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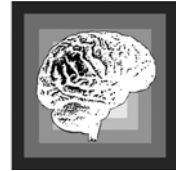
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## The (un)dress of the mad poor in England, c.1650–1850. Part 1\*

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*Part 1 of this paper discusses the representation of the mad poor in literature and (to a lesser extent) art, emphasizing how commonly they are found in states of undress. It delineates the meanings behind such portrayals, arguing that the mad were thus displayed: (a) to signify their putative intellectual/moral degradation, irrationality and ‘otherness’, and to designate them as an ontologically distinct (and inferior) species of person; (b) to denote their animality/childishness, and their proximity to Nature; (c) to reflect perceived phenomenological realities, such as that the mad were innately prone to denudation, and to tearing or destroying their clothes; and (d) as a direct appeal to charity and relief, and as a sign of their personal neglect (of decency/social codes) or neglect by others. It additionally explores medical representations and explanations of the (un)dress of the insane, before (in Part 2) comparing such representations with actual clothing provision for the mad as recorded in parochial and institutional records.*

**Keywords:** *art; Bedlam; clothing; discourse; history; literature; lunatic; madness; medical; nakedness; poverty; representation; (un)dress*

### Introduction

In the early modern period, literary and artistic representations of the poor insane tended to depict them as an agglomerated mass, or else as abused, neglected and afflicted individuals *in extremis*. By contrast, this paper will substantiate grades of poverty and madness which differentiated the nature

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and experience of provision when it came to clothing the mad poor. As Carole Neely has argued recently, historians have been too apt to conflate the multi-faceted meanings of literary discourse on insanity with the realities of care for the insane as evidenced in documentary sources (Neely, 2004, esp. chap. 6; also Jackson, 2005). In partial agreement with Neely and Jackson, this paper will elucidate the meanings of literary representations of the undress of the mad, and assess the extent to which these resonate with actual provision for the mad as evidenced in parochial, institutional, medical and other documentary sources.

Whereas the mad constitute only one rather small category of the poor, their importance in the iconography of poverty and distress, as well as their significance in terms of what was actually expended on the poor, looms larger than their number. Also, contemporary authorities seem to have assessed and provided for the clothing needs of poor lunatics substantially differently from those of other members of the sick and able-bodied poor, although this paper will be careful to draw out the evident parallels. For these reasons alone the (un)dress of the mad poor constitutes a legitimate and important subject for study.

### **Literary and artistic discourse surrounding the (un)dress of the mad poor**

As represented in literature, art and medical texts in the early modern period, madness, especially the maniacal madness of the poor, was in many ways quintessentially associated with nakedness, dishevelment and destruction of dress.<sup>1</sup> From Cibber's sculptures of raving and melancholy madness – which, from c.1676, sat astride the gates of London's Bethlem Hospital – and the final scene of Hogarth's 1735 engraving *The Rake's Progress*, to depictions such as 'Madness' in the *Anatomy of Expression* (1806) by the Scottish surgeon-anatomist, Sir Charles Bell (1774–1842), or Richard Dadd's *Agony-Raving Madness* of 1854, this seems indisputably the case.<sup>2</sup>

A number of points have been made by social, medical, literary and art historians to explain this traditional representation of the mad as naked or dishevelled. Madness, in the early modern period, implied a profound atavism, a loss of humanity and civilization, a return to an animal or primitive state. To a significant extent, clothing was held to distinguish mankind from animals, while varying degrees of nakedness often designated proximity to the base levels of beasts, uncivilized savages and the ignorant, unwashed poor. The mad were commonly perceived, like savages, as unappreciative, if not contemptuous of attire, or like animals, not fit to wear clothes, and were often represented tearing the very clothes from their backs. Like beasts, they tended to be portrayed as naked, but immune to the ravages of the temperature, driven by unbridled instincts and passions.

Representationally, if not actually, poverty had long been strongly associated with despair and disease, but from the Renaissance onwards penury also became increasingly connected with melancholy and madness. From Edmund Spenser's description of the 'dreary mansion of *Despair*' in *The Fairy Queen* to Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* vision of 'Dullness' lodging in the 'Cave of Spleen' (Pope, 1728), the despondent in mