint suffice, / The cross once seen, is death to ev'ry vice' (p.279, 623-4). The voice of the would-be authoritative poet flounders.

Madness is also deployed as warning in 'Expostulation', which amplifies the counsel already given on the 'mad' course of the nation in 'Table Talk'. A focus on the ancient state of Israel acts as a warning against the moral laxness seen to have befallen England. The poet aligns with the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, who is celebrated for his defiance against the imputation of madness: 'They scorn'd his inspiration and his theme, / Pronounc'd him frantic and his fears a dream, / With self-indulgence wing'd the fleeting hours, / Till the foe found them, and down fell the tow'rs' (p.299, 69-72). This lends weight to Cowper's own sense of poetic vocation, which is again seen to depend on moral guardianship. Here, war without divine backing, the exportation of slavery to India, an encroaching Catholicism in law, and homosexuality, are all drawn out for particular criticism. The reader is asked to acknowledge their complicity in any such conduct with an anaphoric tag given over several verse-paragraphs ('Hast thou…'; pp.305-8, 340-414). The poem, though, struggles to reconcile its admonitory stance with a vulnerable sense of spiritual identity:

> The man that dares traduce because he can
> With safety to himself, is not a man:
> An individual is a sacred mark,
> Not to be pierc'd in play or in the dark,
> But public censure speaks a public foe,
> Unless a zeal for virtue guide the blow (p.308, 429-37).

This passage well conveys the strained authority of the poet's voice. In its recourse to public censure made dependent on 'a zeal for virtue', the poem seems to damn itself. The reasoning

around the deployment of satirical violence is intricate, but does not sit easily with Cowper's

determination to write religious truths into plain verse.

In each of 'Truth', 'The Progress of Error', and 'Expostulation', the indictment of worldly

madness is undermined by the recurrent sense that the poet is speaking from an insecure position.

'Expostulation' is perhaps the most sermonic of all the moral satires and the least satirical. The

disconsolation evident in the poem's opening question – 'Why weeps the muse for England?' –

foreshadows a despair that reaches across all aspects of the nation (p.297, 1). The poem is critical

of empty rhetoric: 'Rhet'ric is artifice, the work of man, / And tricks and turns that fancy may

devise, / Are far too mean for them that rules the skies' (p.300, 135-8). This, however, seems to

restrict the poet's artistic license, as a journalistic portrait of England in terms of its agriculture,

landscape, and commerce, mixes awkwardly with the ever-present threat of divine vengeance. In

places, this borders on hysteria: 'Say wrath is coming and the storm appears, / But raise the

shrillest cry in British ears' (p.304, 270-1). 'Expostulation' continues the strong opposition between

true religion and worldly vanity, leading to blanket dismissals of the priesthood, and rich and poor

alike (p.309, 450-65). By the close, the poet not altogether unsurprisingly despairs of his own

undertaking:

> Muse, hang this harp upon yon aged beech,
> Still murm'ring with the solemn truths I teach,
> And while, at intervals, a cold blast sings
> Through the dry leaves, and pants upon the strings,
> My soul shall sigh in secret, and lament
> A nation scourg'd, yet tardy to repent.
> I know the warning song is sung in vain,
> That few will hear, and fewer heed the strain (p.316, 718-25).

The concern that the message will be unheeded is present at the start of 'The Progress of Error':

'The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear, / Falls soporific on the listless ear' (p.262, 19-20). The

'Expostulation' verse goes on to suggest how personalized the sense of failure is, as the poet stands

in lonely expectation of a 'sweeter voice' which will enable him to once more pick up his harp (p.316, 726-31). This picture of the soul in 'secret' lament is counterbalanced by the sense of constriction attached to divine providence earlier in the poem: 'None ever yet impeded what he wrought, / None bars him out from his most secret thought' (p.305, 336-7). 'Expostulation' ends on a similar note to 'Charity' in its merging of personal and formal anxieties and condemnation of a widespread spiritual failure hard by the admission of a personal and poetic one. In 'Charity', though, the emphasis on social connectedness, and the appeal to humanitarian values to end social ills like slavery give the poem a more broadly positive perspective. 'Expostulation' was edited just as Cowper's sense that his own poetry could be prophetical breaks down (Letter to Newton, 4 December 1781, p.551). In deleting a passage that had stridently attacked the Pope, Cowper reveals an acute sensitivity to the religio-political context and his personal insecurity as an author:

> I am glad you have condemned [the deleted passage]… and [I] rejoice that it will not be in the power of the Critics whatever else they may charge me with, to accuse me of Bigotry, or a design to make a certain denomination of Christians odious, at the hazard of the public peace (Letter to Newton, 27 November 1781, p.547).

The comment is indicative of the moral satires as a whole in its mixture of national, religious, poetic, and personal anxieties.

In this section, I have discussed *the world* primarily in relation to earthly sin, but the indictment of worldly madness in *Poems* is also connected to melancholy, which is the focus of the next section. *Poems* presents a paradoxical sense of the world when it is taken to mean, 'The body of living persons in general; society at large, the public; public opinion (OED sense 14). The world in this sense is both distant and very present in *Poems*. Patricia Meyer Spacks has argued that Cowper required the privacy of retirement in order to articulate his feelings: 'The freedom of psychological

privacy… is the opportunity for emotional expansiveness and investigation'.[34] However, the

expression of the poet's feeling in *Poems* is never straightforwardly presented. The portraits of

human behaviour in the moral satires underline Cowper's awareness of the social landscape, but

any penetration of the public sphere tends to be characterized by caution – and more anxiety.

Anxiety in relation to so large a theme as *the world* is increased by Cowper's peculiar relationship

with society in his retirement. Cowper's poem, 'Retirement', as I discuss below, gives two further

senses of *the world* to the OED (senses 7b and 12).

<u>'His grief the world of all her pow'r disarms': Religious Melancholy and Self-Explication in Nature</u>

'Hope', 'Charity', 'Conversation', and 'Retirement' were written consecutively after a delay in

publication which enabled them to be included in the 1782 volume, rather than as part of a

projected second book of poems (Letter to Johnson, 6 August 1781, p.504). They are less didactic,

more open, and have more obvious self-references than the poems discussed above. They are

more comfortable in their poetic aims and offer a more nuanced perspective on human sociability

than that shown in 'The Progress of Error', 'Truth', and 'Expostulation'. In this section, I pay

particular attention to 'Hope' and 'Retirement' and discuss one or two shorter pieces which have

complementary arguments. Both 'Hope' (pp.334-5, 674-709) and 'Retirement' (pp.385-7, 279-364)

have what seem to be self-portraits of Cowper as the religious melancholic, though in each case the

presentation is made in the third person and occurs within a general discussion of moral behaviour.

'Hope' offers explicit praise for Cotton (p.322, 203-6). 'Retirement' reiterates that the notion of a

cure only makes sense when it is sanctioned by God, but there is more secure sense of the self

within a natural world designed by 'the sov'reign we were born t'obey' (p.379, 50). The passages

that articulate the effects of melancholy on the individual explore the role of nature as a curative,

echoing the contemporary medical arguments of Cotton and others. 'Unconscious nature', though,

can also be meaningless to the melancholic struggling with insensibility ('Retirement'; p.335, 740).

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[34] *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.228.

The anxieties expressed in the later moral satires are less concerned with either national themes or collective religious failings. In 'Hope', an evangelical expression of the theme overturns the bleak opening lines of the poem, which give the reply of a 'sage' to the stunningly direct question, *What is human life?* : 'A painful passage o'er a restless flood, / A vain pursuit of fugitive false good, / A scene of fancied bliss and heart-felt care, / Closing at last in darkness and despair' (p.317, 3-6). When some much needed hope arrives, voice and argument are integrated in a poetic response to the natural world which is closely observed, rhythmically resonant, and attuned to differences of perspective: 'From the blue rim where skies and mountains meet, / Down to the very turf beneath thy feet' (p.318, 49-50). The poem sounds out the one voice of nature, as various natural forms, 'All speak one language, all with one sweet voice / Cry to her universal realm, rejoice' (p.318, 52-3). Rather than abstract and general, the poetry is visual and particular, as it is in the satirical portraits of social types. In 'Retirement', the anxieties of the poem relate to the poet himself through the challenges of faith in retreat, and this, again, helps to make the argument of the poem more integrated with voice. However, the individualized anxieties presented in these poems are profound.

The divide between the morally contemptible world of society and the benevolent natural world of retirement is not always maintained, and at certain points the division collapses, and solitude and melancholy take over. Solitude, usually proximate with melancholy, is in several different places described as a living death by Cowper. In one letter, all Cowper's personal anxieties meet as the 'Sterility' of having 'Nothing to say' is attached to the solitude of retreat, which has recently been exacerbated by the departure of the Newtons:

> The Vicarage [in Olney] became a Melancholy object... it is no Attachment to the Place [Olney] that binds me here, but an Unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no Business with the World on the Outside of my Sepulchre (Letter to Mrs. Newton, 4 March 1780, pp.321-2).

The word 'sepulchre' is also used to describe solitude in 'Retirement' where complete social withdrawal is conceived as disastrous: 'For solitude, however some may rave, / Seeming a sanctuary, proves a grave, / A sepulchre in which the living lie, / Where all good qualities grow sick and die' (p.396, 735-8). The solitary individual, labouring under religious melancholy and spiritual despair, is cut off from any sense of nature as ameliorative through the contemplation of God's bounty. The language here also recalls the sentiment registered in a poem not included in *Poems*, 'Hatred and Vengeance, My Eternal Portion' (1774): 'I, fed with judgments, in a fleshly tomb, am / Buried above ground' (p.210, 19-20). This piece, written in Sapphic metre, points to the undercurrent of spiritual despair that is discernible, at least sporadically, in the published collection. Far from the soaring religious poet identified in 'Table Talk', this excruciating aspect of his self-portrait lurks behind his later work. Linked to the mental crisis of 1773, the argument of 'Hatred and Vengeance' *against* the poet writing it is especially severe, and articulated with great formal exactitude (p.489). It bears witness to the degree to which spiritual and mental torment could over-ride all other concerns of the poet. Solitude is total: 'Man disavows and Deity disowns me' (p.210, 9). The poem anticipates the portrait of religious melancholy in 'Hope', as in for instance the perennial alarm about the call to judgment: 'He hears the notice of the clock, perplex'd, / And cries, perhaps eternity strikes next' (p.334, 700-1). This line is a less brutal version of the hatred and vengeance that, 'Wait, with impatient readiness, to seize my / Soul in a moment' (p.209, 3-4).

In *Poems*, poetic voice is characterized by a socially directed moral pessimism, but also a more personal sense of failure and constriction. Retirement can just mean solitude and attendant spiritual despair, and the natural world can just signify indifference and inaccessibility, as it does in both 'The Shrubbery' and 'Verses, Supposed to be Written by Alexander Selkirk, During His Solitary Abode in the Island of Juan Fernandez'. The latter poem, written in the first person, was taken by at least one reader to be the work of Selkirk himself, and some of speaker Selkirk's statements echo Cowper's own elsewhere, including the attack on solitude (p.544): 'Oh solitude! where are the

charms / That sages have seen in thy face' (p.403, 5-6). The poem's insistent rhythm seems to make solitude an encircling force as the speaker laments his isolation, and the power that humanity would exert over nature becomes a kind of tyranny. 'I am monarch of all I survey', the speaker begins, but by the end of the first stanza it is already clear what an empty claim this is: 'Better dwell in the midst of alarms, / Than reign in this horrible place' (p.403, 1-8). The poem does not explicitly describe religious melancholy, but its poetic argument borders on the issue. Nature divorced from the social trappings of religion is seen as a menace, requiring a mercy which, 'Gives even affliction a grace, / And reconciles a man to his lot' (p.404, 55-6). The word *affliction* is here associated with misery and disease, and in 'The Shrubbery' it relates to religious melancholy. The reader is informed in the subtitle, added prior to publication, that the poem was '*Written in a Time of Affliction*', as if to qualify the hopelessness within it (p.425). The first person speaker presents a unique experience of suffering which is focused on an insensibility to the religio-moral benefits of nature, an experience which echoes Cowper's lowest sentiments in *Adelphi* and the letters: 'This glassy stream, that spreading pine, / Those alders quiv'ring to the breeze, / Might sooth a soul less hurt than mine, / And please, if anything could please' (p.425, 5-8). The all-enveloping subjectivity of the melancholic, devoid of feeling, cannot connect with fruitful nature: 'Shows the same sadness ev'ry where, / And slights the season and the scene' (p.426, 11-12). The poem ends pessimistically with a combination of regret and dread, 'of enjoyments past, / And those of sorrows yet to come' (p.426, 23-4). The issue at the centre of the poem, though, has already been much more comprehensively treated in 'Retirement' and 'Hope'.

The criticism of the vanities of the world can seem formulaic in the earlier moral satires, but the presentations of religious melancholy in 'Hope' and 'Retirement' are vivid. Each discussion unpacks the relationship between nature, poetry, melancholy, and religion. In both cases, the theme of insensibility to nature becomes part of an expression of compassion and a call for sympathy. Like Smart in *Jubilate Agno*, Cowper appears to draw authority from his own personal experience. Cowper commends his doctors. In 'Hope', Cotton is singled out as a rare good example,

separated from the 'grave physician, gath'ring fees, / Punctually paid for length'ning out disease, / No COTTON, whose humanity sheds rays / That make superior skill his second praise' (p.322, 203-6). 'Retirement' acknowledges the physician, William Heberden (1710-1801), who had advised Cowper to seek refuge in the countryside during his London crisis (p.385, 279). (Heberden generally notes that insane persons often relapse and may live 'between madness and reason'. He is, though, extremely doubtful about medicine, suggesting that 'quiet and confinement… will often restore them to their senses without the use of medicines… [but overall] I have observed nothing which has been of any service in removing this great affliction').[35] Both poems have a more integrated poetic voice based on a more secure sense of the self within the world, whether the world is taken in the social sense of human society, or in its natural sense as a godly realm. In 'Hope', the portrait of religious melancholy occurs within a qualified affirmation of terrestrial life in which nature is a paean to God: ''Tis grave philosophy's absurdest dream, / That Heav'n's intentions are not what they seem, / That only shadows are dispens'd below, / And earth has no reality but woe' (p.318, 65-8). 'Retirement', too, begins with a celebration of natural creation and marks a softening of the religious position expressed in the earlier tirades against society, which can be seen in the poet's appeal to observe the glories of nature: 'Oh grant a poet leave to recommend, / (A poet fond of nature and your friend) / Her slighted works to your admiring view, / Her works must needs excel, who fashion'd you' (p.391, 541-4). There is a less adversarial stance towards the world here, a more intimate sense of the relationship between the poet and reader – poetry can befriend *you*.

The descriptions of melancholy in 'Hope' and 'Retirement' are explicit in their presentation of a serious condition. Cowper was not referring to melancholy as an affectation or in any sense a lesser ailment. In 'Hope', the context, the diction, and the argument give a precise portrait of religious melancholy. The passage has a religious pedagogical aim: 'The silent progress of thy pow'r is such, / That few believe the wonders thou hast wrought, / And none can teach them but whom thou hast taught' (p.334, 669-71). The very uniqueness of the poet's experience appears to be a

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[35] *Commentaries on the History and Cure of Diseases* (Boston: Printed by Wells and Lilly, 1818), pp.222-3.

source of strength, as the poets asks for, and is seemingly given, divine authority as a painterly scribe to trace God's message. What follows is a physically detailed description of religious melancholy with strong autobiographical overtones. It begins as an overt and extended plea for sympathy:

> If ever thou hast felt another's pain,
> If ever when he sigh'd, has sigh'd again,
> If ever on thine eye-lid stood the tear
> That pity had engender'd, drop one here (p.334, 674-77).

There are several stages in this plea, which is more succinctly put in 'Retirement': 'This of all maladies that man infest, / Claims most compassion and receives the least' (p.385, 301-2). In the 'Hope' sequence, the poet recounts the loss of reputation and status in the world of human society, that religious melancholy seems to have engendered: 'This man was happy – had the world's good word, / And with it ev'ry joy it can afford' (p.334, 678-9). The symptomatology of religious melancholy is then given:

> Alas how chang'd! expressive of his mind,
> His eyes are sunk, arms folded, head reclind,
> Those awful syllables, hell, death, and sin,
> Though whisper'd, plainly tell what works within,
> That conscience there performs her proper part,
> And writes a doomsday sentence on his heart (p.334, 688-93).

I have already quoted the line on the ticking clock and the fear of damnation which follows here, but I would emphasize the way in which the poet seeks authority through the experience of religious melancholy despite the apparent suffering it causes. Like Cowper, Cotton extricates strong religious belief from the ridicule of enthusiasm, but the physician is significantly critical of the mental effects of the doctrine of predestination and election: 'When adopted by honest minds', Cotton writes in a letter that might be read to reference Cowper, the doctrine 'generally terminates in despair' (II, p.196). Such sensitivity enters into the depiction of Cotton in *Poems*, where again he

is more valued for his skills as a religious counsellor than for anything purely medical. This particular passage of *Poems* reads like a piece of self-explication in which Cowper justifies the tenor of his religious beliefs. The representation of the morbid religious melancholic fearing the call to damnation contextualizes the more strident criticisms of the world's pleasure made elsewhere in the collection:

> Sweet music is no longer music here,
> And laughter sounds like madness in his ear,
> His grief the world of all her pow'r disarms,
> Wine has no taste, and beauty has no charms (pp.334-5, 700-3).

The way that madness is grafted on to solitude like a sick joke conveys the despair at the heart of this portrait. Melancholy means bereavement here, born out of the loss of God, where the sufferer's grief-stricken conscience 'disarms' the world of its 'power', an ambiguous choice of words which retains the hostility towards irreligious behaviour, but also suggests a faint sense of regret, or a loss of vitality of the kind witnessed in 'The Shrubbery' – an inability to feel joy when feeling is sacred. When the voice of experience and the voice of the poet come together in celebration of God, the poem's metre extends and staggers to a close, giving a sense of struggle and exhaustion:

> God's holy word, once trivial in his view,
> Now by the voice of his experience, true,
> Seems, as it is, the fountain whence alone
> Must spring that hope he pants to make his own (p.335, 706-9).

This is a microcosm of the poem since the experience of the malady uncovers God's word as the true source of hope/'Hope', again recalling the narrative of *Adelphi*. The namelessness of the individual extends some cover for what would otherwise seem to be a naked self-portrait.

'Retirement' also zooms in on a serious condition in which insensibility and social disconnection have to reckoned with alongside the benefits of retreat. 'Retirement' presents a

vision not dissimilar to Cotton's in *Various Pieces*, one in which poetry is put forward as a possible

cure for melancholy. Cowper finds the confidence of tradition here, drawing on the poetry of Virgil,

Cowley, Thomson, and presumably, too, from his personal relationship with Cotton. The poem

registers, alongside 'Conversation', an important shift in subjectivity where the self is more

socialized – hence the attack on solitude – and more active through the perception of nature.

'Retirement' enacts in poetry what Cowper is repeatedly saying in his letters, amounting to a

defence of his personal circumstances. In its consideration of religious melancholy, the poem offers

no easy solutions, but was applauded by contemporaries for its recognition of the health benefits

of nature:

> Virtuous and faithful HEBERDEN! whose skill
> Attempts no task it cannot well fulfill,
> Gives melancholy up to nature's care,
> And sends the patient into purer air (p.385, 279-81).

The last two lines quoted here were used by Samuel Tuke in the early nineteenth century to

support his argument that 'clean dry air' is favourable to the recovery of insanity and 'close

confinement… of all things the most detrimental':

> … [T]he general effects of fine air upon the animal spirits, would induce us to expect especial benefit
> from it, in cases of mental depression; and to pay all due respect to the physician, who,
>
> > Gives melancholy up to Nature's care
> > And sends the patient into purer air.[36]

I suggest below that Cotton can be linked to the moral treatment of madness that became so

important towards the close of the eighteenth century, but it must be recognized first that

Cowper's stance in 'Retirement' is not an overwhelming affirmation of recovery. Melancholy is

alleviated by nature, but this depends on the sufferer's relationship with God – always a vexed

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[36] *Description Of The Retreat*, pp.129-30.

question with Cowper. Having apparently externalized his own image, Cowper describes the damaging physical effects of melancholy, as the reader is invited to study a 'patient' in what appears to be a self-description:

> Look where he comes – in this embower'd alcove,
> Stand close conceal'd, and see a statue move:
> Lips busy, and eyes fixt, foot falling slow,
> Arms dangling idly down, hands clasp'd below,
> Interpret to the marking eye distress,
> Such as its symptoms can alone express (p.385, 279-88).

As in 'Hope', the diction makes clear that this is a serious condition, a kind of paralysis brought about by a metaphysical and religious despair, in which the patient is likened to Job faced with 'the barbed arrows of a frowning God' (p.385, 304). These lines were applauded by the eighteenth-century mad-doctor, William Pargeter, who strongly implicated the Calvinistic '*doctrines* of the *Methodists'* in the causes of madness: 'The brain is perplexed in the mazes of mystery, and the imagination overpowered by the tremendous description of future torments'.[37] Pargeter does not personally associate such Methodical 'madness' with Cowper, though, rather treating the poet's lines as an exemplary description: '… nothing can be more poetically descriptive of Low-spiritedness or Melancholy than the inimitable lines from Cowper's… Retirement…'.[38] Pargeter presumably appreciated Cowper's physical description of the melancholic figure, since he claimed that disease could be recognized by its external manifestations: 'It is curious, but that very pathos animi, which may occasion the disease, is often to be discerned in the visage of the patient: and in cases of religious madness, it cannot easily be mistaken…'.[39]

As in 'Hope', a major aspect of the melancholy condition is an insensibility to feel, but here the loss of vitality and voice is literally presented:

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[37] *Observations on Maniacal Disorders* (Reading: Printed for the Author, 1792), p.31.
[38] Pargeter, p.41.
[39] Pargeter, p.135.

> That tongue is silent now, that silent tongue
> Could argue once, could jest or join the song,
> Could give advice, could censure or comment,
> Or charm the sorrows of a drooping friend (p.385, 289-92).

The appeal to the reader is adapted from 'Hope' as the melancholic is once again seen as one bereft of God, a 'mourner' (p.386, 338). Religious melancholy is not irredeemable, though, and while outright despair is close by – 'pangs inforc'd with God's severest stroke' – restoration is possible (p.386, 314). The redemptive force is a renewal of sensibility to religious feeling, because even sorrow 'is a sacred thing, [and] / Not to molest, or irritate, or raise / A laugh at its expence, is slender praise (p.386, 316-8). The word 'slender' captures the delicate balance, where voice seems to waver between the presentation of a devastating malady in its physical and mental characteristics, and the faith-based recovery. The poem seems to operate against any satirical impulse. As Newey observes, it utilizes the kind of plain statement that confirms Cowper was responding to the Protestant tradition of Bunyan, Hervey, and Newton.[40] There is a display of authority about this unfolding description of recovery which is most clearly seen when the poet describes spiritual identity in terms of a harmonious relationship with God:

> Man is an harp whose chords elude the sight,
> Each yielding harmony, disposed aright,
> The screws revers'd (a task which if he please
> God in a moment executes with ease)
> Ten thousand thousand strings at once go loose,
> Lost, 'till he tune them, all their pow'r and use (p.386, 323-30).

These lines have some of the assertiveness that characterizes Smart's line in *Jubilate Agno*: '*For I am not without authority in my jeopardy…*' (B1). Cowper's self-representation has nothing like the same sense of assured religious expectations, however, and draws attention to the vulnerability inherent in a spiritual identity formed so close to the apparent experience of madness. The

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[40] Newey, p.71.

prospect of harmony in the God/self relationship points to the flipside presented in 'Truth' and 'Expostulation'. In comparison to the ecstatic enthusiasm of Smart, Cowper has a terror-stricken sense of God's unfathomable power, which is simultaneously always present, and yet always liable to be taken away, presaging mental collapse. Religious melancholy, though carefully delineated, is also somewhat mysterious. The individual is beneath 'a fever's secret sway' (295). 'Man' is a harp played on by God, but one 'whose chords elude the sight' (325). So while retirement seems to increase the poet's confidence, there is still a passivity and an uneasiness in the representation of the individual's relationship with God. The poet's mental equilibrium is made to depend on God's favour, and in both the poems this is far from assured. Religious melancholy begins and ends with God: 'No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels, / No cure for such, 'till God who makes them, heals' (p.386, 341-2). The beneficial experience of nature is secondary, and only after evangelical conversion does the natural world itself revive in the sufferer's 'faded eye' (p.386, 339). The condition threatens to undermine nature's power, since the restorative effects of natural scenes are annulled when regarded in melancholic isolation, as they were in 'The Shrubbery'. Cowper is again reconstituting the conversion motif of *Adelph*i: 'Yet seek him, in his favour life is found' (p.387, 353).

The celebration of nature is an important aspect of the poetic argument in both 'Hope' and 'Retirement', relieving melancholy and bringing God and poet closer together. That the natural world is a harmonizing force in 'Retirement' is apparent in the citations the poem gives to the OED, which occur before and after the passage on religious melancholy. Early in the poem, the planetary or celestial sense of world (OED 7b) is seen in the description of the sun as a 'world whence other worlds drink light' (p.380, 81). The line is mirrored in an identical context in James Hervey's 'A Descant upon Creation': 'Thou Sun… not confining thy Munificence to Realms only, extendest thy enlightening Influences to surrounding Worlds'.[41] Cowper's image is a positive affirmation of nature

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[41] *Meditations and Contemplations,* 22nd edn (London: Printed for John Francis and others, 1776), p.143.

as a sustaining, life-giving source.[42] The other citation refers to the ocean within a passage that

pays homage to 'the pow'r and majesty of God' (p.391, 525). This is clearly a significant context

when many Cowper poems – not least 'The Cast-Away' – draw upon the sea for an imagery of

mental disturbance. The 'Retirement' passage is a beautifully controlled sequence which

rhythmically apprehends through its caesurae the swell and fall of the ocean as it harmonizes with

divine breath:

> Vast as it is, it answers as it flows
> The breathings of the lightest air that blows,
> Curling and whit'ning over all the waste,
> The rising waves obey th' increasing blast
> Abrupt and horrid as the tempest roars,
> Thunder and flash upon the stedfast shores,
> 'Till he that rides the whirlwind, checks the rein,
> Then, all the world of waters sleeps again (p.391, 525-36).

Cowper's nuanced understanding of *the world* is apparent again where here it is: 'A group or

system of (usually similar) things or beings associated by common characteristics (denoted by a

distinguishing word or phrase), or considered as constituting a unity' (OED sense 12). The sense of

an awe-inspiring natural world unified by divine power puts melancholy into some relief, but the

many different understandings of the world in this collection suggest a wrestling with one's place in

it.

Cowper's idea of retirement includes aspects of boredom and frustration, and at times

there is a yearning *for* society and the public world. As Christopher Reid has documented, Cowper

was very interested in reports of parliamentary debates, which after 1771 and the campaign led by

John Wilkes to relax prohibition of publication, became 'commonplace' in the newspapers.[43] As

Reid shows, Cowper could slip into 'the language of public argument' as a 'suppressed orator' – a

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[42] Hervey is a figure who was admired by both Cotton and Blake. Although he was ''Methodistic' and Whitefieldian, [he] remained an Anglican parish priest'. Michael Farrell, *Blake and the Methodists* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p.29).

[43] *Imprison'd Wranglers: The Rhetorical Culture of the House of Commons 1760-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)*,* pp.8-9.

suppression that refers back to his 1763 crisis.[44] While Cowper presents a portrait of religious

melancholy which was convincing to eighteenth-century mad-doctors, he also suggests the social

context of melancholy, its link with isolation, solitude, and a loss of social capital.

In several respects, Cowper's idea of retirement is analogous to Cotton's, even if *Poems*

presents a problem of conscience and religious dread that is not present in the poetry of the

doctor. Cotton's popular and much anthologized poem, 'The Fireside', celebrates the virtues of

retirement and rejects pride, luxury, and worldliness. A paean to marriage and parenthood, 'The

Fireside' recommends a humility that is centred in familial life, giving an essential optimism even

approaching death:

> While conscience, like a faithful friend,
> Shall thro' the gloomy vale attend,
> And cheer our dying breath;
> Shall, when all other comforts cease,
> Like a kind angel whisper peace,
> And smooth the bed of death (I, pp.65-9).

The trust in conscience displayed in these soothing lines strongly contrasts with the misery of a

wracked conscience in Cowper's own meditation on death in 'The Cast-Away' (1799). The 'faithful

friend' of Cotton's conscience, and Cowper's guilt-leaden 'despair of life', are chasms apart, but the

former is probably indicative of the value that Cowper found in Cotton as a Physician of the Soul

(III, pp.214, 18). Cowper's criticism of intellectual abstraction, however, belies the tension between

a high-minded religious faith and a more worldly interest in 'learned cares', public events, and the

absurdities of human behaviour (p.394, 662). The critique of solitude admits that the self is social,

but it stands against repeated expressions of social anxiety made elsewhere in the volume. The

concept of retirement is not a panacea for society's ills as it is in Cotton's verse, but 'Retirement'

does present a more harmonious relationship between self, conscience, and the world – both

natural and social – than the earlier moral satires. The poem's epigraph from Virgil immediately

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[44] Reid, p.12. Cowper was from a family reknown for their public speaking.

conveys a sense of spiritual growth and the benevolence of retreat: 'flourishing in the pursuits of sequestered ease (p.541). The sense of poetic inadequacy is diminished as the poet aspires to serve a God visible everywhere in nature:

> Absorbed in that immensity I see,
> I shrink abased, and yet aspire to thee;
> Instruct me, guide me to that heav'nly day,
> Thy words, more clearly than thy works display,
> That while thy truths my grosser thoughts refine,
> I may resemble thee and call thee mine (p.380, 93-8).

The speaker delicately alludes to 'freakish fancy', which is part of the difficulty 'man' has in avoiding sin (p.381, 128). There is a self-reckoning with interiority: 'To dive into the secret deeps within, / To spare no passion and fav'rite sin, / And search the themes important to all / Ourselves and our recov'ry from our fall' (p.381, 135-39). Paradoxically, with retirement and social withdrawal there is a greater degree of communality expressed, a collective belonging to God through nature, where the majesty of the sea and the 'secret deeps' of the self flow into one another. The poet is no longer speaking against the majority, as he is throughout 'Expostulation', but rather mind, self, and the previously separated worlds of nature and society come together: 'Truth is not local, God alike pervades / And fills the world of traffic and the shades' (p.381, 119-20). The new unity is nicely conveyed in the Smartean phrase 'a mind like ours' (p.381, 123). Alongside the rejuvenating qualities of the countryside, retirement brings a securer evangelical perspective: 'A few forsake the throng, and follow to the deep / As wealth of heav'n, and gain a real prize' (p.382, 161-2). 'Retirement' is a staged performance, a peculiarly self-conscious record of the poet's withdrawal from urban society into the countryside which anticipates *The Task*. As Richard Adelman writes in the context of the latter poem, Cowper's rural retirement was 'carefully advertised'.[45] The parameters are not fully mapped out, and the nature of the movements between such concepts as

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[45] Richard Adelman, *Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic, 1750-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.69.

activity and meditation, work and rest, fancy and labour, are not expounded upon as they are in the later poem. Nevertheless, 'Retirement' already has a deep sense of the sustaining power of natural contemplation as a promoter of well-being and, crucially, too, of the poetic vocation. 'Some minds by nature are averse to noise', the poet states, and of these, it immediately becomes clear, poetic minds are foremost (p.382, 175). The withdrawal from city into countryside is rendered as a natural process ('by nature'), and in nature, too, the poet enthusiastically hits upon his vocation: 'With eager step and carelessly array'd, / For such a cause the poet seeks the shade, / From all he sees he catches new delight… ' (p.382, 187-9).

Cowper's view of retirement accords in some respects with a tradition of moral management in the treatment of melancholy, where his propensity for self-explication is not wholly unlike the self-restraint advocated by the Tukes. Moreover, I would argue that Nathaniel Cotton's stress on 'self-acquaintance' anticipates the remarks of Samuel Tuke on the 'power of self-restraint at the Retreat'.[46] Tuke questions traditional treatments and received wisdom in favour of a more experiential but moralistically based approach. Like Cotton, Tuke lays much importance on internal mental processes. Both encourage personal responsibility, and a recourse to a combined approach of practical management and religious principles when it comes to the cure of insanity, what Tuke himself calls 'judicious modes of management, and moral treatment'.[47] Self-examination and self-restraint are similar kinds of mental activity which require concerted application in order to yield rewards. They are both closely allied with the principle of labour as a moral virtue. 'Of all the modes by which the patients may be induced to restrain themselves', Tuke writes, 'regular employment is perhaps the most generally efficacious'.[48] Cotton's strictness in this respect is apparent in his fable, 'The Scholar and the Cat': 'LABOUR entitles man to eat, / The idle have no claim to meat. / This rule must every station fit, / Because 'tis drawn from sacred writ' (I, p.8). Moreover, Cotton's sermon on self-acquaintance suggests that an aversion to self-examination is

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[46] Tuke, p.139.
[47] Tuke, p.132.
[48] Tuke, p.156.

attributable to a morally culpable 'indolence' and a pleasure which 'disqualifies the mind for all

laborious pursuits' (II, p.63). Allied to this, both Cotton and Tuke celebrate the virtues of retreat,

and the salutary effects of exercise and nature on the mind. Cotton repeatedly makes a connection

between nature, industry, and mental well-being, as in 'On Husbandry': 'The earth seems… in silent

gratitude, amply to repay the industry bestowed upon her; while nature puts on all her gaudy

dresses, and appears with a variety of beauties, at once to please and inform the mind…' (II, p.122).

While this is not explicitly endorsed as treatment for melancholy, it is implicit as such, and there is

surely a similar impulse at work in the idea of retreat as salutary and curative in general terms, and

the establishment of the York Retreat as an institution.

In *Poems*, Cowper's personal situation is most clearly accounted for in 'Retirement', and the

argument, imagery, rhythm and tone of the poem is more integrated than any other with the

possible exception of 'Conversation', which I comment on in the final section of this chapter. As

well as having a more comfortable approach to what seems an unobtainable religio-moralistic

standard for poetry, 'Conversation' and 'Retirement', in particular, are a better fit for the neo-

classical ideals Cowper advocates. These poems are the most 'harmonious' to recall the ideal put

down in 'Table Talk', and I would suggest that the voice of the poems is more assured because they

achieve some success in resolving the personal and religious insecurities that congregate around

melancholy and madness.

'Self, that idol god within': Poetic Identity and Introspection

The voice of the poet in the moral satires is generally divided and conflicted, born out of

contradictory ideas and impulses. There is the weighing up of political concerns and social tastes in

the conservatively-minded 'Table Talk'; the strong Christian fundamentalism of 'The Progress of

Error'; the furious religio-political hard-line of 'Expostulation'; the critique of satire in a purportedly

satirical poem in 'Charity'; the poet's bid for sympathy as a nature-loving religious melancholic in

'Retirement'; and acute self-criticism amid episodes of light comedy in 'Conversation' – where the

poet seems to find a style more suited to his purpose. Part didacticism and part satire, the longer poems convey both the ideal of religious poetry and the difficulty of attaining it – the poet himself repeatedly professes not to meet his own standards. These divisions can be partly attributed to the necessity of counter-balancing personal and spiritual concerns in a newly public context, as an evangelical poet in a protracted spiritual crisis. They also reflect a mixture of poetic and cultural influences, which included the Nonsense Club poets, Churchill and Lloyd, as well as the most morally serious poetry of Milton and Young. They are also responding to destabilizing contemporary events from a position of considerable remove, and after the dislocation of confinement in a madhouse. In these circumstances, it would be more surprising if they demonstrated a complete uniformity of voice, tone, and argument.

Anxiety not only pertains to personal and national themes, but also focuses on the role of poetry. There is anxiety in relation to what is permissible in conjunction with religious strictures, so activities like the writing of lighter verse, painting, and gardening have to be defended ('Retirement'; p.397, 783). In Cowper's sense of 'amusement' there is always a hint of distraction in its negative meaning of non-productiveness (OED sense 2 citing Locke in the *Essay* (Book IV, p.viii): 'This… if well heeded, might save us a great deal of useless Amusement and Dispute'). Conflicting identities enter into Cowper's self-representation, with, on the one hand, the aspiring evangelical poet, and, on the other, the writer of lighter pieces, which would include the moral satire, 'Conversation'. The portraits of religious melancholy in 'Hope' and 'Retirement' are disturbingly convincing, and as in *Adelphi*, the projected evangelical triumph appears muted in comparison with the delineation of a serious condition. These presentations are rendered in the third person, and the ambiguity evident in what are only seemingly self-presentations, arises from a similar mode of detachment to that already witnessed in *Adelphi*. Self-references are veiled or camouflaged or set within general observations – they are never fully confessional.

The shorter poems utilize an array of formal perspectives which dilutes the self-revelation that might otherwise appear more obvious elsewhere in the collection, contributing to an overall

tone of strong pessimism interspersed with moments of gentle, humourous consolation. Hayley's

contemporary view of the poems provides a useful if somewhat positively skewed summary: 'Many

passages are delicate, many sublime, many beautiful, many tender, many sweet, many

acrimonious'.[49] The first person is ironically adopted in the political pieces, 'Ode to Peace' and 'The

Modern Patriot'. There is a striking use of first-person personification in 'On a Goldfinch Starved to

Death in his Cage', a poem as bleak as its title. Ending on a circularity of cruelty and constriction,

the eponymous goldfinch reports back after death on the 'gentle swain' who has cured its

suffering: 'More cruelty could none express, / And I, if you had shewn me less / Had been your

pris'ner still' (p.418, 16-18). 'The Nightingale and Glow-Worm' uses personification in a more

reassuring way to recommend peace and religious tolerance (p.256, 576-77). 'Human Frailty'

straddles an awkward line between the fundamental weakness of 'man' labouring under the

passions, a troubled conscience, and a dependency on a remote God: 'But oars alone can ne'er

prevail / To reach the distant coast, / The breath of heav'n must swell the sail, / Or all the toil is

lost' (p.407, 21-24). The poem puts into abstract terms what is elsewhere raised in the first person

voice of the moral satires. 'The Poet, The Oyster, and Sensitive Plant' encapsulates the ambiguity

within the poetic voice of the volume in an exploration of degrees of feeling, from the fine but

despairing sensibilities of the surprisingly articulate and sensitive 'Oyster' and 'Plant' to the almost

Blakean innocence of the 'Poet': 'The noblest minds their virtue prove / By pity, sympathy, and

love, / These, these are feelings truly fine, / And prove their owner half divine' (pp.436-7, 61-4). The

three different voices within this poem and the third-person perspective of the 'Poet' make it

almost impossible to locate an authorial perspective, and this is perhaps the point. It is a clever,

witty poem about sensibility and exposure, which makes voice an elusive subject. Truth and the

shifting of identities is the theme of Prior's light romantic poem, 'Chloe and Euphelia', which

Cowper translates into Latin. Here there is a suggestive discrepancy between the sentiments of the

poet and the work of the poem: 'Fila lyrae vocemque paro, suspira surgunt, / Et miscent numeris

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[49] Hayley, p.261.

murmura maesta meis' (My lyre I tune, my voice I raise; / But with my numbers mix my sighs)

(p.430, 9-10). The ending of the poem, however, like the sentiment in much of the moral satires,

validates a godly perspective and points to the inescapable nature of truth: 'And Venus to the Loves

around / Remark'd, how ill we all dissembled' (p.430, 15-6).

       A form of evangelical identity is defended in *Poems*, but unlike the evangelical Cotton, the

poet is generally not comfortable in self-examination as a means of taking responsibility for the

state of one's soul. 'Not all the volumes on thy shelf', Cotton writes in this regard, 'Are worth that

single volume, Self' (I, p.236). In *Poems*, self-identity is understood to be entirely dependent on

grace: 'For self to self, and God to man reveal'd, (Two themes to nature's eye for ever seal'd) / Are

taught by rays that fly with equal pace / From the same center of enligh'ning grace' ('Charity';

p.346, 361-4). However, the availability of grace is always precarious in the context of religious

melancholy. In 'Expostulation', Cowper produces an agonized version of Cotton's gentle advice:

'Explore thy Body and thy Mind, / Thy station too, why here assign'd' (I, p.236). In Cowper's poem,

the sentiment becomes: 'Stand now and judge thyself – has thou incurr'd / His anger who can

waste thee with a word' (p.305, 340-1). When the Cowper of 'Expostulation' encountered the

volume, Self, he uncovered something that crucified Christ, and by extension, continued to

threaten Britain. Writing in the context of Pompey's seizure of Jerusalem in 63 BC, the sermonizing

poet suggests that the capture could have been evaded if the Israelites had kept their faith

'immaculate and pure' (p.302, 208). As it was: 'They set up self, that idol god within / View'd a

Deliv'rer with disdain and hate' (p.302, 216-7). This leads to a harsh equation of identity with

national alarm: 'A world is up in arms, and thou, a spot / Not quickly found if negligently sought, /

Thy soul as ample as thy bounds are small, / Endur'st the brunt, and dar'st defy them all' (p.315,

694-7). Anything less than a Calvinistic evangelical self-identity is suspicious, but Cowper finds this

identity hard to achieve, and it does not easily translate into poetry. In the 'Man is a Harp'

sequence in 'Retirement', the melancholic figure is retuned by God who is seen to give 'voice' to

inanimate things, but the spiritual status of the poet is always questionable (p.387, 361).

The precariousness of this evangelical self-identity is reflected in the failure of Cowper's projected poetic identity. *Poems* describes an inability to attain the ideal of the harmonious, exalted, and morally certain religious poetry presented in 'Table Talk' (p.260, 700-5). In most of the moral satires, the self-reflections of the poet on his poetry are negative, from Speaker B's identification with the 'poor grasshopper' in 'Table Talk' onwards (p.256, 577). I have already alluded to the endings of 'Charity' and 'Expostulation' in this respect, but the closing lines of 'Hope' and 'Retirement' also have a sense of unmet expectations. 'Hope' ends with the poet unfavourably self-comparing to other 'happier' bards: firstly, those able to unite the 'faithful monitor's and the poet's part' (p.336, 757); and secondly, poets who 'comfort those that wait / To hear plain truth at Judah's hallow'd gate' (p.336, 763). This second unspecified group have all the riches: 'Th'abundant harvest, recompence divine, / Repays their work – the gleaning only, mine' (p.336, 770-1). The final metaphor of the poem's own deserving as 'the gleaning' mixes an admission of low achievement with a hint of abandonment. It leaves the sense that Cowper was drawing on conflicting traditions of Puritanism and satire while also trying to convey personal, felt experience. Spiritual status appears most in line with creativity in a poetry of the mind rooted in natural contemplation, as seen in 'Retirement', where nature is a bridge between self and God. Nevertheless, a highly circumscribed role is sounded for the poet:

> Me poetry (or rather notes that aim
> Feebly and vainly at poetic fame)
> Employs, shut out from more important views,
> Fast by the banks of the slow-winding Ouse,
> Content, if thus sequester'd I may raise
> A monitor's, though not a poet's praise (p.398, 801-6).

The word 'Employs' is emphasized in the line-break here, and the self-removal described places the emphasis on writing poetry as a means of salvaging health. The pedagogical role of the poet reappears but only mutely: 'And while I teach an art too little known, / To close life wisely, may not waste my own' (p.398, 807-8). Occupation as an essential element of health is a key concern of the

poem, summarized earlier in the line: 'Absence of occupation is not rest, / A mind quite vacant is a mind distress'd' (p.393, 623-4). Writing poetry as a means of occupying the mind is now paramount. What is striking about this final passage of the longer poems, though, is how the resounding sense of pessimism and exclusion ('shut out') pertains even to the hope of writing an inspirational religious poetry, which is abandoned here. These are merely poetic 'notes' and it is the role of a moral guardian – the 'monitor's part' having been contrasted with the 'poet's part' in 'Hope' – which is finally proffered. The sequence of longer poems closes with the exclusion and isolation that characterizes melancholy.

Cowper presents himself as a poet almost by default, but is increasingly drawn to self-explication in verse. The painful nature of self-examination was a major part of its value, as Cotton explains:

> Sad indeed is the case of that man, whose guilt deters him from all researches into his own bosom. But, nevertheless, he will do well to consider, that, however painful such examinations may be, they are absolutely necessary, to prevent further accessions of guilt, and by a sincere repentance to cancel his former score (II, p.66).

When Cowper came to write 'The Cast-Away', though, self-examination ceased to have any value at all, replaced by the poet's journalistic self-discovery in the victim of a literal and metaphorical storm: 'But misery still delights to trace / Its semblance in another's case' (II, p. 214, 59-60). In *Poems*, an anticipation of this bitter stance can be seen in the severe self-examination called for in 'Expostulation', but it is balanced by the more subtle and delicate form seen in 'Conversation'. The latter poem has a digressive style that befits the topic, a playful flexibility which finds a 'medium' between pleasure and wisdom rather than simply excoriating the former (p.376, 879-80). It not only marks a breakthrough stylistically, but also partially resolves the question of madness and strong religious feeling.

A passage in 'Conversation' on introspection brings together the conflicting aspects of the poetic identity advanced in *Poems*, where the focus on human sociability seems to free up Cowper

the moral critic. The poem's personally involved narrator is integrated with the national character

in a self-reflexive portrait of 'bashful men':

> I pity bashful men, who feel the pain
> Of fancied scorn and undeserv'd disdain,
> And bear the marks upon a blushing face
> Of needless shame and self-imposed disgrace.
> Our sensibilities are so acute,
> The fear of being silent makes us mute (p.371, 347-352).

In a passage that merges sharp self-criticism with social observation, the speaker's silence is

paradoxically the poet's expressed subject. The directness of expression and the ownership taken

('Our sensibilities') comes in the context of the poem's more assured overall tone. In Cowper's

comic self-analysis, which combines self-acknowledgment with critical distance, the poet admits to

a charge of pomposity alongside his fellow Britons, which plays down the national alarm flashed in

the earlier poems (p.363, 360). Although the passage largely employs the third person plural, it

begins in the first, and the portrait of this particular bashful man echoes the self-presentation of

Cowper himself in *Adelphi*, not least in the figure's hyper-articulate analysis of the agonies of

appearing in public: 'We sometimes think we could a speech produce / Much to the purpose, if our

tongues were loose' (p.363, 353-4). The poet offers a brilliant explanation for this national and

personal paralysis which balances religious sensibility with the admission that public recognition

may yet be desirable:

> The cause perhaps enquiry may descry,
> Self-searching with an introverted eye,
> Concealed within an unsuspected part,
> The vainest corner of our own vain heart (p.363, 363-6).

The digressive style of 'Conversation' seems to mobilize the argument and despite the double-interiority described here – giving the citation to the OED in the adjectival use of 'introverted' – the poet at least partially acknowledges a bid to influence the terrestrial world: 'For ever aiming at the world's esteem, / Our self-importance ruins its own scheme' (p.363, 367-8). Even in this lighter poem, self-explication – self-searching – becomes a key theme, a personal and national pastime.

Less preoccupied with the Calvinistic concerns of predestination and human corruption than the more stridently religious poems, 'Conversation' makes a virtue out of its digression. An appropriate context for the celebration and defence of Christian wit may have helped to harmonize the poem's moral aims with its gentle satire of conversation and manners (p.369, 599-604). The form of 'Conversation' is well matched to its content as a digressive style seems to capture the interior workings of the mind or self-as-consciousness, neatly expressed during a relaxed description of poetic practice:

> A poet does not work by square or line,
> As smiths and joiners perfect a design,
> At least we moderns, our attention less,
> Beyond th'example of our sires, digress
> And claim a right to scamper and run wide,
> Wherever chance, caprice, or fancy guide (p.374, 789-94).

As Steve Clark argues, Cowper seemingly assimilated a Lockean idea of 'empiricist psychology' notwithstanding his apparent alarm that Christian faith was threatened by empiricism in 'The Progress of Error'.[50] This is most apparent in 'Conversation', where evangelicalism is more easily advanced and empiricism less of a threat: 'Strange tidings these to tell a world who treat / All but their own experience as deceit!' (p.372, 718-9). The poet's celebration of the values and beliefs of

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[50] ''Between Self and Self's Book': Locke and the Poetry of the Early Romantics' in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth* ed. by Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.30-54 (p.31).

evangelicals ('Partakers of a new aethereal birth') comes with a swift report of the settling of a debt

between the poet and the terrestrial world, which seems to acknowledge the relinquishing of

worldly objects, just as it makes a play on the poem's form and content:

> The world and I fortuitously met,
> I ow'd a trifle and have paid the debt,
> She did me wrong, I recompens'd the deed,
> And having struck the balance, now proceed (p.374, 795-8).

The poet has just met the 'world' in the shape of a personified 'She' who comes to dread God's

judgement, whose importance her self-deception has previously hidden her from. 'She' also

deceives herself when it comes to her observations of a 'true Christian's face' (p.373, 743). 'She'

has apparently inherited some of the poet's own concerns, and the description of her recalls the

self-portrait of Cowper himself in *Adelphi*:

> She boasts a confidence she does not hold,
> That conscious of her crimes, she feels instead,
> A cold misgiving, and a killing dread,
> That while in health, the ground of her support
> Is madly to forget that life is short,
> That sick, she trembles, knowing she must die,
> Her hope presumption, and her faith a lie (p.373, 768-74).

The poet asserts his authority as a Christian, now able to pass on the dread of God's judgement to

the personification of a self-deceived world; pay what little individual debt he owes; and 'proceed'

to a life of retirement (p.374, 788). The anxiety over 'modern' poetry and human society displayed

in 'Table Talk' has passed into a wry acknowledgement of an apt digression.

'Conversation' makes the clearest distinction between true piety and madness in the entire

collection, and I would suggest that this helps to make it a more confident performance and an

important poem in Cowper's development. This crucial passage squarely takes on one of the central anxieties of *Poems*: that piety or genuine religious conviction might easily be taken for fanaticism and regarded as madness. The poet reclaims the language of inspiration, aligns genuine piety with common sense, and bemoans the association with frenzy:

> What is fanatic frenzy, scorned so much,
> And dreaded more than a contagious touch?
> I grant it dang'rous, and approve your fear,
> That fire is catching if you draw too near,
> But sage observers oft mistake the flame,
> And give true piety that odious name.
> To tremble (as the creature of an hour
> Ought at the view of an almighty pow'r)
> Before his presence, at whose awful throne
> All tremble in all worlds, except our own,
> To supplicate his mercy, love his ways,
> And prize them above pleasure, wealth or praise,
> Though common sense allowed a casting voice,
> And free from bias, must approve the choice,
> Convicts a man fanatic in th'extreme,
> And wild as madness in the world's esteem (p.371, 651-66).

True piety is carefully separated from the ogre of 'fanatic frenzy', and this is presented as a judgment of mere common sense, even if common sense is liable to be denied a 'casting voice'.[51] The verdict of human society on earth – 'our own' world – is squarely diminished next to the 'worlds' which 'tremble' before God. When piety is reclaimed, madness is identified. *True piety* is straightforward, truthful, sane and healthy, but *madness* is distortion, error, grudging, a false fire, light born of putrefaction, delusional yet also morally culpable:

> But that disease when soberly defined
> Is the false fire of an o'erheated mind,
> It views the truth with a distorted eye,
> And either warps or lays it useless by,

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[51] Brunström argues that Cowper drew on common sense philosophy as represented by works like James Beattie's *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770) which attacked Hume. pp.69-99.

'Tis narrow, selfish, arrogant, and draws
Its sordid nourishment from man's applause,
And while at heart sin unrelinquish'd lies,
Presumes itself chief fav'rite of the skies.
'Tis such a light as putrefaction breeds
In fly-blown flesh, whereon the maggot feeds,
Shines in the dark, but usher'd into day,
The stench remains, the lustre dies away (p.371, 667-78).

Mad fanaticism sustains itself through public approval ('man's applause') while true piety

withstands untrustworthy opinion. The inference of public approval is immediately followed by the

image of decomposition through which madness finds its light. Madness is again appended to sin

and so there is nothing redeeming in it. Madness is a disease, a menace in the social body which

makes distinction between true and false faith perilous. *Poems* as a whole seeks to contain

madness by translating it into the language of sin, and 'Conversation' does this most successfully.

Cotton and others show that Cowper was not alone in seeking to do this (and as I have argued

defining madness was a central preoccupation of eighteenth-century mad-doctors). After its

untangling of religious concerns, unlike the other moral satires, 'Conversation' ends on a broadly

positive note, entering into a purifying song of praise, where the curative potential of divine

language absolves the poet's vocation (pp.376-7, 887-908). The poetry of felt experience in

'Conversation' seems to reflect back on some of the more didactic passages in the earlier poems

which insist on a deep-seated moral gravity. 'And I had rather creep to what is true', the poet

suggests towards the end of the poem, 'Than rove and stagger with no mark in view' (p.376, 863).

To conclude this chapter, I point to the irony in Cowper's future success as an author given

not only the acute national, personal, and religious anxieties that characterize the voice of this

collection, but also his considerable doubt about authorship itself. If the Lockean theory of personal

identity enters into a new and more individualistic idea of authorship as an authorial self, as Hess

suggests, Cowper's work ironically pushes in this direction notwithstanding his own disparaging

comments on authorship.[52] Cowper evidently distrusted eighteenth-century print culture and the potential blurring of personality and the public dissemination of ideas disturbed him. From an evangelical perspective, God is 'Author', but Cowper was living at a time when the personality of authors increasingly counted, and his evangelical faith came to be dominated by spiritual despair (*Olney Hymn*s: 47). Cowper's work underlines the flux in understandings of personal identity and authorship, but it is notable, too, that his description of melancholy was recognized as authentic by contemporary mad-doctors. He is emphatically not the poet that Newton presents him as in the *Preface* – there is little sense of a joyful rebirth in *Poems* and the force of his evangelical conversion diminishes quite markedly. As Newey suggests, writing poetry arguably became a form of therapy for Cowper, the moral satires being part of 'a *stabilizing process*, a therapeutic act'.[53] But a self-presentation in terms of mental recovery is not asserted with any conviction by Cowper, and it runs against the kind of authorial identity that he aspires to in 'Table Talk'. Cowper's poetic identity lies somewhere between the fully evangelical author of *Adelphi* and the morally improving and reluctant self-promoter of *Poems*, still demonstrably struggling with religious melancholy and madness, subjects that, perhaps, no one wants to write about unless it seems completely unavoidable. There is certainly a persistent sense in *Poems* that Cowper was seeking to write about anything other than the self, but self-explication and natural contemplation become his principal subjects. The movement further into the self is nicely caught by Cowper's contribution to the language of introspection.

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[52] Hess, p.23.
[53] Newey, p.63.

Chapter 5: Insanity and Spectres in Blake's *The Four Zoas* (c.1797-1807) and Other Works

'Thou knowest that the Spectre is in Every Man insane'

This chapter argues that Blake's antinomian stance as a visionary prophet-artist challenges orthodox thinking about the understanding and management of madness in a formative period. Blake's remarks on Cowper in his annotations to Spurzheim's *Observations* (1817) were made at a crucial moment in the public response to madness following a large-scale investigation into conditions in madhouses across England between 1815-16. A focus on the presentation of *spectres* will guide my examination of the key themes of this thesis in Blake's poetry: voice, madness, melancholy, and poetic identity. What Blake calls 'spectres' are the characters most closely associated with insanity in his first long mythological poem, *Vala, or The Four Zoas*, where they have an important role in the narrative, particularly in relation to Los, the prophet-artist figure.[1] The poem can be read as both a critique of Enlightenment reason and a radical exploration of the eighteenth-century culture of feeling. The presentation of spectres in the later epics, *Milton* (c.1800-10) and *Jerusalem* (c.1804-20) shows that the idea of the figure remained broadly consistent. I clearly do not have the space to give comprehensive accounts of these immensely complicated works, but with a tight focus on the crucial role of spectres in *The Four Zoas*, it is possible to open up a discussion on insanity and identity in Blake's work as a whole. *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem* were produced at a time of heated public debate about the meaning and proper regulation of madness, a period which includes the discussion about the relationship between madness and evangelicalism in the wake of Cowper's death (1800); the first criminal defence of insanity in the trial of James Hadfield (1800); a parliamentary select committee on the treatment of criminal and pauper lunatics in England and Wales, leading to Wynn's Act (1808),

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[1] *Vala* was an early title. Given that I am reading the manuscript in its latest version, the poem will henceforth be referred to as *The Four Zoas*.

which enabled but did not require county authorities to provide an asylum funded by rates; the public dismissal of Blake himself as an 'unfortunate lunatic' during his Broad Street exhibition (1809); the assumed insanity and confinement of the King (1810-20); the assassination of the Prime Minister, Spenser Perceval, by an alleged lunatic, John Bellingham (1812); and the parliamentary commission, which led to three defeated parliamentary bills on lunacy (1816-19).

The chapter is organized around the interwoven concepts of insanity, melancholy, antinomian enthusiasm, and poetic identity, largely in relation to the spectral figures that emerge in *The Four Zoas*, but with a related discussion of a Cowperian spectre in *Jerusalem*. I begin with a contextual section on antinomian enthusiasm in the 1790s and early 1800s, noting some important connections between Blake and Cowper. I then elucidate the status of madness in medical and linguistic terms at the cusp of the nineteenth century through a brief discussion of John Haslam's *Observations* (1798; 2nd edition 1809) and *Illustrations* (1810). Haslam's commentary on 'Definition' in the former work recalls the Battie-Monro lunacy debate and the difficulty of finding an appropriate vocabulary for the subject. In the third section, I discuss the *insanity* of spectres in *The Four Zoas*, a poem which, like *Jubilate Agno*, makes voice a subject in itself. Insanity is at the crux of the narrative in Blake's 'Dream' of Nine Nights, where it is associated with melancholy fears of eternal death, the deluded perception of a fallen world, and a form of mental abstraction and physical constriction (E153, pl. 10, 51). Insanity has an ambiguous status, because it is also close to the source of redemption through the artistic struggle to reach the 'Eternal heavens of Human Imagination' (E395, p.126, 11). Like Smart, Blake challenges the fundamental assumptions of Lockean psychology, such as the reflection and imprinting of ideas on a passive mind. I argue, though, that insanity is seen as an aspect of the 'dreamful horrible State' that characterizes a fallen world rather than an irremediable condition, and that allowance is always made for spiritual redemption – an ultimate return to health (E335, p.52, 21). In the fourth section, I discuss the relationship between prophecy and reason through the figure of Urizen in *The Four Zoas*, and the idea of the Spectre as the 'Reasoning Power' in *Jerusalem* (Ch. 3, E229, pl. 74, 10). Blake's vigorous

and expansive creative vision gives primacy to human divinity over and above rationalistic

epistemology, which is derided as not only abstract and narrow but also insane – a fundamental

distortion of reality. I draw on Morton Paley's suggestion that Cowper was the model for the

Spectre that appears in plate 10 of *Jerusalem*, where Blake's salve for melancholy in both *Jerusalem*

and *The Four Zoas* is located in the creative impulse of the imagination, still a key battleground in

arguments about madness. The other key locus of sanity for Blake is the collective identity of

'Universal Brotherhood' which is strikingly at odds with a burgeoning psychology which internalized

morbidity and encouraged individual self-control, as seen in the idea of moral treatment (which

Haslam contributed to) (*The Four Zoas*; E300, p.3, 4). In *Jerusalem*, the 'Selfhood' might be thought

of as Blake's emblem of individualism, and it is the target of much opprobrium throughout the

poem (E147, pl.5, 22). My final section contrasts Blake's view of human divinity and the body-soul

with Haslam's sense of the organic body and a material consciousness.

'Can you not make me truly insane': Blake, Cowper, and Antinomian Enthusiasm

Morton Paley has established that Blake was in a privileged position to access Cowper's work

during the Felpham period (1800-3), including the late poet's letters and other private material like

the *Memoir of the Early Life of William Cowper, Esq*. (which was later to become *Adelphi*).[2] In his

relationship with William Hayley, who was then writing his biography of Cowper, Blake worked side

by side with a man who had been a close friend of Cowper's from 1792 until the latter's death in

1800. Not only did Blake produce at least twelve pictures that directly related to Cowper as a

subject, he also became acquainted with two key figures in Cowper's later years. The Reverend

John Johnson, Cowper's young cousin, had lived with the poet for the last five years of his life,

while Samuel Greatheed, as minister of Newport Pagnell, had warned Hayley of Cowper's

deteriorating condition in 1794. Both had transcripts of Cowper's *Memoir*, but took different

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[2] Morton D. Paley, 'Cowper as Blake's Spectre', in *Eighteenth Century Studies*, I (1968), 236-252.

positions in 1816 on the role of religion in Cowper's madness.[3] Both Johnson and Hayley referred to the poet as 'the good enthusiastic Blake'.[4]

Evidence from the Felpham period shows that engagement with the Hayley project coincided with an acute spiritual crisis for Blake. After remarking upon his work engraving plates for Hayley's *Life of Cowper* and having praised Cowper's letters, Blake describes a spiritual struggle which uncovers the essential unreality of the terrestrial world:

> I labour incessantly & accomplish not one half of what I intend, because my Abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work, carrying me over Mountains & Valleys, which are not Real, in a Land of Abstraction where Spectres of the Dead wander. This I endeavour to prevent & with my whole might chain my feet to the world of Duty & Reality; but in vain! the faster I bind, the better is the Ballast, for I, so far from being bound down, take the world with me in my flights, & often it seems lighter than a ball of Wool rolled by the wind. Bacon & Newton would prescribe ways of making the world heavier to me, & Pitt would prescribe distress for a medicinal potion; but as none on Earth can give me Mental Distress, & I know that all Distress inflicted by Heaven is a Mercy, a Fig for all Corporeal! (Blake to Thomas Butts, 11 September 1801, p.34).

The passage registers a double artistic and spiritual impediment: firstly, in 'a Land of Abstraction where Spectres of the Dead wander'; and secondly, enchainment in the 'world of Duty & Reality' – which is resisted by enthusiastic flight. Blake asserts a transcendent plane of mental being where corporeal distress becomes irrelevant. The letter demonstrates that spiritual and political struggle are inseparable in Blake's formulation, as in *Jerusalem*: 'Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion' (E207, pl. 57, 10). Unlike Cowper, Blake was quite willing to take on the badge of enthusiasm, as he acknowledges in an earlier letter to William Hayley in which he admits to writing from the 'Dictate' of his dead brother: 'Forgive me for expressing to you my Enthusiasm which I wish all to partake of Since it is to me a Source of Immortal Joy even in this world by it I am the companion of Angels' (Blake to Hayley, 6 May 1800, pp.15-16). As Jon Mee argues, Blake's enthusiasm is not just a claim to divine inspiration or 'straightforward Christian zeal… [It] measures

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[3] Paley, pp.248-9. Johnson placed the blame for Cowper's madness on the Calvinism which convinced the poet he was a reprobate, while Greatheed argued that Cowper always believed himself regenerate but was nevertheless perturbed that he might perish forever if 'he died in the state in which he was'.

[4] G.E. Bentley, ed. *Blake Records*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p.104 (Hayley to Romney: 3 February 1801); and (Johnson to Hayley: 17 June 1801), p.108.

his distance from the politics of Deism and Dissent'.[5] His enthusiasm melds together socio-political,

philosophical, and personal concerns, as the references, in the Butts letter quoted above, to labour,

Pitt's Bread policy, the materialism of Bacon and Newton, and the overall context of spiritual

struggle, show.

The Four Zoas was conceived in the context of the psychopathology of enthusiasm,

antinomianism and prophetic inspiration in the 1790s and early 1800s. Antinomian was a pejorative

term, literally meaning 'against the law' (Greek, *anti* 'against'; nomos 'law'), and unlike

enthusiasm, it was not taken up by Blake himself (or by other 'antinomians').[6] Blake not only

rejected orthodox moral codes and repeatedly lambasted clericalism, he also adopted an attitude

to the Bible that was sometimes far from deferential: 'The Hebrew Nation did not write it / Avarice

& Chastity did shite it' (E516). His antinomianism was expressed in outright hostility to state

religion: 'The laws of the Jews were… what Christ pronounced them The Abomination that maketh

desolate, i.e. State Religion, which is the source of all Cruelty' (E618). Such a position was quite

markedly dangerous when, as Mee explains, 'the words "enthusiast" and "antinomian" often come

close to being used as synonyms by those alarmed at the progress of popular heresy in the period'.[7]

This was not lost on Blake himself: 'To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life'

(E611). Blake's enthusiasm cast in this way, as well as an emerging 'bourgeois' market, are,

according to Mee, part of the reason why he was not published by Johnson, at a time when the

Analytical Review was at pains not to confirm Burke's view that supporters of the French

Revolution were 'mad religious fanatics'.[8]

The habitual response to enthusiasts in the politically unstable 1790s was to dismiss them

as insane, as another artisan enthusiast, William Bryan, protests in his millenarian text, *A Testimony*

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[5] Jon Mee, 'Blake's politics in history', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. by Morris Eaves, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 2007), pp.135-147 (p.140-2).
[6] Rix, p.7.
[7] *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) p.57.
[8] Mee, p.223.

of the Spirit of Truth (1795): '… ye great men of the earth… you think every man insane who dares profess to speak or write by inspiration of the divine spirit'.[9] Bryan lamented that no one would employ him: 'I had once been mad, and left my business, [and] I might take another fit of insanity, and do so again'.[10] He did, however, become an apothecary, and his description of the role suggests a complete lack of professional standards. Bryan dispenses medicine according to divine inspiration and love of God, rather than the '*self-love*' which is seen as the 'foundation' of the system of physic.[11] This nevertheless appears to guard him against the financial exploitation of his clients:

> If I was at any time sent for I must give only the medicine which I knew would be likely in the most speedy and effectual manner to bring about my patient, and no more than was necessary: I could not croud in draught after draught to enlarge my bill.[12]

As I have described in Chapter 1, the psychopathology of enthusiasm had a long history going back to the English Civil War, in which it was presented as an infectious disease or a virus that could spread across an unsuspecting populace. There was a statute against popular prophecy throughout the eighteenth century, and Blake's private writings, if not his printed texts, would surely have alarmed the authorities. The strongly political dimension of Blake's antinomianism has been seen by Saree Makdisi as its most significant aspect, so that rather than a 'strictly religious matter', it informs a radicalism that is not only pitched against the conservative reactionary forces of the 1790s, but also frames a viewpoint that is significantly at odds with radical liberal thought:

> Blake's stress on love, community, forgiveness, and freedom, his revulsion at "contention for Worldly prosperity," is radically inconsistent with many of the liberal radicals' deep and abiding faith in the necessity of free competition on an open market (open both to competition and to the whole world), the exercise of moral virtue over dominated others, and the consequent persistence of a class hierarchy based on the accumulation of private property.[13]

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[9] William Bryan, *A Testimony of the Spirit of the Truth Concerning Richard Brothers* (London: Printed at J. Wright's, 1795), p.13.
[10] Bryan, p.29.
[11] Bryan, p.30.
[12] Bryan, pp.29-30.
[13] *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.74.

In its own terms, however, Blake's articulation of a radical position places an emphasis on spiritual understanding. It is made within the discourse of popular prophecy, the rights of which he uncompromisingly asserted in his 1798 annotations to *An Apology for the Bible* by the Bishop of Landaff, Richard Watson (1737-1816):

> Every honest man is a Prophet he utters his opinion both of private & public matters Thus If you go on So the result is So He never says such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. a Prophet is a Seer not an Arbitrary Dictator (E617).

This democratic understanding of prophecy puts vision at the centre of Blake's poetry. Both *America* (1793) and *Europe* (1794) are explicitly written as prophecies, and *The Four Zoas* shares with them a recourse to the language and imagery of *Revelation*, and to the other prophetic books of the Bible. In the appeal to popular prophecy, coupled with a frequently disdainful attitude to received religious wisdom, Blake is not wholly dissimilar to other prophetic writers of the 1790s like William Bryan and Richard Brothers. Having prophesied the death of the King and the end of the monarchy, Brothers was imprisoned as criminally insane, before being moved to a private asylum in Islington.[14] Unlike Brothers, though, Blake did not suggest that he had a special commission from God as the 'Prince and Prophet' of a new religion (British-Israelism), nor did he style himself as a man apart, cognisant of 'great and remarkable things not revealed to any other Person on Earth'.[15] Prophecy is a mode available to anyone for Blake, who tends to stress universality. While the nature of Blake's enthusiasm is unconventional, like Smart, he can be seen as part of a complex, multi-layered tradition, as E.P Thompson suggests in a summary of his key influences:

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[14] Timothy C. F. Stunt, 'Brothers, Richard (1757–1824)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn, Jan 2008 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3573 [accessed 13 Sept 2016].

[15] Richard Brothers, *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times* (London: Robert Campbell, 1794), Title page.

> (1) The strongest influence upon Blake comes from one major source – the Bible – but the Bible read in a particular way, influenced by Milton and by radical Dissent; (2) To this may be added suggestions of more specific vectors – the Moravians, Baptists, Philadelphians and Behmenists, the Rosicrucians and masons, and thence to the Swedenborgians… .[16]

In addition to the Bible, Blake's rhetoric has a wide range of other religious and esoteric sources, but it remains difficult to place Blake precisely in any one tradition. Like Smart, Blake synthesizes. As Rix suggests, while commenting on *All Religions are One* (1788), 'his discussions often draw on a syncretistic amalgam of ideas, but he remains loyal to none'.[17] The antinomianism that runs alongside Blake's enthusiasm imbues his work with its rebelliousness: 'His writing is characteristically less deferential to conventional religious notions than many enthusiastic texts and reveals the traces of other discourses besides the biblical basis of Blake's rhetoric'.[18] Thompson argues, indeed, that Blake's radical stance, his 'hostility to the polite culture… *is* his tradition… it directs and colours his judgement'.[19] Married to a concerted level of political engagement in a revolutionary era, this stance made his work potentially dangerous from the perspective of that polite culture. It is also one of the reasons why Blake's ideas and work, both at the time and since, come to be associated with madness. Even observers sympathetic to Blake, including Cowper's friend, Greatheed, remarked upon his 'eccentricity'.[20] The recognition, though, that Blake can be seen as part of 'a radical, political tradition', as Thompson puts it, 'acts against him being dismissed as an 'eccentric or a solitary'.[21]

Blake was quite aware of the perceived connection between enthusiasm and madness, and rebutted as well as accepted the charge. In the annotations to *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (1788), he concurs with the emphasis of the Swedish philosopher and mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg

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[16] E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.33.
[17] Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.2.
[18] Mee, p.20.
[19] Thompson, p.xviii.
[20] Bentley, *Blake Records*, p.189. Greatheed wrote to Hayley (27 January 1804) following Blake's acquittal after his trial for sedition: 'I knew our friend's eccentricity, and understood, that, during the crisis of the French Revolution, he had been one of its earnest partisans'.
[21] Thompson, p.62.

(1688-1772), on the 'spiritual Substances' that inform thought, and remarks: 'Who shall dare to say after this that all elevation is of self & is Enthusiasm & Madness & is it not plain that self derived intelligence is worldly demonstration' (E606). Blake's objection to a worldliness seen to diminish the spirit mirrors a similar aversion in Cowper, and enters into the appeal that Cowper seems to have held for Blake. In the short poem 'William Cowper Esqre', Blake chastises Hayley for what are seen as the worldly motives behind his friendship of Cowper: 'You see him spend his Soul in Prophecy / Do you believe it a Confounded lie / Till some Bookseller & the Public Fame / Proves there is truth in his extravagant claim' (E507, 5-9). The retention of the honorific in the poem's title and the somewhat ambiguous appraisal of Cowper in these lines indicate the complexity of Blake's response to him. The case of Cowper seems to have prompted Blake to reflect upon his own sanity. Blake's Cowper poem is accompanied by a number of short satirical verses that seek to turn around the imputation of madness: 'Madman I have been calld Fool they Call thee' (E507); 'Thou callst me Madman but I call thee Blockhead' (E507).

At the beginning of the Felpham period, William Reid's *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies of this Metropolis* (1800) announced a welcome restriction of the revolutionary societies, and introduced an attack on popular enthusiasm by admitting a previous complicity: 'The Author of this undertaking, having been involved in the dangerous delusion he now explodes, may reasonably be admitted a competent witness of the events which he relates.[22] Among a great many other unorthodox religious groups criticized for their bid to reform Christianity and bring in the Millennium, Reid attacks the Swedenborgianism that had attracted Blake, a 'pantomime of religion' seen to have already sunk: 'How are the mighty fallen'.[23] With important implications for *The Four Zoas*, there is a change in the texture of Blake's enthusiasm towards the end of the Felpham period. Sometimes described as a 'conversion' experience, this was certainly not a departure akin to the reactionary course taken by Reid. In *The Four Zoas*, it is reflected in late revisions which incorporate

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[22] William Reid, *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in this Metropolis* (London: J. Hatchard, 1800), p.iv.
[23] Reid, p.56.

a more explicitly Christian vision into the narrative, including the key passages on insanity that I

discuss below.[24] Blake's apparent renewal of Christian faith is decidedly enthusiastic:

> I am again Emerged into the light of Day; I still & shall to Eternity Embrace Christianity and Adore him who is the Express image of God; but I have travel'd thro' Perils & Darkness not unlike a Champion. I have Conquer'd, and shall still Go on Conquering. Nothing can withstand the fury of my Course among the Stars of God & in the Abysses of the Accuser. My Enthusiasm is still what it was, only Enlarged and confirm'd (Letter to Butts, 22 November, p.42).

Despite the positive tenor here, Blake soon found that his prophetic work had to take place away

from the countryside, and, in this sense, he moves in an opposite trajectory to the retiring Cowper,

evident when he reverses Cowper's sense of the health benefits of the countryside to refer to 'the

unhealthiness of the place' (Letter to Butts, 10 January 1803, p.47).

The defiance of Blake's response to the charge of madness infuses his poetry. In the only

known review of Blake's 1809 Broad Street exhibition, Robert Hunt, in *The Examiner* magazine,

assumed the mantle of sanity to check an 'alarming increase of the effects of insanity', which he

identified with the 'stupid and mad-brained political project' of England's rulers.[25] In his

condemnation, Hunt misreads the deep criticism of the establishment in Blake's artwork, where

Pitt is allegorically seen to guide Behemoth, and Nelson Leviathan:

> … when the ebullitions of a distempered brain are mistaken for the sallies of genius by those whose works have exhibited the soundest thinking in art, the malady has indeed attained a pernicious height, and it becomes a duty to endeavour to arrest its progress. Such is the case with the productions and admirers of WILLIAM BLAKE, an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement, and, consequently, of whom no public notice would have been taken, if he was not forced on the notice and animadversion of the EXAMINER.[26]

In the *Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake pre-empts such criticism, asking to be judged by an

independently discerning public: '… those who have been told that my Works are but an

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[24] Andrew Lincoln, *Spiritual History: A Reading of William Blake's Vala, or The Four Zoas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.223.

[25] Robert Hunt, *The Examiner* (17 September 1809), in Blake Records, p.282.

[26] Hunt, pp.282-3.

unscientific and irregular Eccentricity, a Madman's Scrawls, I demand of them to do me the justice

to examine before they decide' (E527-528). The *Descriptive Catalogue* was itself responding to

earlier criticism of Blake's designs for Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1808), where Robert Hunt had

castigated the artist's 'vain effort of painting to unite to the eye the contrary natures of spirit and

body' (7 August 1808).[27] In a carefully worded defence of the imagination and prophetic vision,

which transcends the 'perishing and mortal eye', Blake answers Hunt's objection to his drawings of

spirits as 'impossibilities' with the assertion: 'Spirits are organized men' (E541-2). The *Descriptive

Catalogue*, in which Blake self-compares with Raphael and Michelangelo, is dismissed by Hunt as 'a

farrago of nonsense, unintelligibleness, and egregious vanity, the wild effusions of a distempered

brain' (17 September 1809).[28] Blake responded by attacking Hunt (and an admirer) in a short verse:

'The Examiner whose very name is Hunt / Calld Death a Madman trembling for the affront / Like

trembling Hare sits on his weakly paper / One which he usd to dance & sport & caper' (E504, 15-

18). Far from backtracking from a self-declared visionary enthusiasm, Blake actually increases its

scope by mythologizing his personal enemies in his major poetry. When *Jerusalem* is introduced,

Blake's 'To the Public' squarely draws attention to 'The Enthusiasm of the following Poem' (E145,

pl. 3). This defiance is an important aspect of Blake's perspective as an antinomian enthusiast.

  The connection between Cowper and Blake resurfaces after the parliamentary

investigation into madhouses (1814-16), which uncovered endemic abuses in institutions across the

country, including at the public asylums of York and Bethlem. The plans of lunacy reformers to

provide a network of publicly funded asylums, which would compulsorily house all pauper lunatics,

as well as a new independent system of inspection, were rebuffed by the House of Lords.[29] The

political response to madness, then, was very much a subject for public discussion, of which the

case of Cowper formed one part. As Paley describes, the earlier debate about the causes of

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[27] Hunt, p.259.
[28] Hunt, p.283.
[29] Andrew Scull, *Museums of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Penguin, 1979), p.82.

Cowper's madness was revisited after the appearance of Greatheed's revised *Memoirs* (1814) and

John Johnson's *Posthumous Poems* (1814), which included a sketch of Cowper's life. Blake had met

both Johnson and Greatheed, and his particular interest in insanity at this time is evidenced by the

annotations to *Observations on the Deranged Mind, or Insanity* (1817) by the German phrenologist,

Johann Spurzheim (1776-1832), who squarely addressed the thorny question of the relationship

between strong religious convictions and madness.

Spurzheim cites the former Bethlem Apothecary, John Haslam, who had been dismissed for

his role in the scandal uncovered by Parliament, having already produced his two most influential

texts on the subject, *Observations* (1798) and *Illustrations* (1810). The latter volume presented the

case of James Tilly Matthews, which had been a major factor in the apothecary's public disgrace.[30]

The debate over Cowper had centred on the question of whether Calvinistic Methodism had

caused the poet's madness, or whether he was already subject to a constitutional insanity which

came to be expressed in religious terms. Referring directly to Methodism, Spurzheim essentially

endorses the former view:

> Religion is another fertile source of insanity. Mr. Haslam, though he declares it sinful to consider religion as a cause of insanity, adds, however, that he would be ungrateful, did he not avow his obligation to Methodism for its supply of numerous cases. Hence the primitive feelings of religion may be misled and produce insanity; that is what I contend for, and in that sense religion often leads to insanity.[31]

Blake's response, from a self-consciously enthusiastic perspective, evokes the late poet to suggest

that Cowper's despondency or 'madness' was a religious falsehood, a means of protecting the poet

from 'unbelief':

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[30] Roy Porter, 'Introduction', *Illustrations of Madness* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.xi-Lxiv (p.xv). '[W]hen the governors of Bethlem felt obliged to review Haslam's conduct, documents written by Matthews, alleging maltreatment, weighed heavily with them, leading to Haslam's dismissal in 1816'.

[31] J. G. Spurzheim, *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind, or Insanity* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817), pp. 153-4.

Cowper came to me & said. O that I were insane always I will never rest. Can you not make me truly insane. I will never rest till I am so. O that in the bosom of God I was hid. You retain health & yet are as mad as any of us all--over us all--mad as a refuge from unbelief--from Bacon Newton & Locke (E663).

Blake's defiant enthusiasm informs a stand against the rationalism, empiricism, and deism of the much derided troika of Bacon, Newton, and Locke. It claims a perspective which renders a certain kind of madness healthy just as it points towards the insanity of despair, which has the figure of Cowper lamenting his exclusion from the 'bosom' of God. In a startling reversal, Blake, the living poet, is seen to be identified by Cowper, the dead one, as a source of good counsel. This compelling shift has the unashamedly 'mad' Blake set up as an authority on madness ('over us all') at a crucial time in the public response to it.

'This Proteus disorder': Haslam and the Definition of Insanity

The medical response to madness still had a crisis of definition. Haslam's perspective as a leading if controversial practitioner serves to indicate the continuing problem of conceptualizing madness, and underlines the stark divide between the uncertain attempts to make madness an exclusively medical concern and the still very influential religious interpretations of it. Notwithstanding the poet's contemporary obscurity, I would suggest that Blake's thinking intersects this context and helps to crystallize the issues in public discussion. In the Preface to *Observations* (2nd edition 1809), Haslam, in order to understand madness, first seeks to imagine a gold standard: 'the human mind, in its perfect and healthy condition'.[32] This is not wholly unlike Blake who also measures insanity against a perfect criterion in the shape of human divinity. Unlike other contemporaries, Haslam eschews neologisms and makes no attempt to chart the subtle differences between numerous different forms of insanity. The Scottish physician, Alexander Crichton (1763-1856), for instance, attempted to concisely account for the physical causes of delirium, the various morbidities of the mind, and the contribution of the passions in the development of mental diseases, providing a

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[32] *Observations on Madness and Melancholy*, 2nd edn (London: John Callow, 1809), p.6.

nosology of the species and symptoms of 'mental derangement'.[33] Instead, Haslam employs terms

'in general use' when making a basic distinction between *mania* and *melancholia*, and then argues

for empirical observation through the presentation of dissected brains.[34]

Half case-study, and half physical description of organic brain tissue, Haslam's studies are

moving to read, not least because the patients themselves are entirely voiceless – spoken for

retrospectively, their behaviour interpreted and exposed like their 'opened' heads. Each case is a

sparse account of unrelieved suffering, like that of 'E.D.' (Case IX), a 36 year old woman who 'dies

comatose':[35]

> Her insanity came on a few days after having been delivered… Under the impression that she ought
> to be hanged, she destroyed her infant, with the view of meeting with that punishment. When she
> came into the house, she was very sensible of the crime she had committed, and felt the most
> poignant affliction for the act (p.102).

The plainness of Haslam's style accentuates the tragic ends that the patients meet. There is no

attempt to engage with what is seen as irrationality, an irrationality which is often simply reported,

as with 'J.D.' (Case XIII): '… his exclamations were of the most incoherent nature'.[36] In the case

(XXXV) of 'T.C.', Haslam does present the patient's first-hand account of a stabbing, but only to

demonstrate a 'lesson': '… that a madman seldom forgets the coercion he has undergone, and that

he never forgives an indignity'.[37] Haslam's claim on greater objectivity does not preclude an

occasional blunt moral or social judgment, reflecting uncertainty over whether the morbid

appearances of the brain are 'the cause or the effect of madness'.[38] (Haslam makes a simple

division between moral and physical causes, the former including 'the long endurance of grief,

ardent and ungratified desires, religious terror, the disappointment of pride, sudden fright, fits of

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[33] *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement*, 2 vols (London: Cadell & Davis, 1798), II, p.342-5.
[34] Haslam, pp.36-7.
[35] Haslam, p.103.
[36] Haslam, p.111.
[37] Halam, p.169.
[38] *Observations on Madness and Melancholy* (London: Printed for C. Rivington, 1798), p.103.

anger, prosperity humbled by misfortunes').[39] There is a neutral even-handedness in many of the

patient descriptions if not a very pronounced sympathy, as in the Case (XXIV) of 'S.W.', which

recalls Cowper: 'She was in a truly melancholic state; she was lost to all the comforts of life, and

conceived herself abandoned for ever by God'.[40]

Haslam's Preface pays significant attention to the etymology of 'mad': 'The word is

originally Gothic, and meant anger, rage… [Mod]'.[41] He cites the physician, Thomas Beddoes (1760-

1808):

> ' "Mad is one of those words which means almost everything and nothing. At first, it was, I imagine,
> applied to the transports of rage; and when men were civilized enough to be capable of insanity,
> their insanity… must have been of the frantic sort, because in the untutored, intense feelings seem
> regularly to carry a boisterous expression" '.[42]

The opening part of this remark was also cited by Haslam's colleague at Bethlem, the surgeon,

Bryan Crowther (1789-1815), who at first rejects the intimation that a very loose madness cannot

be defined: 'Were we to attempt a definition of the word madness, from its derivative signification,

we might affix fairly to it the interpretation of furious insanity'.[43] Crowther, though, later comments

that a 'precise' definition is well beyond him, and defers to Shakespeare, who 'seems to me to have

given the truest definition, where he says: "… Mad call I it, for to define true madness, / What is't?

But to be nothing else but mad"'.[44] Madness had such a wide remit that what was mad to one

person was sanity to another, and any attempt at definition could itself seem mad to a second

observer. Haslam confronts this issue by holding fast to a determinate approach to language,

lamenting in one footnote on the terminology of the passions that, 'We live in a world of

metaphor'.[45]

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[39] Haslam, *Observations* 2nd edn (1809), p.100.
[40] Haslam, p.136.
[41] Haslam, p.3.
[42] Haslam, pp.3-4.
[43] Bryan Crowther, *Practical Remarks on Insanity* (London: Thomas Underwood, 1811), p.6.
[44] Crowther, p.9. Referring to the speech by Polonius in *Hamlet* (Act II, Scene II).
[45] Haslam, p.34.

A Lockean suspicion of figurative language, a doubt over the power of human reason, and a practical empiricist's approach to theory of mind, lead Haslam to a position which would oppose on every level that of the spiritually-minded poet. Insanity for Haslam is a 'disease of the brain', the understanding of which is camouflaged by the limitations of medical science and the difficulty of finding an appropriate vocabulary to describe the different shades of madness.[46] Haslam, like Battie forty years before, sought to simplify the problem in the interests of professional medicine, and like Battie he begins with the assumption that a 'precise definition' would be highly desirable.[47] He soon concedes, however, that it is impossible to pin the idea of madness down. The problem is not that madness is hard to recognize, but rather that the varieties of the condition all come under one term which refers to numerous different forms at once: 'Mad is not a complex idea', Haslam writes in a specifically Lockean formulation, 'but a complex term for all the forms and varieties of… this Proteus disorder'.[48] He implicitly queries the exhaustive nosologies of madness produced by medics like Crichton and Arnold, the latter a near contemporary of his at Edinburgh.[49] Not unlike John Monro, Haslam underlines the authority of experts who are able to recognize insanity when they see it:

> [It] may be assumed that sound mind and insanity stand in the same predicament, and are opposed to each other in the same manner, as right to wrong, and as truth to lie. In a general view no mistake can arise, and where particular instances create embarrassment, those most conversant with such persons will be best able to determine.[50]

Haslam implies that the difference between sound mind and insanity is reliably transparent to the professional observer's eye, an attitude which is everywhere apparent in *Illustrations* (1810), but hard to credit given the public scandal that would rock madhouses across the country a few years

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[46] Haslam, p.30.
[47] Haslam, p.1.
[48] Haslam, p.4.
[49] Andrew Scull, Charlotte Mackenzie, and Nicholas Hervey, *Masters of Bedlam: The Transformation of the Mad-Doctoring Trade*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.13.
[50] Haslam, pp.37-8.

after the book's publication. Given Haslam's confident, forthright, and significantly materialistic

understanding of insanity, Blake's assertion in private writing of a 'fourfold vision', in which the

living and the dead mingle with angels and a talking thistle, would probably have been taken as

evidence of insanity by the apothecary (Letter to Butts, 22 November 1802, pp.43-6). Despite the

increasing professionalization of mad-doctors, though, there were no settled criteria for

determining or measuring insanity when Haslam was writing, and so subjective judgments based

on little material evidence continued to be an issue.

In *Illustrations*, Haslam reveals his reliance on a binary thinking which separates *madness*

from *reason* to such an extent that it is a source of puzzlement as to how anyone might find any

grey areas:

> Madness being the opposite to reason and good sense, as light is to darkness, straight to crooked,
> &c. it appears wonderful that two opposite opinions could be entertained on the subject: allowing
> each party to possess the ordinary faculties common to human beings in a sound and healthy state,
> yet such is really the fact: and if one party be right, the other must be wrong: because a person
> cannot correctly be said to be *in* his senses and *out* of his senses at the same time.[51]

The context here is the verdict given by two London medics, George Birkbeck and Henry

Clutterbuck, that James Tilly Mathews was not in fact quite as insane as Haslam found the patient

to be. Birkbeck and Clutterbuck had recommended Matthews' release from Bethlem following a

family petition, which was fiercely resisted by Haslam on the grounds of public safety.[52] Throughout

Illustrations, Haslam simply presents Matthews' ideas, often without any commentary, as if the

mere relation of the details carried all the evidence needed to confirm the patient's insanity.

Matthews' ideas of an air-loom and a gang of assassins based in and around Bethlem hospital have

been retrospectively interpreted as evidence of schizophrenia, but his language is populated by

imagery of violence, oppression, and physical and mental constriction, which may well reflect

aspects of the treatment he received at Bethlem: ' "… they [i.e. the assassins] cut the sympathy,

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[51] Haslam, *Illustrations*, p.15.
[52] Porter, p.xxix.

and have ever since at all my attempts dashed or splashed the inward nerves of vision to bully and

baffle me out of it" '.[53] When giving Matthews' ideas, Haslam seems to relish the presentation of a

grotesque performance: 'Having described the dramatic personae, it is expedient to mention the

different pre-parations which are employed in the airloom, by these pneumatic adepts, for the

purposes of assailment'.[54]

Binary thinking is an anathema to Blake. In the idea of contraries, oppositions are essential

for human life:

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason[.] Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, E34, pl.3; hereafter, *Marriage*).

An emphasis is placed here and elsewhere in Blake's poetry on active struggle, an important aspect

of which is the fluctuating, energetic, and intensely dynamic relationship between body and soul,

very much apparent in *The Four Zoas*. In Haslam's understanding of insanity, the emphasis is largely

placed on the physical activity of the brain, while the soul is largely kept out of the argument. In

another annotation to Spurzheim's *Observations*, Blake comments on the suggestion that any

disease in children should be considered as organic, because, in children, the functions of the mind

are 'suppressed': 'Corporeal disease. to which I readily agree. Diseases of the mind I pity him.

Denies mental health and perfection Stick to this all is right. But see page 152' (E662). In the page

Blake refers to, Spurzheim gives a phrenological description of insanity which posits that a

dysfunctional mind can be a precursor to cerebral derangement: 'Whatever occupies the mind too

intensely or exclusively is hurtful to the brain, and induces a state favourable to insanity, in

diminishing the influence of will'.[55] Blake's sense of perfection in human divinity would not

countenance the thought of *imperfection* in children, and so a distinction is drawn between

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[53] Haslam, p.47.
[54] Haslam, pp.27-8.
[55] Spurzheim, p.152.

'corporeal disease' and 'diseases of the mind', where mind is understood as the mind-soul (E662). Insanity, for Blake, can be a 'corporeal disease' but only in the sense that the body refers to a limited perception of the soul: 'for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses' (*Marriage*, E34, pl.4). Haslam's contention that empirical observation by way of expert professional doctors was the starting point for understanding insanity would clearly have been nonsensical to Blake. In *Observations*, Haslam gave a stripped-down analysis of the brains of dead people, emptied of personal content, a model of abstract thought from which considerations of the soul and religion are deliberately elided. In bemoaning the absence of medical pedagogy when it comes to insanity, Spurzheim also argues for greater objectivity when he complains that, 'The notion of insanity, which any one acquires, depends on his own application'.[56] Blake makes such abstract thought an aspect of the insanity within his spectral characters.

'The Spectre is in every man insane & most Deformed': Poetic Voice, Spectres, and Insanity

The Four Zoas raises similar editorial issues to *Jubilate Agno* in terms of its manuscript, the order in which it was designed to be read, and the uncertain date of both the poem's start and the point at which Blake stopped working on it.[57] Readers of the poem have to contend with an idiosyncratic syntax, and some major revisions which added layers of textual controversy. In Blake's final revisions, he appears to have been making an attempt to incorporate a specifically British myth centred on the links made in the eighteenth century between druidism and early Christianity.[58] Also like *Jubilate Agno,* the poem has been seen as a product of madness. David Erdman, for instance, argued that Blake was obsessively responding to unfolding contemporary events like the war with France: 'The result is as mad as the effort to play croquet in Wonderland with living mallets and

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[56] Spurzheim, p.5.
[57] Lincoln, p.31. The poem 'first began to take shape' between 1795 and 1797, with Blake still working on it perhaps as late as 1807.
[58] Lincoln, p.27

balls'.[59] While it is reductive to consider the work a preparatory piece for another poem, I would

rather see *The Four Zoas* as Blake's school of ideas, or, as Rosso memorably describes it, a

'prophetic workshop'.[60]

It will be convenient to give a brief summary here of the mythology behind *The Four Zoas*,

which informs all the major poems that followed it. *The Four Zoas* is an antinomian take on the fall

of 'The Universal Man' into various corrupt identities, as interpreted through a satirical rewriting of

the Bible and through the work of Milton and Edward Young (E301, p.3, 6). Blake had been

illustrating the latter's *Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742-5) and part of *The Four

Zoas* is written on the proof sheets of his engraved designs, a connection which had an influence on

both the drawings and the content of the poem.[61] The 'Ancient Man' of the poem's title is not a

single Adam-like figure, the progenitor of the human race and original sin, who is brought into

being by God (E300). The 'Ancient Man' has always existed as part of a divine group of Eternals,

who, prior to the narrative of *The Four Zoas* formed a vigorous, active, and imaginative unity. From

the poem's inception, 'The Universal Man' is identified with 'the Universal Brotherhood of Eden'

(E300-01, p.3, 5-6). With the fall, however, Man breaks down into composite parts or *Zoas*: 'Four

Mighty Ones are in every Man' (E300, p.3, 4); Urizen (approximately reason or wisdom); Luvah

(passion); Tharmas (sensation); and Urthona (creative instinct).[62] The division into the unhealthy

self-identities of the Zoas is the key mover of Blake's mythological catastrophe. As the narrative

takes shape, fallen temporal manifestations of the Zoas emerge, most notably the prophet-artist

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[59] *Blake: Prophet Against Empire,* 3rd edn (New York: Dover, 1977), p.294. Erdman qualifies this: 'We cannot be sure; an alternative explanation would be that as Blake reworked and expanded and rearranged this and that part of the manuscript, under the compulsion of the mental and allegorical travels and reverses he was creating, he disregareded chronological sequence when he drew upon current and recent memorable events for the quasi-military conflicts and negotiations of his tale'.

[60] George Anthony Rosso, *Blake's Prophetic Workshop: A Study of The Four Zoas* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993), pp.12-13. Rosso refers to Blake's 'nearly schizophrenic narrative strategies' but goes on to argue that insisting on 'Blake's singularity seems not only wrongheaded but counterproductive'.

[61] Cettina Tramontano Magno, and David V. Erdman, 'Commentary', in *The Four Zoas: A Photographic Facsimile of the Manuscript with Commentary on the Illuminations*, ed. by Cettina Tramontano Magno and David V. Erdman (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987), pp.14-15.

[62] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp.277-8.

figure, Los (as Urthona), and the symbol of rebellion, Orc (as Luvah).[63] The fall is also reflected

spatially, wherein 'Eden' describes the true home of human divinity, a revitalizing 'spring' (E302,

p.5, 3-4); 'Beulah', a more passive but still paradisiac zone, 'Created by the Lamb of God around /

On all sides within & without the Universal Man' (E303, p.5, 32-33); beneath is the more

recognizably earthly and material world of 'Generation' which harbours 'Decay & Death' (E301, p.4,

5); and, lastly, at the very bottom, 'Ulro', a Hell 'where the Dead wail Night & Day' (E317, p.25, 39).

The major figures also have separate female emanations indicative of divided humanity: Jerusalem

(the emanation of Man); Ahania (Urizen); Vala (Luvah); Enion (Tharmas); and Enitharmon (Los).

Within the movement of the fall, at crucial points in the narrative, the division of the Zoas is

reflected by the emergence of spectres. The spectre is the masculine aspect of the fallen being,

divided from his feminine emanation.

Spectres, then, reflect several stages of division and a movement down from Blake's

conception of the 'Human form Divine' where body and soul are one, a movement that brings the

darkness of the restricted senses (E300, p.126, 10). Spectres only exist as part of the fall, as

Connolly describes: '… [S]pectres lurk in the shadows, the minimal light accessible to the caverned

man'.[64] Although there are many different spectres in name, which are associated with a wide

range of Blake's characters, the way spectres function in the narrative of his long poems is broadly

consistent. Spectres emerge in *The Four Zoas* as gender division occurs, at the point when Blake's

already lowered Zoas break down further into separate male and female entities. One consequence

of this, in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, is the identification of spectres with a disastrously destructive

'Selfhood', which must be destroyed, 'put off & annihilated alway' (*Milton*, Book II, E142, p.41, 36).

The notion of the Selfhood encompasses the Christian vices of the seven deadly sins (hubris, greed,

lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth). As Janet Warner has argued, spectres are linked not only to

these sins but also to the melancholic despair that rationalizing engenders; this is understood to be

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[63] When I use the term, 'prophet-artist', I am intending to emphasize the characterization of Los as a spiritual artist in the widest sense. Blake views poetry and visual art as complementary.
[64] Tristanne J. Connolly, *William Blake and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.156.

the opposite of Blake's conception of the infinite, and draws upon such medieval notions as *accidie* (sloth) and *wanhope* (despair of the mercy of God).[65] Warner demonstrates the consistency of Blake's approach by pointing to the distinction made between the spectre itself and anything that comes under its power. Visually, this marks a difference between the huddled and prostrate figures that populate Blake's art as 'Man in his Spectre's Power', and those of the spectre itself, which include a variety of satanic figures, beasts, bats, serpents, and dragons.[66] One clear instance of spectral overpowering is the huddled figure depicted in plate 37 of *Jerusalem* with the accompanying lines: 'Each Man is in / his Spectre's power / Until the arrival / of that hour, / When his Humanity / awake / And cast his Spectre / into the Lake' (E184, pl.37) (See Appendix II: Figure 8). This small poem succinctly describes how spectres overshadow Blake's sense of human divinity, which must be reawakened through art. On the *Jerusalem* plate, the lines are tellingly shown in reverse, emphasizing the inverted identity of the mastered figure. Spectres denote the negation of Man, the despairing reverse of divine humanity as Blake envisaged it.

Spectral identity is a kind of religio-political sickness which must be encountered and then reintegrated. While spectres have nuanced positions in relation to particular characters, they always begin as symbols of falsehood and delusion, emerging only when the unity of human divinity has broken down, when emanations have split off, when violence and disjunction have taken place. In *The Four Zoas*, for instance, the Spectre of Tharmas is a product of an assault on the female emanation, Enion, whose body is overtaken by a serpent in the manuscript illustration: 'Mingling his horrible brightness with her tender limbs then high she soard / Above the ocean; a bright wonder that Nature shudder'd at / Half Woman & half Spectre…' (E304, p.7, 7-10). The wording of 'half Spectre' here is a revision, having previously been 'half Beast', and before that,

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[65] Janet Warner, 'Blake's Figures of Despair: Man in his Spectre's Power' in *William Blake: Essays in honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, ed. by Morton Paley and Michael Philips (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.207-224 (p.209 and pp.214-215).
[66] Warner, p.215.

'half Serpent'.[67] Blake's drawing reflects both the male and the female perspective. On the

preceding page, the perspective of Tharmas contrasts with the nightmare form just alluded to, as

the male Spectre rests, presumably after coitus (manuscript, p.6).[68] Before *The Four Zoas*, Blake

used the diction of spectres to denote the disease of tyranny and despotism in *The French*

Revolution (E293, p.9, 71) and *America* (E53, pl. 5, 6). A lyric poem from his notebook, 'My Spectre

around me night & day', written during the Felpham period (1800-3), describes a more personal

haunting:

> My Spectre around me night & day
> Like a Wild beast guards my way
> My Emanation far within
> Weeps incessantly for my Sin (E475, 1-4).

The oppressive and sinful Spectre likened to a wild beast has its analogue in the representation of

the Spectre of Urthona in *The Four Zoas*, a character who, as I discuss below, self-confesses a

bestial insanity of 'ravening devouring lust' (E360, p.84, 36-8). The shorter poem expresses an

internal struggle which appears to refer to Blake's marriage where Catharine Blake becomes the

weeping 'Emanation' described here. The selfish individualized love the poem condemns must be

renounced, but the speaker acknowledges his own culpability:

> Let us agree to give up Love
> And root up the infernal grove
> Then shall we return & see
> The worlds of happy Eternity (E477, 49-52).

In this case, the Spectre is not so much an externalized character as part of the internalized

reflections of the poem's speaker – a troubled conscience. Magnus Ankarsjö, commenting on the

poem, suggests that it is 'obvious that, as in *The Four Zoas*, these terrible tribulations take place on

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[67] Blake, *The Four Zoas*, ed. by Magno and Erdman, p.29. I will give the page of the original manuscript in the text, and the page of the Magno and Erdman edition and any commentary here.
[68] Blake, p.120.

a mental plane within the psyche of the speaker'.[69] Given the complexity of *The Four Zoas*, though, and the range of speaking characters in the poem, not all of whom are easily differentiated, Ankarsjö's point is difficult to confirm. The connection between spectres and the representation of negative and divided states of mind is, however, clear, as is the connection between spectres and the division of the sexes. Both markedly continue in *The Four Zoas*, a poem which is illustrated with a number of startling phallic and vaginal images, and is subtitled: 'The torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgment of Albion the Ancient Man' (E300).

Like Cowper, Blake represents insanity as a spiritual issue, a problem of faith, but rather than an inflexible Calvinism, *The Four Zoas* bears witness to an eclectic approach to religion which emphasizes Christian forgiveness as well as an antinomian understanding of the immanence of God within everyone. Blake's sense of a divinely infused human intellect could hardly be further from Haslam's view that insanity should be understood as a corporeal disease managed by medical expertise, where, '… the investigation of the senses and the operations of the human intellect… are so interwoven with corporeal disease, that it is impossible to separate them…'.[70] On one level, insanity in *The Four Zoas* is a Cowperian melancholic despair, manifested in fallen perception and sexual struggle, and focused on the terror of eternal death in the mythological world of Generation. On another, though, insanity is seen as part of the prophetic and artistic struggle the poem presents as essential for redemption. In the opening lines, a 'Daughter of Beulah' is called upon to sing the fall *and the resurrection* of Man: 'His fall into the Generation of Decay & Death & his Regeneration by the Resurrection from the dead' (E301, p.4, 5). The poem is cast as a prophecy uttered by an inspirational voice, a vital point since it immediately foregrounds vision in the poem (and voice, as I comment on below). Vision is at the centre of Blake's conception of insanity, from the restricted vision of the fallen world to the imaginative and creative vision which points to the sanity of redemption.

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[69] Magnus Ankarsjö, *William Blake and Religion* (Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland & Co., 2009), pp.100-101.
[70] *Considerations on the Moral Management of Insane Persons* (London: Printed for R. Hunter, 1817), p.3.

This emphasis gives the prophet-artist figure, Los, or Urthona – 'his name In Eden' – a special status in what is to follow 'for the day of Intellectual Battle' (E300-1, p.3, 3 and 11). In the intellectual warfare that the poem describes, Los is accorded a key role in the resurrection of Man. The poem refers to an intellectual battle of a kind that Blake himself declares to have experienced, as when he self-compares with Bunyan:

> I have indeed fought thro' a Hell of terrors & horrors (which none could know but myself) in a Divided Existence; now no longer Divided, nor at war with myself I shall travel on in the strength of the Lord God as Poor Pilgrim says' (Blake to Hayley, 4 December 1804, p.104).

This is also an outward-facing poem, written at a time when Europe was submerged in war and when the stakes for ideas were very high – perhaps too high for Blake to attempt publication.[71] Nevertheless, *The Four Zoas* certainly reads as if it wants to be heard, and indeed appears to be yearning for collective action, with its 'long resounding strong heroic Verse' (E300, p.3, 2). As such, I concur with Rosso's argument that, since Blake is not dealing in 'apocalypse… as a purely internal event', the poem should be approached with a 'dual individual and collective focus'.[72] Insanity is at the centre of an epic creative struggle to correct religious falsehood, as Blake does on a miniature scale when he annotates Spurzheim.

There are two key sequences in the poem concerning insanity as a condition, both of which dramatize fragmented spiritual identity and a crisis of anxiety centred on melancholic beliefs in relation to religious salvation: the opening quarrel in *Night I* between Tharmas and his emanation, Enion, which leads to the emergence of the Spectre of Tharmas (E301, p.4-5, 6-43); and the wooing of the Shadow of Enitharmon by the Spectre of Urthona in *Night VII* (E359-60, p.84, 33-42). While these sequences take place at very different points in the narrative, they not only have strong thematic links, but employ, in part, identical diction. Considering these passages together provides the best means of understanding how the representation of insanity operates across the narrative

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[71] Erdman, p.298.
[72] Rosso, p.10.

as a whole. Both sequences parody analytical detachment and help to show how *The Four Zoas* opens up a discussion of feeling and emotion next to the question of insanity. Both sequences are important in the redemptive framework of the poem, which can be seen immediately by referring to the artwork that accompanies the poetry. In the *Night I* drawing that surrounds the text, Tharmas, the recently fallen Zoa, is cast in a spectral pose at the bottom of the ocean, head down, hands covering face, but he is also depicted with wings, retaining the possibility of redemption (manuscript, p.5).[73] In the tangled drawing in *Night VII*, the Spectre of Urthona is shown in a similarly ambiguous pose, lying on the ground but with one arm raised upwards (manuscript, p.84)(see Appendix II: Figure 9).[74]

The *Night I* sequence presents an insanity of melancholy which can be read as an indictment of detached rational inquiry, and of the Lockean psychology of sensation and reflection in which discrete ideas are imprinted on the mind. While for Locke in the *Essay*, sensation and reflection are 'the only originals from whence all our ideas take their beginnings', here the sensation and fallen consciousness of the characters, Tharmas and Enion, are shown to be muddled and deluded.[75] Blake also reverses the positive Protestant appraisal of self-examination given by, among others, Nathaniel Cotton. In *The Four Zoas*, self-examination is disastrous because self-identity itself is disastrous: 'Why wilt thou Examine every little fibre of my soul / Spreading them out before the Sun like Stalks of flax to dry' (E302, p.4, 29-30). The spiritually divided Tharmas and Enion both harbour delusive feelings of recrimination, reducing the soul and the 'infant joy' of mental perfection to 'Death Despair & Everlasting brooding Melancholy' (E302, p.4, 34). As the emanations fleeing from the divided Man seek refuge in Tharmas, the Zoa passively wonders at self-murder: 'I am already distracted at their deeds & if I look / Upon them more Despair will bring self murder on my soul' (E302, p.4, 37-8). This despair is grafted on to the separate identity that Tharmas now inhabits, which becomes a mockery of personal identity-in-consciousness: 'I am like an atom / A

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[73] Blake, p.119.
[74] Blake, p.198.
[75] Locke, 'Of Ideas in General, and their Original' (Book II), p.110.

Nothing left in darkness yet I am an identity / I wish & feel & weep & groan Ah terrible terrible E302, p.4, 42-5). Described as the 'Parent power', Tharmas is the character through whom the fall is first witnessed (E301, p.4, 6). In Eden, he is a model of communication associated with the eternal virtues of coherence and receptivity, with the tongue as a 'special sense'.[76] The divided sensation and disastrous non-communication between Zoa and emanation, though, result in a sea of incoherence from which Enion weaves his Spectre, '… issuing from his feet in flames of fire / In gnawing pain drawn out by her lovd fingers every nerve / She counted. every vein & lacteal threading them among / Her woof of terror' (E302, p.5, 15-18). Like a soul, the Spectre issues from the alienated body in pain, while Enion, in the now limited, finite world of her understanding, rationally counts the nerves and veins.

The association of the Spectre with insanity begins with this description of the body and soul in myopic and painful separation. As an 'essentially incorporeal' being, the Spectre is defined against the finite, material world into which it emerges, and is immediately associated with the danger of eternal death.[77] There is a movement to arrest the fall of Tharmas, but it is compromised when the Daughters of Beulah, who generally work to protect faith and to support poetry and prophecy in the narrative, brood over the newly created Hellish space of Ulro and close down the possibility of communication:

> The Daughters of Beulah follow sleepers in all their Dreams
> Creating Spaces lest they fall into Eternal Death
> The Circle of Destiny complete they gave to it a Space
> And namd the Space Ulro & brooded over it in care & love
> They said The Spectre is in every man insane & most
> Deformd Thro the three heavens descending in fury & fire
> We meet it with our Songs & loving blandishments & give
> To it a form of vegetation But this Spectre of Tharmas
> Is Eternal Death What shall we do O God pity & help
> So spoke they & closd the Gate of the Tongue in trembling fear (E303, p.5, 34-43).

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[76] S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1965), p.399.
[77] Lincoln, p.75.

The time-bound sense of individualized identity which comes with the fall is likened to a form of insanity through the image of the furious Spectre descending towards the eternal death of Ulro. The Daughters of Beulah, by meeting the Spectre in its fall, offer a 'form of vegetation' and 'songs and loving blandishments' – an organic life – but they curtail communication by closing the 'Gate of the Tongue' in fear. They themselves participate in the error and illusion of a finite world of mortality and decay, a world approximate to what Blake calls elsewhere, 'that faint Shadow Call'd Natural Life' (Letter to Hayley, 11 Dec 1805, p.120). The image of a 'Circle of Destiny' gives a sense of this world's restrictive force which threatens the spiritual catastrophe of Ulro. It becomes clear, as Lincoln argues, that: 'The fall begins with the failure of faith, which is a failure to see the infinite power of mercy and love'.[78] In the midst of their own brooding fears of eternal death, the Daughters appear to panic in a moment of Cowperian doubt. Blake defamiliarizes common expectations of material and physical reality, which are seen to derive from the limited perception of the senses, until the finite world of 'Generation' is shown to be a delusion, a gross distortion of human divinity.

The insight that *The Four Zoas* offers into arguments about insanity is found in the conceptual arrangement of the poem, which gives a range of nuanced perspectives that reflect different levels of spiritual understanding or fallen consciousness. Rather than easily determined as one side of a binary opposition, Blake represents insanity as highly complex, inextricably linked with desire, environment, and a range of oppositional emotions – love, hate, joy, sorrow, fear. In the poem's characters, there is a generational movement in emphasis, from Tharmas-Enion to Los-Enitharmon, or symbolically put, from insanity cast in the realm of sensation, to insanity cast in the realm of imagination.

The second key sequence reinforces the connection between insanity, spectres, divided identity, and sexual and artistic struggle. It presents spectral versions of Urthona-Los and Enitharmon, as respectively, the Spectre of Urthona and the Shadow of Enitharmon. In other

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[78] Lincoln, pp.233-34.

words, the passage represents the voices of the separated parts of already divided characters, and

in a densely allegorical context. The Spectre of Urthona is wooing the Shadow of Enitharmon (after

the failure of Los and Enitharmon to 'unchain' the revolutionary spirit of Orc in Night V (E342, p.62,

26)). The scene occurs in the immediate context of the delicate nurturing of revolution as

Enitharmon's Shadow mourns for a degenerating Orc (weakened by Urizen's hypocrisy at the start

of Night VII). Frye suggests that, in Blake's symbolism, the Spectre of Urthona can be seen as the

struggling will of the prophet-artist figure: 'In this world Los cannot function without the Spectre of

Urthona… there is a perpetual conflict between the imagination and the will to prevent the latter

from deserting to the Selfhood'.[79] As the Spectre presents his version of the fall, he offers a vision

for the liberation of Man. The Spectre, in this way, retains something of the unfallen Zoa's

prophetic and creative instincts, but his self-conscious insanity is characterized by an out-of-control

will:

> I view futurity in thee [i.e. Enitharmon] I will bring down soft Vala
> To the embraces of this terror & I will destroy
> That body [i.e. Los] I created then shall we unite again in bliss
> Thou knowest that the Spectre is in Every Man insane brutish
> Deformd that I am thus a ravening devouring lust continually
> Craving & devouring but my Eyes are always upon thee O lovely
> Delusion & I cannot crave for any thing but thee not so
> The spectres of the Dead for I am as the Spectre of the Living
> For till these terrors planted round the Gates of Eternal life
> Are driven away & annihilated we never can repass the Gates (E359-60, p.84, 33-42).

An echo of the earlier lines in Night I, the Spectre here has a more ambiguous role, both spiritually

perceptive and self-consciously registering an insanity of unfulfilled, bestial desire. The vision is

given within a physical setting that symbolizes mystification – they stand under the 'Tree of

Mystery' (E358, p.82, 23-4). In Blake's poem, 'The Human Abstract', this tree grows inside the

'Human Brain' (E27). Unlike Tharmas and the Daughters of Beulah in the earlier sequence, though,

this Spectre appears to understand the melancholy-inducing 'terrors' of eternal death. In the

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[79] Frye, p.294.

appeal to 'soft Vala', the reasoning Spectre recognizes the horror of the fallen universe and the nature of the fall itself as separation from an 'undivided essence' (E359, p.84, line 5). The Spectre takes a stand against this 'delusive' inner world (in which the ruin of reason has just featured prominently in Night VI).

Insanity in *The Four Zoas* is part of the artistic struggle to produce the prophetic art which will ensure salvation. The Spectre of Urthona in the second sequence is more a conflicted will than a wholly negating voice, as suggested by his own self-identification with 'the Spectre of the Living' as opposed to 'The spectres of the Dead'. The latter can be both unborn spirits in need of bodies and mortals in need of the 'body' of art.[80] In the passage cited above, they are fragments of spirit that need to be incarnated. The idea of 'The spectres of the Dead' has already been seen in my discussion of the letter in which Blake describes a spiritual and artistic struggle in a 'Land of Abstraction' (Letter to Butts, 11 September 1801, p.34). In the letter, Blake's 'Abstract Folly' takes him away from his work and into this dread zone which requires an enthusiastic flight to return him to spiritual health, and 'a Fig for all Corporeal' (p.34). The provoking factor is the rational, 'heavier' world of 'Bacon & Newton' which would 'prescribe distress for a medicinal potion' (p.34). In both the sequence and the letter, Blake is describing the visionary struggle of the prophet-artist, condemned to live in an abstract world, which is seen to push against the imaginary impulse conceived as the locus of sanity. In Night VII of the poem, Los and Enitharmon see the 'Spectres of the Dead' arriving from the destruction of Urizen's ruined cosmos earlier in the poem (Nights II and III). They represent a terrifying double-negative of split vision and lone identity: 'Each Male formd without a counterpart without a concentering vision' (E369, p.87, 30). More pointedly, as the less-fallen Spectre of Urthona explains, 'without a Created body the Spectre is Eternal death' (E369, p.87, 38). In order to counteract the descent into war in Night VIII, Enitharmon, out of pity, weaves bodies for the 'Spectres of the Dead' which become part of Golgonooza, Los's project of spiritual

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[80] Alicia Ostriker, 'Dictionary of Proper Names' in *William Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin, 1977, 2004), p.1055.

and artistic restoration. The extreme manifestation of spectral identity is the insanity of despair –
the capitulation to fears of eternal death – and this is to be resisted with prophetic art.

Like Cowper's *Poems*, though in a more idiosyncratic way, *The Four Zoas* records a struggle
for poetic voice, in this case for the comprehensive spiritual vision of the prophet-artist. Not only
are spectres associated with insanity, but prophetic creativity is virtually synonymous with sanity,
and here, too, spectres are important since they must be reintegrated before creativity can
flourish. Across Blake's work, rather than simply ignored or abandoned, spectres and emanations,
as subordinates and assistants, take part in the production of the artistic work itself. As Connolly
identifies, the emanation 'can be seen as the assistant at male artistic creation, the colours used in
that creation, and the artwork itself which emanates from, and takes separate being from its male
part'.[81] Golgonooza is built by Los and the Spectre of Urthona only when they are 'mingling
together' (E368, p.87, 2-6). In effect, this re-joining becomes a reintegration of poetic voice, as the
voices of the Zoas' shadowy split identities (emanations as well as spectres) are reabsorbed.

All Blake's poems have a strong sense of voice, from the 'Voice of one crying in the
Wilderness' in *All Religions Are One* to the 'Voice of the Devil' in *Marriage* (E1 and E34, pl.4). The
perspective of speaking characters frequently changes, particularly in Blake's longer work. *The Four
Zoas* has more line-references to voice than any other poem (over seventy against forty in
Jerusalem). This might at first sight seem to accentuate the role of the poet's mental activity in the
poem, but as I discuss later in the chapter, there is no sense of an opposition between self and
world in Blake's work. The resolution of the spiritual conflict in the poem depends in a very literal
sense on the reintegration of poetic voice(s), as the vocally clashing Zoas, spectres, emanations,
and natural forms all come to be rehabilitated in the redeemed Man, walking upon 'the Eternal
Mountains [and] raising his heavenly voice' (E406, p.138, 30). Earlier, voices are not easily
differentiated or fail to be recognized or are misunderstood or some confusion enters into them, as
when Enitharmon hears the voice of Luvah in a dream (a dream within the 'Dream' of the poem): 'I

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[81] Connolly, p.190.

heard the sounding sea; I heard the voice weaker and weaker / The voice came & went like a

dream, I awoke in my sweet bliss' (E306, p.11, 1-2). In possibly one of the loudest poems in the

English language, the narrative is driven by a struggle to find the divine voice. When Urizen's

cosmos collapses, and reason symbolically crashes, the emphasis is placed on the character's

failure to articulate a sense of divinity:

> Loud strong a universal groan of death louder
> Than all the wracking elements deafend & rended worse
> Than Urizen & all his hosts in curst despair down rushing
> But from the Dolorous Groan one like a shadow of smoke appeard…
>
> Thick short incessant bursting sobbing. deep despairing stamping struggling
> Struggling to utter the voice of Man struggling to take the features of Man (E329-30, p.44, 11-13 and 18-19).

Reintegration of voice occurs with the reintegration of all the separate identities which comprise

the prophet-artist figure: Los; Enitharmon; and the Spectre of Urthona. The tension dramatized

through these figures describes a key aspect of the intellectual battle presented in *The Four Zoas*,

between, on the one hand, imagination and creativity, and on the other, the restrictive laws and

moralities that are seen to destroy them (E300, p.3, 3). This is clear from the poem's conclusion,

which triumphantly describes the reintegration of Urthona and the disappearance of spectre and

emanation:

> Urthona is arisen in his strength no longer now
> Divided from Enitharmon no longer the Spectre Los
> Where is the Spectre of Prophecy where the delusive Phantom
> Departed & Urthona rises from the ruinous walls
> In all his ancient strength to form the golden armour of science
> For intellectual War The war of swords departed now
> The dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reigns (E407, p.139, 44-50).

This final passage condenses the poem's major themes of prophecy and redemption, and

underlines the importance of spectral identity in the narrative. As the 'Eyes of Man' are expanding

again, 'intellectual War' is no longer heard, and insanity has disappeared.

‘Oh that I cease to be! Despair! I am Despair!’: Reason and the Cowperian Spectre

The reintegration of the Zoas into a universal divinity includes Urizen, even if, as Hisao Ishizuka notes, the character is often treated by scholars as the ‘epitome of Enlightenment cold reason and rationality’.[82] Ishizuka describes how Blake utilizes medical discourse to connect Urizen not only with rational thought but also the culture of sympathy and sensibility.[83] The ‘dire Web’ seen in Night VI of *The Four Zoas* is at the centre of Ishizuka’s argument (E350, p.73, 31): ‘[Urizen’s] ‘Web’ is woven with eighteenth-century medical discourse as a warp and with the cultural discourse of sympathy (feeling) as the woof’.[84] Ishizuka broadens the idea of Urizen as a representation of the eighteenth-century mind, but I would contend that the poem still contains an attack on the Enlightenment ideal of reason, a critique which sharply contrasts with the most fundamental ideas of contemporary mad-doctors like Arnold and Haslam.

‘Reason and Energy’ are paired in Blake’s idea of ‘Contraries’, the oppositions needed for progress in spiritual affairs: ‘Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is The bound or outward circumference of Energy’ (*Marriage*; E34, p.4). Where it exists in this dynamic relationship with energy, reason is positive, but abstract reason is usually suspect as a rational, limiting, constrictive, de-energizing force. Urizen undergoes a series of complex transitions in *The Four Zoas*, and the poem’s mythology pushes against the status of reason as supreme in medical arguments about insanity. In Thomas Arnold’s *Observations*, an over-active imagination, excess feeling, and erroneous perception stand to destroy reason:

> Indeed strength of passion, activity of imagination, and erroneous judgment, are so intimately connected, so aid and support each other, and are so opposite to, and destructive of, sound reason,

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[82] ‘Untying the Web of Urizen: William Blake, Nervous Medicine, and the Culture of Feeling’ in *Liberating Medicine, 1720-1835*, ed. by Tristanne Connolly & Steve Clark (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), pp.97-107 (p.97).
[83] Ishizuka, p.97.
[84] Ishizuka, p.97.

that whenever any of them have arisen to a great height, and flourish in the extreme, they partake of the nature of insanity, from which they differ not so much in kind, as in degree.[85]

While in Arnold's arrangement, 'sudden', 'violent', and 'habitual' passions are itemized among the causes of insanity, *The Four Zoas* draws them into complex, allegorical relationships. Blake's vaunting of imagination turns around Arnold's conception. As one of the divided Zoas, Urizen makes a bid for absolute power, where reason becomes more questionable within the context of the fall. The poem's objection to rationalizing, abstract thought anticipates the description of the Spectre in *Jerusalem* as the 'Reasoning Power'.

The Four Zoas reverses the criticism of enthusiasm as an infectious disease, and suggests that the malady comes from the other side: from rational thought and rigid religious dogma. The action of the early part of the poem is dominated by the rise and fall of Urizen as God-King. In Nights II and III, the 'sickening light' of Urizenic reason, emptied of spirit, and unable to harmonize divine vision with the material and geometrical organization of a mechanically constructed cosmos, collapses under its own weight. This follows the rejection of the emanation, Ahania, partly a rejection of religious constraint in accordance with Blake's antinomian ideas: 'Thy passivity thy laws of obedience & insincerity / Are my abhorrence…' (E329, p.43, 10-11). Urizen's fall is seen as a spiritual error first and foremost.

Where Haslam controversially defended coercion and the literal chains of reason – the use of manacles – Blake presents the mental effects of enchaining reason, the 'mind-forg'd manacles' ('London', E27).[86] In a key sequence of *The Four Zoas*, occurring halfway through the poem across Nights IV and V, Urizenic reason is represented as an obstacle to the fulfillment of prophetic art, and as such, a form of madness. This marks the first significant appearance of the Spectre of Urthona, or 'prophecy's worldly ambitions' as Laura Quinney describes the character (E309, p.16,

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[85] Arnold, *Observations,* II, p.265.
[86] *First Report. Minutes of Evidence Taken before The Select Committee appointed to consider of Provision being made for the better Regulation of Madhouses, in England* (London: Ordered by The House of Commons, 25 May, 1815), p.63. During his 1815 evidence, Haslam defended the use of manacles as opposed to a strait-wastecoat.

11).[87] The Spectre emerges when Tharmas rips Enitharmon out of Los's side, compelling Los to rebuild Urizen's furnaces. Perceiving the ruins beneath the fallen Zoa as a 'formless unmeasurable death', Los binds Urizen down:

> Round him Los rolled furious
> His thunderous wheels, from furnace to furnace, tending dilligent
> The contemplative terror, frightened in his scornful sphere,
> Frightened with cold infectious madness – in his hand the thundering
> Hammer of Urthona, forming under his heavy hand the hours,
> The days & years, in chains of iron round the limbs of Urizen… (E335, p.52, 175-180).

The passage implicates a maddening constrictive reason in the fragmented identity and thwarted artistic will of Los and the Spectre of Urthona. The spectral reason that threatens Los is cast as an insidious disease that would spiritually enslave humanity by reducing the infinite and unified world of the imagination into a finite and divided world of linear time and fixed space, where individuals define themselves by their corporeality. In Night II, a spiritually blinded Urizen marked down Los and Enitharmon as objects of envy: 'For Los & Enitharmon walkd forth on the dewy Earth / Contracting or expanding their all flexible senses' (E322, p.34, 9-10). Against the poet and his muse, stands the madness of Urizenic reason as a failure of imaginative and spiritual vision. Blake's raising of the imagination at the expense of reason would have been resoundingly dismissed by eighteenth-century mad-doctors like Alexander Crichton, who finds multiple 'diseases' attendant upon the imagination, and identifies how it 'destroys' judgment through its recourse to 'horrid notions of supernatural agents'.[88] In a verdict with unfavourable implications for all artists, Joseph Mason Cox argued that professions and employments could 'pre-dispose to insanity, and especially those in which the imagination is kept constantly in action'.[89] In his discussion of insanity's causal factors, which incorporate psychological ideas of 'temperament' and 'habit', Cox shared with Blake

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[87] *William Blake on Self and Soul* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.115.
[88] Crichton, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement*, II, p.14.
[89] *Practical Observations on Insanity* (London: Baldwin and Murray, 1813), p.16.

the understanding that 'reason could totter on her throne', but suggested this was caused by an

'inability to abstract the mind from whatever deeply occupies it'.[90]

Blake's sequence ultimately presents a similarly paradoxical sense of madness to that given

in the annotations to Spurzheim – taking on madness as a means of retaining spiritual health. The

act of binding Urizen, reason's fallen God-King, results in the rational chain of chronological time

and linear progression. Over 'seven ages of woe', the process turns the prophet-artist into the

same rigid and limited anatomy that Urizen is bound into:

> He became what he was doing he was himself transformd
> The globe of life blood trembled Branching out into roots;
> Fibrous, writhing upon the winds; Fibres of blood, milk and tears;
> In pangs, eternity on eternity… (E338, p.55, 23-5).

Having caught the disease, bodily protuberances branch out of Los's spiritual essence in painful and

involuntary movements. The opening of Night V begins with Los's shamanistic dance, as he and

Enitharmon 'stonify' into rock-like forms and shrink into space:

> Infected Mad he dancd on his mountains high & dark as heaven
> Now fixd into one stedfast bulk his features stonify
> From his mouth curses & from his eyes sparks of blighting
> Beside the anvil cold he dancd with the hammer of Urthona (E338, p.57, 1-4).

On the one hand, this passage emphasizes the connection between 'mad' Urizenic reason and a

contracting 'unexpansive' natural world, characterized by decay, the melting away of embryonic

forms, and the apparent nullification of inspiration. On the other, Los seemingly takes on the guise

of a shamanistic figure, a prophet-healer who cures madness by absorbing it into himself.[91] At this

point, limits are placed on the fall, as 'Contraction' and 'Opacity' are set – a moment which

underscores the possibility of redemption through prophetic vision. Los's mad dance can be read as

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[90] Mason Cox, pp.14-16.
[91] Astriker, p.344.

the first inklings of resistance to the unexpansive, rational world of the senses that he has just

become part of. On this reading, madness, while not in itself useful, is part of the prophetic struggle

to attain a spiritual identity in the Poetic Genius, defined by Blake in *All Religions Are One* as 'the

true Man' from which 'the body or outward form of Man is derived' (E1). The poem is at bottom an

articulation of this struggle to reclaim an identity in the 'Spiritual Man', as opposed to the 'Natural

Man' who is 'at Enmity with God' (Annotations to Wordsworth's *Poems*, E665, p.1-3).

In Blake's conception, it is not mad-doctors who cure insanity but prophets, which

unsurprisingly opens up a chasm between the poet and practically-minded medics. Haslam brings

together Monro's idea of madness as a disease of the judgment, and Battie's idea of a disease of

the imagination, but also questions the status of the imagination as a power or faculty of the

mind.[92] For Haslam, insanity is real in its material effects on the brain and should be practically

managed, while for Blake, insanity is an aspect of a fallen world which his poem would

imaginatively dream away in prophetic art. From a Blakean perspective, Haslam is perhaps an

instance of the 'Natural Man', the empirical Urizenic doctor. (From a mad-doctoring perspective, it

is hard to envisage any medics, either in the eighteenth century or our own, referring to Blake for

practical advice, even if the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust once named a forensic acute

ward after the poet). In his *Observations*, Haslam pours scorn on past claims that a madness of

possession was cured by a combination of medicine and religion: '… union of the holy office with

consummate medical skill, was enabled to cure nine lunatics out of ten, which certainly has not

hitherto been accounted for'.[93] Blake would deny the medical claim to authority over madness

which Haslam asserts here.

Urizen stands in as an oppressive authority in a number of mutually reinforcing guises:

patriarch, priest, rationalist philosopher; politician; king; God. In Night VI, he is Lord of the Abyss,

recalling Milton's Satan, with his 'Globe of fire / Lighting his dismal journey thro the pathless world

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[92] Haslam, *Observations*, pp.15-6.
[93] Haslam, p.21.

of death' (E346, p.70, 34-5). In his most fallen manifestation, Urizen is the antithesis of the

prophet-artist who cures by works of art, as described by Blake's Devil in *Marriage*:

> the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal method by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid (E39, pl.14).

Encountering, in *The Four Zoas*, the 'ruined spirits' of his southern kingdom, who are 'Moping'

around in their own subjectivities, Urizen only mirrors their suffering, which is located precisely

within solipsism: 'Beyond the bounds of their own self their senses cannot penetrate' (E347 p.70, 8-

12). The strong correlation between madness and the constrictions of a de-spiritualized, ego-

centric self continues when Urizen over-views the terror-stricken identities no longer under his

control: 'His voice to them was but an inarticulate thunder for their Ears / Were heavy & dull &

their eyes & nostrils closed up' (E347, p.70, 39-45). In the collapse of authority that the poem

describes, Blake makes a spiritually bare reason inarticulate and pernicious. When advancing the

professional cause of medicine as an objective science, Haslam, meanwhile, attacks the 'zealots of

reformation':

> My professional brethren, whose knowledge is useful and unassuming, whose habits of investigation are patient; whose practice is a series of maxims to repress hypothesis, will I trust excuse my endeavour to demonstrate, for the progression of science and the advancement of humanity, that the disorders of the intellect are the peculiar and exclusive province of the *medical* practitioner.[94]

Haslam advocated a form of reasonable scientific investigation that put spiritual questions to one

side. Blake's poems suggest a dramatic interplay between madness and reason, which are quite

cleanly separated by the apothecary, who suggested that reason had nothing to learn from

madness:

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[94] Haslam, pp.6-7.

> … to endeavour to convince madmen of their errors, by reasoning, is folly in those who attempt it, since there is always in madness the firmest conviction of the truth of what is false, and which the clearest and most circumstantial evidence cannot remove.[95]

In Haslam's view, employing reason to engage with an error-strewn madness is pointless and misguided.

Hsiao Ishizuka has shown that Blake's description of the 'Web' drew on eighteenth-century nervous fibre theory, which saw the body as 'woven out of fibre-threads, the minimum building unit of the solid body'.[96] In the poem, Urizen, as a symbol of the fallen human brain, spins out the 'Web' of false religion in an internalized process which not only ensnares other spirits but Urizen himself, who self-defeatingly uses sympathy, pity, and affection to lure his victims. 'For Urizen lamented over them in a selfish lamentation / Till a white woof coverd his cold limbs from head to feet' (Night VI; E350, p.73, 26-7). Ishizuka places an emphasis on the articulation of cultural sympathy in Urizen's capacity for sympathetic feeling, which is seen as a parody of eighteenth-century morality: 'A seemingly rational Urizen, a judge and lawgiver, at the throne of the imperial brain, is, in fact, a sensitized, affectionate, and pathetic man of feeling, linked by the medico-cultural chain of a spider's vast net-work'.[97] I would argue that this characterization of Urizen as sensitized and pathetic does not weaken the poem's attack on rationalism, but rather reinforces it. Urizen is both rational and pathetic, a tyrant and a self-pitying moralist. Although *The Four Zoas* utilizes medical discourse in the idea of Urizen's 'Web', the sequence challenges, first and foremost, the rational basis of natural religion.

Urizen is represented as spiritually blind, and the character's despotic creation of a 'Vortex' challenges prophecy, since it binds futurity: 'Of All & all futurity be bound in his vast chain / And the Sciences were fixd & the Vortexes began to operate (E350, p.73, 20-1). The fixed 'Sciences' and the 'Web' are the flipside to Blake's alternative sense of a 'True Religion & Science' at the end of the

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[95] Haslam, *Observations* (1798), pp.105-6.
[96] Ishizuka, p.98.
[97] Ishizuka, pp.106-7.

poem. If Blake demonstrated a fascination with the anatomy of the body, his prophetic vision is incompatible with a late eighteenth-century proto-scientific medicine which objectified and pathologized vision. It does not sit easily with Arnold's notions of 'Ideal' and 'Notional' insanity, where the former places a pathological question mark over *anything* imagined which does not precisely correspond to 'external objects as they really exist'[98]; and the latter privileges the 'common sense of the sober and judicious part of mankind' over a perception which misrepresents or exaggerates the form of existing 'objects of sense'.[99]

In Night VI of The Four *Zoas*, Urizen's blindly rationalizing intellectual confusion is presented as a last desperate effort to reclaim an authority which has already been debunked as 'mad', but it is countered by a visionary enthusiasm which was exposed to the same charge. Long before the composition of *The Four Zoas*, David Hume, in 1741, had described the madness of enthusiasm in terms of an excessive regard for 'the invisible regions or world of spirits', so that the imagination is swelled 'with great, but confused conceptions, to which no sublunary beauties or enjoyments can correspond'.[100] This is linked to various subjective states of the elevated mind, so that the madness of enthusiasm, for Hume, is not so much a sickness – one of its sources is actually 'luxuriant health' – as a deluded philosophy by which the mind stands in for external reality. While drawn from an almost diametrically opposed perspective, Hume's critique of enthusiasm mirrors many of Blake's own objections to Urizenic rationalism: it is blind, it is confused, it denies truth and reality. Hume locates madness in giving blind credence to the unsighted, but 'the invisible regions or world of spirits' clearly triumph over the natural world in Blake's conception.[101]

Urizen reaches a nadir in the 'Howling Melancholy' of 'Universal Empire' which defines the events of Night VIII. As a symbol of a thoroughly debased, rationalistic world, Urizen acts in tandem with the sinister Shadowy Female, the corrupt form of Vala or nature. Together they sanction

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[98] Arnold, I, p.56.
[99] Arnold, I, pp.56-7.
[100] David Hume, 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', in *Writings on Religion by David Hume*, ed. by Antony Flew (Open Court: La Salle, Illinois), 1992, pp.3-9 (p.4).
[101] Hume, p.4.

destruction and subvert revolution. This is a war between individualistic, authoritarian power and democratic prophecy, as Blake conveys through Urizen's speech: 'The time of Prophecy is now revolvd & all / This Universal Ornament is mine & in my hands' (E360, p.95, 16-19). Reason constricts. When removed from the imagination, it draws false principles, as Blake stated in *There is No Natural Religion*: 'Man by his reasoning power. can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev'd' (**'**A'; E2); and 'Reason or the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be when we know more (**'**B'; E2). Hume's reason is the ratio of constricted vision from the Blakean perspective, but even sympathetic contemporary observers, such as Henry Crabb Robinson, questioned Blake's sanity: '… [his] religious convictions had brought on him the credit of being an absolute lunatic'. Robinson finds in Blake, though, a blend of madness and genius: 'Of such is the whole race of escstatics, mystics, seers of visions, and dreamers of dreams, and to their list we have now to add another name, that of William Blake'.[102] Such fundamentally opposing views as those of Blake and Hume cannot be bridged, and are exemplified by the poet's objection to Hume as a Urizenic figure in the vortices of historiography: 'The reasoning historian, turner and twister of causes and consequences, such as Hume, Gibbon and Voltaire; cannot with all their artifice, turn or twist one fact or disarrange self evident action…' (E544).

Prophecy continues to grapple with negative identity in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. The appearance of the Cowperian spectre in *Jerusalem* is a particularly revealing instance of an ongoing spiritual and creative struggle between prophecy and fallen reason. In *Jerusalem*, Los attempts to master and reintegrate his spectre, only to be met with multiplying divisions in a negative cycle of fury: 'His Spectre divides & Los in fury compels it to divide' (*Jerusalem*, E161, pl. 17, 1). The conflict between spectral reason and imaginative power is clearly expressed here:

> The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated
> From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel, in a Ratio

[102] 'Kunstler, Dichter, und Religioser Schwarmer', in *Blake Records*, trans. by K.A. Esdaile, ed. by G.E. Bentley Jr., 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.594-603 (p.595).

> Of the Things of Memory. It thence frames Laws & Moralities
> To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars
> (Chapter 3, E229, pl. 74, 4-13).

Spectres in *Jerusalem*, as elsewhere, are negative, abstract, rational powers, symptomatic of a fallen world in which imagination is cut off, and a mechanical and spiritual deadness exerts itself, exemplified by the rigidity of punitive laws and restrictive religious and moral codes. The link between spectres and abstract reason finds them pitched against imaginative power in all the longer poems, but they are also identified with religious melancholy.

The insanity of despair in both religious and poetic terms is strikingly presented in the Spectre that appears in Chapter 1 of *Jerusalem*, which, as Paley has argued, seems likely to have been informed by the period Blake spent working on Cowper with Hayley. The context of the passage is artistic struggle – Los's effort to build Golgonooza with the enforced labour of his Spectre ('the Spectre of Urthona'). The latter's speech has the main aspects of Cowper's own representation of religious melancholy in its angry cry at the injustice of a distant and insensitive God:

> For he is Righteous: he is not a Being of Pity & Compassion
> He cannot feel Distress: he feeds on Sacrifice & Offering:
> Delighting in cries & tears & clothed in Holiness & solitude
> But my griefs advance also, for ever & ever without end
> O that I cease to be! Despair! I am Despair
> Created to be the great example of horror & agony: also my
> Prayer is vain I called for compassion: compassion mockd
> Mercy & pity threw the grave stone over me & with lead
> And iron, bound it over me for ever: Life lives on my
> Consuming: & the Almighty hath made me his Contrary
> To be all evil, all reversed & for ever dead: knowing
> And seeing life, yet living not; how can I then behold
> And not tremble; how can I be beheld & not abhorrd…
> *Jerusalem* (Chapter 1, E153-4, pl.10, 47-59).

In the narrative of the poem, the Cowperian Spectre's melancholic struggle with God becomes an aspect of the prophet-artist's struggle with spectral identity, a reflection of Blake's own encounter with Cowper in his annotations to Spurzheim. As Paley suggests, the reader seems invited to pity

the Spectre, who appears to take on the self-conscious despair of Cowper's predestination arguments.[103] Moreover, self-murder – and murder – have just been explicitly linked to the Spectre (E152-153, pl.10, 8-16). The Spectre is a form of insanity in the guise of a rationalizing religious melancholy which engenders despair, different but perhaps no less damaging than the 'unbelief' of Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and John Locke, as Paley comments: 'Blake's visionary Christianity saw Calvinism and rationalism as ironically comparable idolatries.[104] Indeed, later in *Jerusalem*, Albion's Spectre identifies with the forces of unbelief: 'I am God O Sons of Men! I am your Rational Power! Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke…' (E203, Pl. 54, lines 16-17). The condemnation of melancholy is reflected in Blake's letters, where it is dismissed as an unreality despite the acknowledgment of a recent experience of it: 'I begin to Emerge from a Deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep you from & all good men'(Letter to George Cumberland: 2 July 1800, p.17). Melancholy, here, as elsewhere in Blake, is delusive, 'my stupid Melancholy' as he terms it (p.18). In a later letter, Blake delights in shaking off the 'spectrous Fiend' of de-humanizing, mechanical labour with the comment: 'Dear Sir, excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or a graver into hand, even as I used to be in my youth…' (Letter to William Hayley: 23 October 1804, p.101). In this letter, Blake validates the etymological meaning of enthusiasm as divine possession by self-comparing with Nebuchadnezzar, noting that 'thank God I was not altogether a beast as he was' (p.101). Religious melancholy and despair are symptoms of a spectral power which represses an enthusiastic creative inspiration. For the decidedly sober Arnold, though, enthusiasm is understood to take hold of minds 'weak by nature', and is an indirect cause of 'religious fear', a pathological 'affection of the mind' linked to both 'fanatical insanity' and 'desponding insanity'.[105]

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[103] Paley, p.237
[104] Paley, p.237
[105] Arnold, II, pp.260-1.

If the emergence of spectres allude to the sickness of division, fragmentation and the void, then creative artistic practice is the cure, but this requires the reintegration of those spectral voices which threaten artistic fulfilment. The opposition between artistic struggle and spectral despair is again clearly stated in *Jerusalem*: 'Los reads the Stars of Albion! the Spectre reads the Voids / Between the stars' (E251, Pl..91, 31-7). Creative art, in the fullest sense, is a liberation for Blake, and insanity is the opposite – a form of constriction and imprisonment in which artistic activity is reduced to inertia and despair. In his self-description of a creative enthusiasm, Blake pointedly uses the word 'enlarged' (Letter to Butts, 22 November 1802, p.42).

There is no doubt that Blake's enthusiasm renders him completely out of step with the direction the treatment and understanding of madness was taking in the late eighteenth century, whether considered in terms of the moral treatment exemplified by the York Retreat, as I comment on in the next section, or in terms of practical administration and confinement. According to Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863), Blake considered that, ' "there are probably men shut up as mad in Bedlam, who are not so: that possibly the madmen outside have shut up the sane people"'.[106] This sense of reversal accords with his poetry, and the remark seems to witness a double sense of 'shut up' – both confined and silenced. A symbolic illustration of this view can be seen in *Jerusalem* when, on a hopeful pilgrimage across London, Los encounters the new Bethlem in St. George's Fields, then being built: '… thence to Bethlehem where was builded / Dens of despair in the house of bread: enquiring in vain / Of stones and rocks he took his way, for human form was none' (E194, pl.45, 25-26). The nullification of humanity in a spiritual sense that Blake alludes to here has its analogue in the findings of the 1815 inquiry, which uncovered appalling conditions in which patients were cramped together in cold, damp galleries, where 'women… [were] naked and chained on straw' and 'men chained close to the wall… [and] handcuffed'.[107] The case of William Norris, who could barely move in a complex contraption, and 'had remained thus

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[106] Cited in Bentley ed., *Blake Records*, p.373.
[107] *Report*, p.11. Evidence of Edward Wakefield, M.P.

encaged and chained more than twelve years', was particularly scandalous.[108] (Haslam suggested

that Norris was so restricted because he was known to be violent). When Los enquires in 'vain / Of

stones and rocks', the character might have been speaking for a myriad of Bethlem patients. In fact,

Blake's lines were probably written towards the end of the hospital's long projected move from the

collapsing Moorfields to the new building at St. George's Fields, a procedure that Haslam was

involved in up until his dismissal.[109] Indeed, in Haslam's amended 1816 evidence to the

parliamentary inquiry, he was forced to defend the 'salubrity' of the new Bethlem, after the first

patients arrived in 1815; a 'greater proportion' of deaths were found in comparison to the old

hospital, attributed to 'the dampness of the basement story', with 'several women patients lying on

the ground' when the committee visited.[110] For Haslam, as he remarked in *Observations*, since a

satisfactory definition of insanity is impossible, 'much more advantage would be obtained if the

circumstances could be precisely defined under which it is justifiable to deprive a human being of

his liberty'.[111] For Blake, rationalism leading to deprivation of liberty *is* insanity, a source of

melancholy and despair.

'The Human Form Divine': Poetic Identity, Spectres, and Dynamic Bodies

I want to reiterate here the value of engaging with Blake's work in conjunction with that of medical

thinkers like Haslam. I have sought to understand the particular way insanity is represented within

the mythological and symbolic scheme of *The Four Zoas*. Given its complex and contentious

editorial arrangement, there can be little certainty in terms of interpretation, so it is worth

clarifying the purpose of such an undertaking. I would argue that it lies in the way the poem

encourages an *active* critical and conceptual thinking. As Morris Eaves argues, Blake was a 'mythic

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[108] *Report*, p.12.
[109] Scull and others, p.19.
[110] *First Report. Minutes of Evidence Taken before The Select Committee appointed to consider of Provision being made for the better Regulation of Madhouses, in England* (London: Ordered by The House of Commons, 26 April, 1816), p.49.
[111] Haslam, *Observations* (1809), p.4.

or metaphorical' synthesizer, fundamentally resistant to specialization, which puts him at odds with the long list of social routines that it aids and abets: rationalization, scientific thinking, professionalization, industrialization, commercialization, institututionalization, modernization'.[112] Leaving to one side industrialization, the treatment of insanity going into the nineteenth century was marked by all these routines, which makes Blake's highly oppositional stance worthy of attention. Blake's mythology has an internal logic and engages with contemporary ideas in a way which helps to crystallize major points of contention. To build on this point, and to conclude my chapter, I will contrast the Blakean understanding of the body-soul with Haslam's medical view.

Although the physical is part of the spiritual body in his conception (as 'the Human form Divine'), Blake presents the materiality of the body in considerable detail (E395, p.126, 10). The body is a site of change for Blake. Bodies are dynamic; they fuse, dissolve, and splinter; they reform, regenerate, and reformulate. Bodies can also be cities and countries. Even the products of bodies – as I have alluded to with voice – are characterized by their diversity. With the license of an artist, Blake is not held back by any sense of medical parameters, but he also employs medical diction. Having witnessed lectures on anatomy by William Hunter, the leading eighteenth-century practitioner, Blake's knowledge of the subject was more than superficial. He executed plates for the Swiss anatomist and physiologist Albrecht Von Haller (1708-77), and owned a medical book by the physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801).[113] He incorporates into his mythology, for example, an understanding of the globular theory of blood, seen when Los binds down Urizen and enters into the restrictive form of the organic body: 'The globe of life blood trembled Branching out into roots; / Fibrous, writhing upon the winds' (E338, p.55, 24-5). This is a good example of Blake's multi-directional use of imagery, since 'globe' is used in many other senses in *The Four Zoas*, in a

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[112] Morris Eaves, 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.5-15 (pp.7-8).

[113] Richard C. Sha, 'Blake, Liberation and Medicine', in *Liberating Medicine, 1720-1835*, ed. Tristanne Connolly & Steve Clark (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), pp.83-95 (p.85).

way that draws attention to perspective, as in the formation of the self-balancing 'watry Globe' in the first Night (E302, p.5, 25).

Blake's view of the body-as-soul is radically removed from Locke's idea of personal identity. Connolly has given a useful summary of the issues here:

> Substance for Locke is necessary to imagine, and impossible to know. Blake, I would venture, sees the human form divine, the eternal body, as substance. This is similar to the traditional idea of the substantial soul as defining personal identity, holding the qualities of one person together, but Blake's concept of the soul is non-traditional in many ways, not least of which is his view of the soul as multiple and/or divisible.[114]

Even when allied to a knowledge of contemporary medical thinking and anatomy, this belief in a multiple and divisible soul makes considerations of the organic body secondary at best in Blake's understanding of insanity. There is no sense, for instance, that deficiencies of the organic body are the leading cause of mental disturbance. Where Blake's poetic identity is concerned, his unorthodox view of the soul is paramount. The 'Prophetic dreads' of 'Eternal death' so closely associated with insanity in *The Four Zoas* threaten Blake's sense of a universal identity in an 'Eternal Brotherhood' (E328, p.41, 7-9). Locke makes self 'that conscious thing, (whatever substance, made up of whether spiritual, or material, simple, or compounded, it matters not…'.[115] The philosopher's contention that human identity is based on both the material body and the immaterial soul could not be more thoroughly rejected by Blake, who never admits the finite limitations imposed by death. Blake's view also differs from the older idea of the soul-in-substance which was premised on the indivisibility of the soul, assuring, as Christopher Fox explains, the individual's 'personal continuity and ontological permanence'.[116]

Against both the idea of personal identity-in-consciousness and soul-in-substance, Blake presents an active, manifold, creative identity which abhors fixity. Fixity, as seen in the binding

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[114] Connolly, p.177.
[115] Locke, *Essay*, 'Chapter XXVII' (Book II), p.307.
[116] *Locke and the Scriblerians*, p.15.

down of Urizen in *The Four Zoas*, tends to imply a loss of spiritual identity which threatens sanity; and corporeal embodiment is a sign of diminishment – a perceptual aberration or a movement down from infinity. As Blake states in his annotations to Berkeley's *Siris* (1744): 'The Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body' (E664). In his agreement with a point introduced through Themistius (317-c390 AD), that the soul imparts form to matter, Blake adds: 'This is my Opinion but Forms must be apprehended by Sense or the Eye of Imagination / Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him' (E664). Blake's conviction in this last point can be seen in the dynamic motions and Protean shifts of his imaginative characters. Tharmas, who, in one manifestation, is a chaotic sea, is not the only 'Protean Zoa'.[117] Blake's prints of Urizen in *The Four Zoas* show many different manifestations. On the page that describes his binding down by Los, Blake's illustration (a *Night Thoughts* Proof) appropriately depicts Urizen as an old man holding death's bell before a startled sleeper (Night IV; p.53).[118] As the poem describes his wandering through the collapsed cosmos, Urizen is shown in the form of a crocodile (Night VI; p.70).[119] I have already suggested that the insanity of spectres is reflected in Blake's illustrations, where the characters' forms reflect their changing spiritual status.

If matter is never the end of the matter for Blake, Haslam is part of a shift towards a more materialistic approach to madness in medicine, but this was a gradual movement. While Blake's vision of spiritual war imagines a complex interplay between divisible spirits, Haslam walked a body-soul tight-rope. Richard H. Sha has described in general terms the dilemma that mad-doctors like Haslam faced when writing about the body towards the end of the eighteenth century:

> On the one hand, scientists and physicians needed to materialize the body in order to have authority over it. On the other hand, they could not afford to risk charges of atheistic materialist determinism and thus were especially careful not to create bodies that precluded soul or spirit.[120]

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[117] Magno and Erdman, p.51.
[118] Magno and Erdman, p.167.
[119] Magno and Erdman, p.184.
[120] Sha, p.85.

Haslam can be seen carefully stepping around the soul in his medical arguments about insanity. The material focus on the brain in *Observations* projects an understanding of thinking matter which would extract the immaterial soul from an explanation of consciousness. Significantly, this occurs during comments on religious terror:

> Perhaps it is not more difficult to suppose, that matter, peculiarly arranged, may think, than to conceive the union of an immaterial being with a corporeal substance… When we find insanity… uniformly accompanied with disease of the brain, is it not more just to conclude, that such organic affection has produced this incorrect association of ideas, than that a being, which is immaterial, incorruptible, and immortal, should be subject to the gross and subordinate changes which matter necessarily undergoes? [121]

The equivocal phrasing here contrasts with Blake's declarative statements of enthusiastic faith in the imagination. While the delusions of religious despair are the delusions of an insufficient faith for Blake, Haslam regards religious terror in a Lockean sense as a wrong association of ideas caused by an organic disease. Haslam would dismiss the idea that God may be culpable in the development of religious insanity, but he clearly has a very different deity in mind to the Blakean notion of God as immanent within everyone and produced by everyone: 'He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only' (*There is No Natural Religion*; E3).

Having drawn the brain away from the divine, Haslam lacks the evidence to develop an argument on the material contribution to consciousness. As Andrew Scull notes, both Haslam and Pinel in France, 'acknowledged that the sorts of post-mortem examinations that had begun to unravel the pathology of diseases including tuberculosis and pneumonia had had no comparable successes when it came to insanity'.[122] Since the biological basis of insanity could only be assumed, many mad-doctors espoused the value of a moral approach. Haslam, in his writings at least, combined a focus on the centrality of the body with a more therapeutic approach to the management of the insane that built upon the work of Battie, and influenced the leading

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[121] Haslam, pp.240-1.
[122] Scull, *Madness in Civilization*, p.210.

exponents of moral treatment at the York Retreat. *Observations*, for instance, advocates early

confinement after the removal of the patient from his home, a limited use of coercion, and stresses

the importance of 'gentleness of manner' and 'kindness of treatment' in the recovery of the

patient.[123] *Observations* was specifically praised by Samuel Tuke, and Haslam's idea that violent

patients should be secluded in a quiet room was not only endorsed by the Retreat, but is still

incorporated within mental health practice today.[124]

Blake's embrace of antinomian enthusiasm and a manifold spiritual identity united in the

imagination clearly moves in an opposite direction to the politics of individualism, which comes to

bear on the moral theories of madness in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Despite the

damage to his reputation caused by the heavy parliamentary censure of Bethlem and the wrangling

over the Matthews case, Haslam remained a leading specialist on insanity, as Jonathan Andrews

describes: 'His publications and their promotion of some of the tenets of moral management

helped to ensure that Haslam's reputation as a specialist on mental diseases remained high,

especially on the continent where his books were in great currency'.[125] As part of his concerted

efforts to rehabilitate himself, Haslam wrote *Considerations on the Moral Management of Insane*

Persons (1817). While still insisting on a corporeal understanding of madness, Haslam strongly

asserted the importance of the moral authority of the mad-doctor, and was adamant that

confinement was essential as a spur to the recovery and dignity of the patient: '… the prospect of

returning a free agent to his family and friends, generates that self-control which awakens reason,

and induces him to admire and follow sober dictates'.[126] Samuel Tuke similarly referred to a

'rational and honourable inducement', and a mannered self-restraint as a 'principle in the human

mind'.[127] This understanding of rational self-control is overturned in Blake's idea of the 'Selfhood', a

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[123] Haslam, p.133.
[124] Scull and others, *Masters of Bedlam*, p.28.
[125] Jonathan Andrews, 'Haslam, John (*bap.* 1764, *d.* 1844)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12548 [accessed 1 Sept 2016].
[126] Haslam, *Considerations*, p.73.
[127] *Description Of The Retreat,* p.157.

concept which is most prominent in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* (E147, pl.5, 22). In his commentary on *A Vision of The Last Judgment*, Blake summarizes its pernicious effects as: 'The Humiliation of the Reasoning & Doubting Selfhood' (E563).

The 'Selfhood' can already be seen in the spectres of *The Four Zoas*. To find redemption, spectral identity has to be shaken off, just as the 'Selfhood' has to be cast off in *Jerusalem* (E147, pl.5, 22). In both poems, Blake uses versions of the same word to describe this. In *The Four Zoas*, when the Spectre of Urthona self-declares his insanity, the character suggests that the 'spectres of the Dead' must be 'annihilated' before redemption is possible (*The Four Zoas*; E360, p.84, 42). In Chapter 1 of *Jerusalem*, the poetic 'I' announces the mission of the poem: 'O Saviour pour upon me thy Spirit of meekness & love: / Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life!' (E147, pl.5, 21-22). Prophetic art prospers in *The Four Zoas* only after Los embraces the Spectre of Urthona, which signals an end to the insanity of an individualized will: '… Los embracd the Spectre first as a brother / Then as another Self; astonishd humanizing & in tears / In Self abasement Giving up his Domineering lust' (E367, p.95, 29-31). Humanity is located in the collective, not the individualized self. Redemption is an active process, a wrestling for the eternities of imagination in which spirits have to be reordered: 'They must renew their brightness & their disorganized functions / Again reorganize till they resume the image of the human / Cooperating in the bliss of Man obeying his Will / Servants to the infinite & Eternal of the Human form' (E395, p.126, 14-17). This inverts any simple paradigmatic opposition between reason and insanity by suggesting that both are delusive in a disorganized world of fragmented spiritual identities.

Redemption and sanity are found in active resistance to separation and solitude, to what one of Blake's divine 'Eternals' describes as, 'selfish cold repose / Forsaking Brotherhood & Universal love in selfish clay' (E401, p.133, 13). Unlike Cowper's negatively defined salvation, Blake's redemption is a positive, optimistic vision: 'Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face / Each shall behold the Eternal Father & love & joy abound' (E402, p.133, 25; referring in the manuscript to Ephesians 3: 10). Achieving redemption is a continuous struggle, a point conveyed by

comments placed right at the end of *The Four Zoas* manuscript: 'Unorganizd Innocence, All Impossibility / Innocence dwells with Wisdom but never with Ignorance' (E697, p.93). Innocence – the return to human divinity– has to be constantly re-organized, constantly re-enacted. Underlying this struggle is the Blakean notion of 'States', which, as Peter Ackroyd suggests, 'allows for an alternative understanding of what we would now call human psychology'.[128] The concept is introduced in Night VIII of *The Four Zoas* in the context of Los's speech of repentance before the satanic figure of Rahab, who is advised on, 'The Difference between States & Individuals of those States' (E380, p.105, 23-4). While the 'State' of Satan is itself beyond redemption, it is possible for individuals who enter into the satanic 'State' – like Luvah in the poem – to redeem themselves. I would suggest that what is true for Satan is also true for insanity.

Blake explicitly contrasts an unstable, corporeal, and fallen identity with an eternal, unchanging one based on these immortal 'States', as described in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*: 'Man Passes on but States remain for Ever… Eternal Identity is one thing & Corporeal Vegetation is another thing' (E556, p.76-9). In my second chapter, I raised a point made by Chris Mounsey, suggesting that Smart and Blake tend to collapse any opposition between self and world (where Cowper does not). In the case of Blake, Mounsey alludes to the idea of 'contraries' in the specific Blakean sense of Innocence and Experience:

> The self is not an independent existing centre which may or may not exist in the world, but is one part of the self and the world 'contraries' in the process of Experience. Man needs both the energy of the body to go into the world to bring back Experience and the Affections which order it and produce Understanding from it so as to become whole.[129]

I would concur with this, but also emphasize how dynamic, and ceaseless a process it is to move between 'Innocence' and 'Experience', as infinite, perhaps, as Smart's praise. There is no space

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[128] Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Vintage, 1995), p.294.

[129] 'Christopher Smart and William Blake: a Distinctive Mode', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth* ed. by Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.166-81 (p.178).

here to detail the function of the 'Selfhood' in *Jerusalem* or *Milton*, but it is possible to see how closely the concept is associated with spectres. In the notes to 'the Deists' at the end of Chapter 2 in *Jerusalem*, Blake explains:

> Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary. But your Greek Philosophy… teaches that Man is Righteous in his Vegetated Spectre (E200, pl.52).

In a fallen world, Blake suggests that an effusive spiritual identity has to be constantly re-made – it cannot be defined or fixed in the organic body. Identity is a creative process continuously renewed by the fountain of redemptive imagination, which ultimately restores sanity.

Despite the obscure and archaic terms of Blake's mythology, *The Four Zoas* anticipates modern problems in mental health and social relations, which are arguably exacerbated by a rampant individualism that the presentation of spectres and 'Selfhood' seem to anticipate. Blake is relevant not only in his status as a consummate artist, but also as a critical thinker who 'rouzes the faculties to act' (Letter to Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799, p.8). Haslam has been recognized as an important figure in the history of psychiatry, and he is, in some ways, a forward-thinking doctor: concerned with material evidence, sceptical, advocating rigour, focused on what is practically possible. That he also became a central figure in a nation-wide scandal, and then subsequently rehabilitated himself, indicates something of the complex nature of the public debate on madness at a time when objectively-styled approaches to the condition had no secure institutional footing. I have pointed to some of the ways in which the work of Blake and Haslam intersect present-day discussions of mental health, but I now want to draw my conclusions together alongside the other central figures of this thesis – and look beyond the spectres of this chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I have looked at some of the ways in which madness as a protean concept played out in the eighteenth century in both medicine and poetry, from the '*Proteus*' shapes' of William Battie to the 'Proteus disorder' of John Haslam and the protean Zoas of William Blake. Madness as a metaphorical slur on social and religious groups has been seen alongside various forms of it as a disease condition, from nervous affectations to terrifying mental and spiritual torments. The characterization of madness as protean in medicine is a testament to the difficulty in understanding a concept which involves so complex an organ as the brain and variable environmental factors, alongside humoural, mechanical, and neurological views of the body. One of the most fascinating aspects of madness in the early nineteenth century, where my study ends, is the sense that a medical hold on madness was by no means assured when Haslam and Monro were justifying their authority to lunacy reformers in 1815. Madness, whether understood as primarily a spiritual issue or a brain disease, was an elusive concept, and a large number of the institutions associated with treating it had had their reputations damaged from an already low base of public support.

William Battie's sense that the essentials of madness could be explained away in a treatise now appears fantastically ambitious given the capability of eighteenth-century medicine. Battie, though, recognized the limitations of any one doctor's approach when he promoted a medical research base within a hospital, a very modern move when one considers the current clinical and academic partnerships between hospitals and research organizations like the Institute of Psychiatry and the King's Health Partners. If John Haslam became a *de facto* representative of the Bethlem medical establishment during an scandalous era, he also points to a medical science which acknowledges its shortcomings and attaches scepticism to speculative theory. Haslam's wariness of medical jargon is instructive for the present day, but his lack of sympathy and tendency to stereotype the insane as grotesque is an unfortunate reminder of the prejudices that can sometimes characterize medical authority. Cotton was a personally sympathetic doctor, but also

one who recognized the potential for grandiosity in medicine, balancing uncertainty with the assurance of faith. As he put it in one letter, 'The human body is so complicated a structure, as to preclude surprise at our ignorance of the facts and nature of many diseases…' (II, p.174). Cotton diplomatically sought to accommodate reason and faith through personal humility: '… let you and myself act the parts of reason and religion; and in every difficulty, where the former cannot sustain us, most assuredly the latter will' (II, p.168).

Not all eighteenth-century observers held madness to be absolute, and reason was interrogated as well as celebrated. It should be recalled that Locke wrote in the *Essay*, 'there are degrees of madness, as of folly; the disorderly jumbling [of] ideas together, is in some more, and some less'.[1] The modern psychiatric sense that we are on a continuum with the extremes of mental disorder at one end and a precarious mental health at the other can already be seen in this period. It is observable in a remark given by Haslam during court evidence taken towards the end of his life: ' "I never saw any human being of sound mind... I presume the Deity is of sound mind, and he alone" '.[2] This is a startling comment given Haslam's earlier sense of reason's solidity, and given the complex interplay between evangelicalism, enthusiasm, and madness in the eighteenth century. Mad-doctors had to reckon with religion in a nuanced way, separating an acceptable form of Anglicanism from the more controversial forms of religious practice, which they were not shy of implicating in the causation of mental unrest. The hostility towards Methodism harboured by the Monros, Pargeter, and Haslam was, though, countered by the 'prominence' of evangelicals in the early nineteenth-century lunacy reform movement, and a 'gradual reassimilation of divine service into a new generation of hospitals and asylums'.[3] Even if it wanted to, medicine could not extricate religion from insanity or its treatment.

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[1] Locke, *Essay*, 'Chapter XI: Of Discerning, And Other Operations of the Mind' (Book II), p.157.
[2] Cited in William Cummins, 'Lectures on Forensic Medicine', in *The London Medical Gazette*, 19 (March 18, 1837), pp.913-21 (p.916).
[3] Andrews and Scull, *Undertaker*, p.92.

Cowper's *Adelphi* and *Poems* show that exclusively religious frameworks for understanding madness could be advocated throughout the eighteenth century. As Cotton's career indicates, older Protestant models of religious counsel and advice for the treatment of melancholy, in particular, were reinvigorated by the evangelical revival, even if Wesley and Whitefield were literally denied entry to Bethlem hospital.[4] The representation of melancholy in Cowper's work, though, also points to the larger social context. Cowper presented a melancholy with theological, nervous, and social aspects. It cannot be entirely accounted for in terms of Calvinistic doctrine; other issues pertain, including a personal bashfulness, the loss of social relationships, the boredom and loneliness experienced in retirement, and the proximity to a nature sometimes seen to be indifferent to human concerns. In this way, Cowper's melancholy becomes closer to the modern experience of depression. 'By examining the history of melancholia and depression', Clark Lawlor writes, 'we can see that the depressed patient is not reducible to a biochemically deficient machine, but an individual embedded in a complex social environment'.[5] It may be easier to connect historical conditions like melancholy and the spleen to the modern understanding of depression than it is to trace a path from eighteenth-century conditions to schizophrenia or psychosis. Melancholy trades in a human sadness which is, to a greater or lesser extent, universally experienced. Any linkage is clearly problematic, though, not least because depression and schizophrenia today are closely related and can be difficult to distinguish in a way which is reminiscent of the movements between melancholy and other forms of madness in the eighteenth century.

Given its protean shifts, it is pertinent to ask how valuable a term *madness* is. One of the ways in which *madness* seems to function today is as a site of resistance to the hold that biological psychiatry has over ideas of mental health, as Jim Geekie and John Reed write: 'By using the term

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[4] Andrews and Scull, p.81. They wanted to visit Methodist patients, including the 'sane' Joseph Periam, and 'castigated James Monro and his colleagues for giving him purges and vomits when what he needed was counsel and guidance'.

[5] *From Melancholia to Prozac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.202.

'madness' the experience is wrested from the grip of a few select experts on 'schizophrenia' and

'psychosis', and portrayed not as a medical condition… but rather as an aspect of the human

condition, about which we all can have our say'.[6] In the same vein, Lawlor comments on a

preference to use the term *melancholy* rather than *depression*: '… a demand from theorists and

practitioners of various persuasions that we reinstate a model of the human that escapes the

reductionism of biochemical definitions'.[7] This is also reflected in accounts written by patients who

define their own experiences in terms of *madness* rather than diagnostic criteria, and in

movements like Mad Pride. The founders of *The Madness and Literature Network* (MLN) comment

on terminology as they define their aims:

> The term 'madness' is employed deliberately to signal our alignment with literary and historical
> scholarship and our commitment to a broad, inclusive approach, rather than a necessarily narrower
> clinical focus as would be implied by terms such as 'mental disorder', 'mental illness', or by naming a
> specific illness in our titling. We encourage individual reviewers to use whichever language they are
> comfortable with or find useful when writing for our site.[8]

Tellingly, this shows that there is still no consensus on the language of mental disturbance.

Ironically, the term *madness* – which carried so much stigma in the eighteenth century – has now

been adopted as part of a 'broad, inclusive approach'. Today, more stigma is attached to the

diagnoses of modern psychiatry than a 'madness' liberally bestowed in socio-political as well as

medical contexts.[9] In the eighteenth century, madness was used metaphorically in numerous ways,

too, but, in medicine, it also referred to an illness in a way that now it does not. In the recognition

of human suffering, the writers of the MLN indicate that the stakes involved remain as high as ever.

My own sense is that *madness* is a useful umbrella term as well as historically unavoidable. There is

also an issue of ownership which should be respected. Clearly, people who have had the

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[6] *Making Sense of Madness: Contesting the Meaning of Schizophrenia* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.16.
[7] Lawlor, p.200.
[8] Paul Crawford, Charley Baker and others, *The MLN 2016* http://www.madnessandliterature.org/index.php
[accessed 10 September 2016], 'Aims and Objectives'.
[9] I am writing up this thesis at a time when 'madness' or 'lunacy' are ubiquitous terms in political discourse
after a divisive EU Referendum campaign and musical differences within the Labour Party.

misfortune to be diagnosed with a mental disorder have the right to use any language they see fit to describe their experiences. Rather than a narrow clinical focus, the term *madness* might enable a broad-based discussion to take place about a particularly complex and enduring human problem without discriminating against any one approach. It should be recalled, though, that eighteenth-century mad-doctors, including Haslam, worried after Thomas Beddoes, that *madness* signified a concept both full and empty, 'everything and nothing'. In this context, the present-day adoption of *madness* is suggestive of attitudes towards the questionable authority of biological psychiatry, and underlines the rejection of the language it is employing.

The contemporary understanding of mental illness has some of the same characteristics as the protean madness of the eighteenth century, when agreement on what constitutes mental disorder is constantly shifting as each new edition of the *DSM* or *ICD* subtly alters the terrain. In the latest edition of the American *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (widely used in British psychiatric services), there is a desire for 'Harmonization' with the other major diagnostic manual for mental illnesses produced by the World Health Organization, the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-11): '… the existence of two classifications complicates attempts to replicate scientific results across national boundaries'.[10] Given the uncertainty over the language of madness and mental disturbance, dialogue between different cultural groups, and an openness to alternative ways of thinking are vital, and it is here that my sense of the value of poetry comes in. Poetry is an exercise in listening and poems like *Jubilate Agno* and *The Four Zoas* require time and patience to appreciate, but they are certainly rewarding. It may be impossible to verify the experience of madness, but Smart, Cowper, and Blake, in different but related ways, all offer an insight into the human response to madness, part of which *is* the struggle to articulate what madness is. Cowper may never have favourably resolved his own spiritual crisis, but he certainly represented human suffering in a compelling way. His work invites a debate about our most basic

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[10] *DSM: American Psychiatric Association*, 5th edn (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), p.11.

needs and desires. This might be interpreted ungenerously to suggest that he exaggerated a mental

condition for personal gain, but it seems more probable to me that he explored personal themes

which he might have preferred to ignore: self-murder, solitude, introversion. Where Cowper

presents spiritual abandonment, one of the first poems Smart produced after the personal disaster

of confinement in a madhouse was, 'On a Bed of Guernsey Lilies' (published 1764). A beautiful lyric

poem with a remarkably optimistic tone, it bears witness to the surety of the poet's faith:

> Yet still the philosophic mind
> Consolatory food can find,
> And hope her anchorage maintain:
> We never are deserted quite;
> 'Tis by succession of delight
> That love supports his reign (IV, p.348, 15-20).

I hesitate to call this a poem of personal recovery since its sense of renewal is collective, but it

certainly resonates with the present-day idea of *recovery*, as Smart succinctly illuminates the

aesthetic and physical benefits of nature for the mental health of everyone.

Smart was much more comfortable than Cowper in identifying himself as a poet – a 'bard' –

but he, Cowper, and Blake all produced a religious poetry of undeniable cultural reach. Karina

Williamson notes that Smart influenced the Beat poets in post-war America, cultivating

'derangement' before madness was 'reconceptualized as a cultural and sociological phenomenon

by R.D. Laing and Michel Foucault'.[11] In 2007, the popularity of *Jubilate Agno* was signalled when

Frank Key and Germander Speedwell posted a complete reading of the poem on the internet.[12]

Cowper was a favourite writer of Jane Austen and his influence on Christianity through the

hymnbook was clearly profound.[13] His anti-slavery poem, 'The Negro's Complaint', was quoted by

Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights era in America. Blake's influence on artists and poets is so

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[11] 'Surfing the intertext: Smart among the moderns', in *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, pp.255-90 (p.256).
[12] 'Jubilate Agno… read by Frank Key', https://archive.org/details/JubilateAgno [accessed 5 April 2014].
[13] John Halperin, 'The worlds of Emma: Jane Austen and Cowper', in *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp.197-207 (p.198).

vast it is difficult to know where to start. Aldous Huxley, Carl Jung, and Bob Dylan are among those directly influenced by his work. In London, Blake's presence as an artist is of course everywhere. When I was writing up this thesis, I was struck by the resemblance between the imagery of 'Each Man is in his Spectre's power', and the postures of London's homeless (see Appendix II: Figure 8). The spectre as a metaphor of negative human identity, of the madness of despair, is one instance of Blake's conceptual power. One of the ironies about his canonization after a life of relative obscurity is the now paradoxically strong sense of Blake's personal identity as an artist and writer. His work, though, advocates a democratic, collective identity, which is perhaps best reflected by his continuing influence on other artists, who, in a way, validate his 'madness', his voice (as is also the case with Smart and Cowper).[14]

Shaun Irlam has made the argument that all three poets can be included among a group who reclaim the 'forms of poetic enthusiasm'.[15] Reading them together certainly concentrates attention on the line between religion and pathology, which is a timely issue. While working as a nurse in the current mental healthcare system, I recall an interview in which a patient was being 'given' a diagnosis of schizophrenia. The patient self-identified as a Christian, but was understood by the medics on the ward to be 'hearing voices' and to have 'delusions'. The consultant psychiatrist responsible for the person's care commented during the assessment: 'I understand that you believe in God, and that's OK. I think it's daft, but I respect your beliefs'. This came across as an insensitive remark, dismissive and unengaging. Many people still identify themselves through their religious faith and tensions are easily raised if the liberty of the individual has been removed or restricted. An occasional glance at the news is enough to see that the relationship between strong religious faith and medical authority remains a problematic one. For all the emphasis on

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[14] I think Jackie Leven's song, 'To Live and Die in Levenland', has a good sense of Blake's idiosyncratic power as an artist with its closing refrain, 'And then the sun came out and bath-ed me / In William's Blake Eternity'.
[15] *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.32 and p.54. With Cowper, the author's argument is applied to *The Task*. I would dispute whether Cowper's uncomfortable relationship with enthusiasm in *Poems* (1782) would make his point.

communication skills, meaningful dialogue between healthcare workers and patients, or between different professional groups, can be very poor.

The diagnostic criteria for 'Dissociative Identity Disorder' in the new *DSM* shows that there is a concern in modern psychiatry for cultural and religious sensitivities:

> Disruption of identity characterized by two or more distinct personality states, which may be described in some cultures as an experience of possession. The disruption in identity involves marked discontinuity in sense of self and sense of agency, accompanied by related alterations in affect, behavior, consciousness, memory, perception, cognition, and/or sensory-motor functioning. These signs and symptoms may be observed by others or reported by the individual… The disturbance is not a normal part of a broadly accepted cultural or religious practice.[16]

The word 'normal' in psychiatry ought to be approached with great care. Rather like madness in the eighteenth century, there is an assumption that medics will recognize normality when they see it. The fine balance between respecting religious and cultural traditions and determining pathological behaviour is evidenced in further commentary on this disorder: '… the majority of possession states around the world are normal, usually part of spiritual practice, and do not meet [the] criteria...'.[17] Notwithstanding the stated desire for a more flexible system of diagnosis, the *DSM* ultimately defers to the authority of doctors, and, in some respects, the criticism of *DSM-5* marks a return to the criticism of eighteenth-century mad-doctoring, as in 'The six most essential questions in psychiatric diagnosis'.[18] The leading two questions refer to the 'nature' and the 'definition' of mental disorder, with the authors summarizing three possible positions:

> The diagnostic categories represent real diseases that we can accurately name and know with our perceptual abilities, a middle, nominalist position that psychiatric disorders do exist in the real world but that our diagnostic categories are constructs that may or may not accurately represent the disorders out there, and finally a purely constructivist position that the diagnostic categories are simply constructs with no evidence of psychiatric disorders in the real world.

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[16] *DSM*, p.292.

[17] *DSM*, pp.293-4.

[18] James Philips and others, 'The six most essential questions in psychiatric diagnosis', in *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine* 7:3 (2012) **http://peh-med.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1747-5341-7-3** [accessed 1 August 2014].

In terms of mental disorder, the perception of 'real diseases', as opposed to the purely artificial constructs of theory, is as much at issue today as it was when Battie was criticized for his hypotheses. The middle position – that the tools of medicine have not managed to 'represent' the mental disorders that really are 'out there' – also recalls Battie and Haslam. Indeed, what is striking about the *DSM* in this context is that, despite the modern techniques of brain imaging, epidemiology, and genetics, uncertainty over diagnostic definition persists to such an extent that a quite new 'dimensional' approach is called for by the producers of the latest manual: '… the boundaries between many disorder "categories" are more fluid over the life course than DSM-IV recognized, and many symptoms assigned to a single disorder may occur… in many other disorders'.[19] Just as it promises more precision, psychiatry tends to present more uncertainty, or at least more layers of complexity.

As a medium which has always made much of doubt, often in the context of religious faith, poetry has a value quite other that that of the accelerating nosologies of biological psychiatry. The poetry of Smart, Cowper, and Blake has certainly been an aid in my own navigation of the bewildering complexities of modern mental healthcare. It seems appropriate to end this study with an affirmation of poetry as an art form which enables us to converse with the past in a way which reflects the depth of feeling and the incredible richness of human experience – something which is impossible to contain in a diagnostic category. Poetry is by its nature protean. I leave the last word to the voice who spoke of the 'Mind-forgd manacles': 'Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race!' (*Jerusalem*; E146, pl.3).

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[19] *DSM*, p.5.

Appendix I: Timeline

(**1621**) *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton

(**1679**) *Lucida Intervalla* by James Carkesse

(**1681**) *The Anatomy of the Brain and the Description and Use of the Nerves* by Thomas Willis

(**1691**) *A Discourse Concerning Trouble of Mind and the Disease of Melancholly* by Timothy Rogers

(**1704**) *A Tale of a Tub* by Jonathan Swift

(**1713**) *Poems* by Anne Finch

(**1714**) **Act for the More Effectual Punishing such Rogues, Vagabonds, Sturdy Beggars, and Vagrants, and Sending them Whither They Ought to be Sent** (authorizes two or more Justices of the Peace to secure the arrest of any person 'furiously mad and dangerous', and that person to be incarcerated in a secure place so long as 'such lunacy or madness shall continue'.

(**1716**) *The Signs and Causes of Melancholy* by Richard Baxter

(**1724**) *A Treatise of the Spleen or Vapours* by Sir Richard Blackmore

(**1728**) Monro dynasty (1728-1882) begins at Bethlem with the appointment of James Monro

　　　The Dunciad (1728-43) by Alexander Pope

(**1731**) Cowper born

(**1733**) *The English Malady* by George Cheyne

(**1739**) *The London Citizen Exceedingly Injured* by Alexander Cruden

(**1744**) **Amendment of 1714 Act** to include 'those who by lunacy or otherwise are so far disordered in their Senses that they may be dangerous to be permitted to go Abroad'.

(**1747**) *Primitive Physic* by John Wesley

(**1750**) *The Midwife* (1750-3) edited by Smart

(**1751**) St. Luke's Hospital opens

　　　Visions in Verse by Nathaniel Cotton

(**1753**) Cowper's first major mental crisis

(**1755**) *Dictionary of the English Language* by Samuel Johnson

(**1757**) Smart admitted to St. Luke's; discharged 'uncured' twelve months later

      Blake born

(**1758**) *A Treatise on Madness* by William Battie; *Remarks on Dr Battie's Treatise* by John Monro

      Smart admitted to Potter's private madhouse

(**1759**) *Rasselas* by Samuel Johnson

(**1760**) George III begins his reign

      Murder trial of Lord Ferrers; attempted plea of insanity but crime seen as a proof of

depravity not madness

(**1762**) George III's first signs of insanity

(**1763**) Final work on *Jubilate Agno* by Christopher Smart (began between June 1758 and April 1759,

but not published until 1939, as *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song From Bedlam*)

      Song to David by Smart

      Cowper enters Cotton's 'Collegium Insanorum' at St. Albans

      Parliamentary committee investigating abuses in private madhouses; Smart released from

Potter's private madhouse

(**1764**) Cowper's conversion to evangelicalism during recovery

      Authentic Narrative by John Newton

(**1765**) Cowper leaves St. Albans for Huntingdon

(**1766**) Decision made to close Bethlem to public viewings

      Report of the Coroner's Inquest into the Death of John Brown by John Brown

(**1767**) Cowper writing *Memoir*

      Cowper's arrival at Olney

(**1770**) Ticket only, keeper-accompanied tours at Bethlem

      Second part of Cowper's *Memoir* – now *Adelphi*

(**1771**) Death of Smart

(**1773**) Cowper's third major mental crisis after engagement with Mrs. Unwin is broken off

(**1774**) **Act for Regulating Private Madhouses** (private madhouses to be licensed; confinement required certification from a medical practitioner (unless a pauper); also required inspection by either magistrates (in the provinces) or a five-man commission from the Royal College of Physicians (London)

(**1779**) *Olney Hymns* by Cowper and Newton

(**1782**) *Poems* by Cowper

   Observations… on Insanity (1782-6) by Thomas Arnold

(**1783**) Peace of Paris: independence of American colonies recognized by Britain

(**1785**) *The Task* by Cowper

(**1786**) Margaret Nicholson lunges at George III with a cake knife and is taken before the Privy Council; declared insane without facing trial and immediately conveyed to Bethlem where she lives out her life as an 'incurable' on the criminal wing

(**1787**) Cowper has fourth major mental crisis

   St. Luke's finally moves to Old Street after delays (first agreed in 1776)

(**1788**) George III acutely unwell

(**1789**) *A Treatise on the Real Cause and Cure of Insanity* by Andrew Harper

(**1790**) *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-3) by Blake

(**1791**) *The French Revolution* by Blake

(**1792**) *Various Pieces* by Nathaniel Cotton

   Observations on Maniacal Disorders by William Pargeter

(**1793**) *America* by Blake

(**1794**) Cowper's fifth major mental crisis

   Europe, The Book of Urizen, Songs of Innocence and Experience by Blake

(**1796**) The York Retreat founded

Address to Humanity by William Belcher

(**1797**) James Tilly Matthews admitted to Bethlem

Blake's Illustrated *Night Thoughts* published but only one volume appears

Vala, or The Four Zoas (c.1797-1807) by Blake (first published by Yeats and Ellis in 1893)

(**1798**) James Tilly Matthews transferred to the incurable wing at Bethlem

Observations on Insanity by John Haslam

Intellectual Electricity by William Belcher

An Inquiry into… Mental Derangement by Alexander Crichton

(**1800**) **Act for the Safe Keeping of Insane Persons Charged with Offences**

Trial of James Hadfield for attempting to assassinate George III; Hadfield acquitted on the

grounds of being a religious maniac, and confined in Bethlem; leading to above Act

Death of Cowper

(**1800**) Blake in Felpham with William Hayley (1800-3)

Milton (c.1800-1810) by Blake

(**1801**) George III assumed to be insane

Blake engraves Hayley's *Cowper* biography

(**1803**) Blake arrested following encounter with soldiers

(**1804**) Blake tried for seditious libel and acquitted

Jerusalem (c.1804-1820) by Blake

Practical Observations on Insanity by Joseph Mason Cox

(**1807**) Appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Commons to investigate 'the State of

the Criminal and Pauper Lunatics in England and Wales'

(**1808**) **Wynn's Act** enabled but did not require authorities to establish county asylums

(**1809**) Blake's Broad St. exhibition

(**1810**) George III's final period of assumed insanity during which he is confined in Windsor Castle

Illustrations of Madness by John Haslam

(**1811**) Regency Bill

(**1812**) PM Spencer Perceval assassinated by John Bellingham, an alleged lunatic; Bellingham is

hanged as his claim to insanity is dismissed

(**1813**) *Description Of The Retreat* by Samuel Tuke

(**1814**) Parliamentary commission into the state of madhouses

     Report From The Committee on Madhouses in England (1814-15)

(**1815**) *Observations of the Physician and Apothecary of Bethlem Hospital* by John Haslam

(**1816**) Three parliamentary bills on lunacy (1816-19) advocating more rigorous inspection by

'outsiders' and the building of county asylums; passed in the Commons but defeated in the Lords

(due to localist objections and resistance from within the medical profession)

(**1817**) *Observations on Insanity* by Spurzheim

(**1820**) First complete copy of *Jerusalem* by Blake

(**1827**) Death of Blake

(**1828**) The **County Asylums Act** required magistrates to send annual returns of admissions,

discharges and deaths to the Home Office, giving Secretary of State option to send a visitor to any

county asylum; the **Madhouse Act** established a new Metropolitan Commission to license and

supervise lunatic asylums in the metropolitan area; had power to refuse or revoke licenses; made

some requirements over record-keeping; and required a resident medical officer if there were

more than 100 patients in an asylum; in the provinces, the Act strengthened inspection provisions

(by combination of paid medical visitors and unpaid magistrates) but only applied to private

madhouses (not to county asylums) while visitation and licensing duties also remained with the

magistrates

(**1845**) The **Lunatics Act** made the Lunacy Commission a permanent national body and established

a nationwide inspectorate of all kinds of asylum

    The **Second Lunatics Act** (made the erection of county and borough asylums compulsory in

order to house pauper lunatics; separate, less costly buildings set-up for chronic lunatics.

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Appendix II: Artwork

Figure 1

'O Proteus… with the form of an actor, who at one moment takes the limbs of a man, at another those of a beast, come tell us why you turn into all shapes, so that, forever changing, you have no fixed form?'[1]

[1] Jörg Breu the Elder in Andrea Alciato, *The Book of Emblems* (Emblema CLXXXIII) http://www.mun.ca/alciato/e183.html [accessed 10 March 2014]. Description by Alciato.

Figure 2 *Jubilate Agno* (B645-704): '*For the colours are spiritual (B650)… For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry*' (B695).[2]

Figure 3 William Battie (1703-76) holding a copy of *Reasons for the establishing and further encouragement of St. Luke's Hospital for Lunaticks. Together with the rules and orders for the government thereof*. The hospital was founded in 1751.[3]
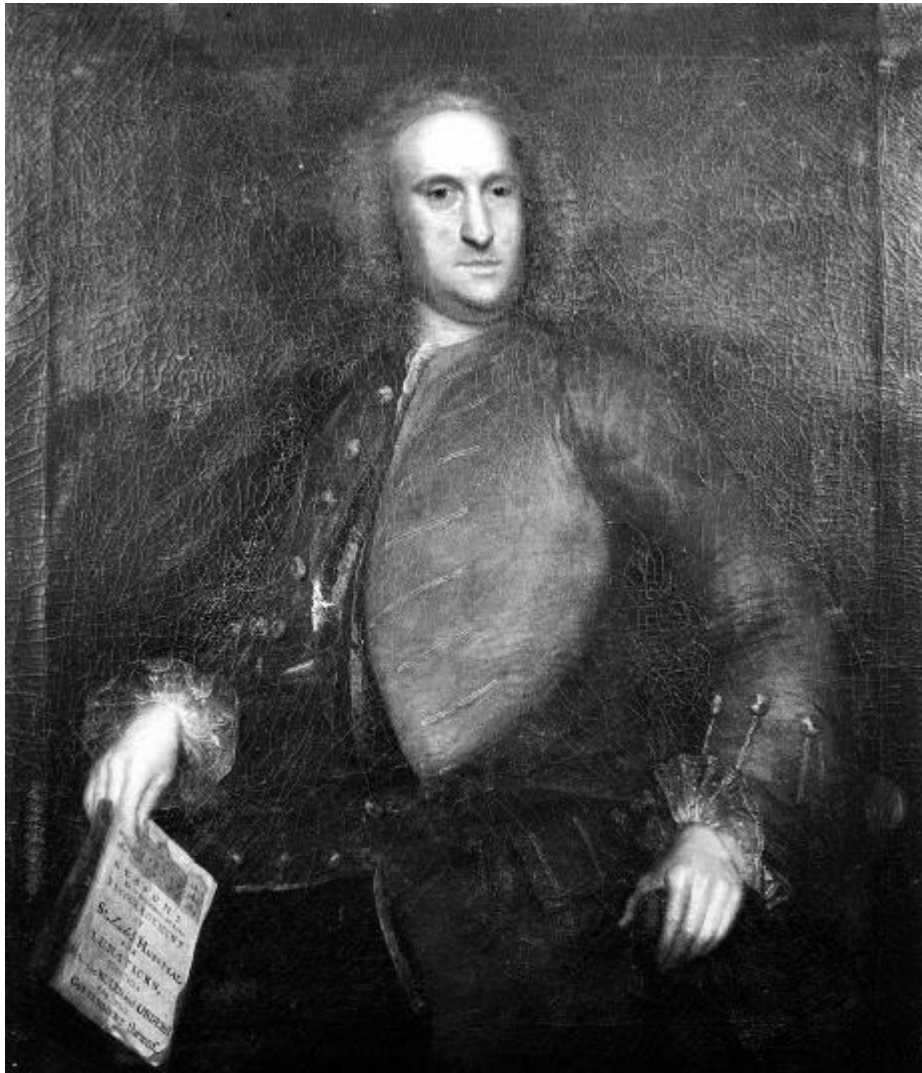
[3] Unknown artist, *Battie*. Oil Portrait, Royal College of Physicians, London.

Figure 4 The 'Collegium Insanorum' at St. Albans (c.1800)[4] and **Figure 5** Portrait of Nathaniel Cotton (1707-88).[5]

[4] Unknown artist, *Collegum Insanorum*, St. Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society.
[5] Unknown artist, *Cotton* (published 1820), National Portrait Gallery, London. *Herts Advertiser*, May 2012 http://www.stalbanshistory.org/page_id__574.aspx [accessed 26 February 2015].

Figure 6 Cowper and his writing slope – a copy of a painting by Francis Abbott (1792).[6]

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[6] *Cowper*. Reproduced from Nicola Durbridge, 'Cowper's Writing Slope', *The Cowper and Newton Museum Olney* (2012) http://www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/mw_writing_slope.pdf [accessed 1 June 2016], pp.1-20 (p.5).

Figure 7 An Engraving of Cowper by Blake, based on the 1792 portrait by George Romney, made in 1803 for Hayley's biography.[7] An earlier 1801 miniature by Blake was rejected by Lady Hesketh on the grounds that it brought out Cowper's madness.[8]
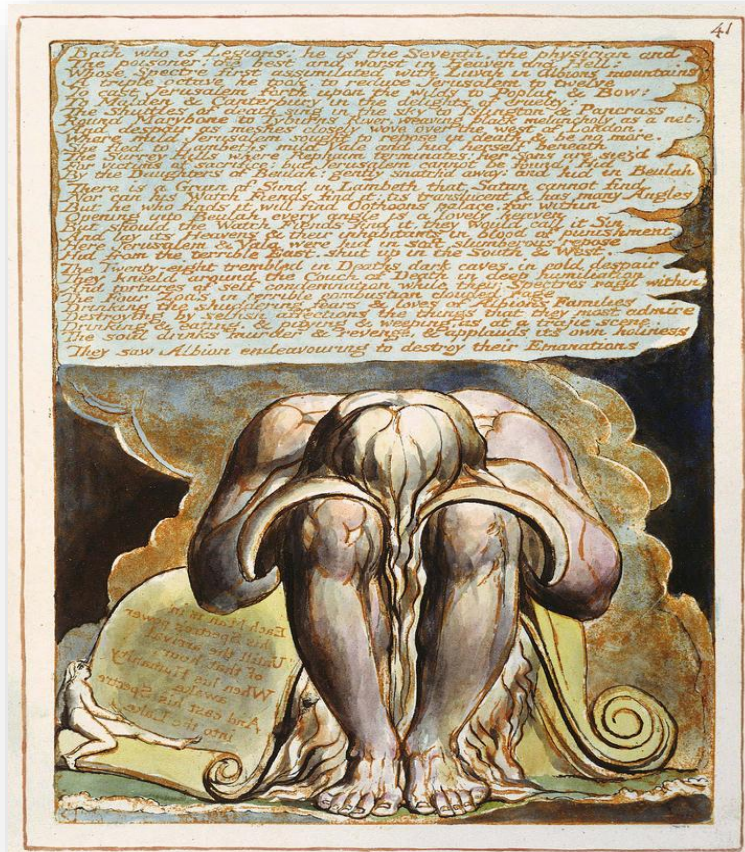

WILLIAM COWPER

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[7] Blake, *Cowper*. Robert N. Essick Collection.
[8] G.E. Bentley, ed. *William Blake: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.12.

Figure 8 'Each Man is in his Spectre's power…'. *Jerusalem*; E184, pl. 37 [41].[9]

[9] Blake, *Jerusalem, Copy E, Object 41 (Bentley 41, Erdman 37, Keynes 41)*, c.1821. Relief etching with pen, watercolour and gold. Yale Center for British Art, Yale University. Reproduced from *The Blake Archive*, http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=jerusalem.e.illbk.41&java=no [accessed January 19 2015].

Figure 10 John Haslam.[11]

[11] Henry Dawe after George Dawe, *Haslam*. Engraving. US National Library of Medicine.
http://locatorplus.gov/cgi-
bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&v1=1&ti=1,1&Search_Arg=101418034&Search_Code=0359&CNT=1&SID=1
[accessed 4 July 2016].

Figure 11 *A Visit to Bedlam* (1794) by the caricaturist Richard Newton (1777-98).

Inscriptions on the wall read: "You are a Cuckold", "You lie, you mad dog, I am as honest a woman

as any Parson's wife in London!". Just above the title at the bottom: "Admittance to his Caricature

Exhibition One Shilling".[12]

A VISIT TO BEDLAM

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[12] Newton, *A Visit to Bedlam*. Satirical print. Hand-coloured etching. British Museum Online
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=753993
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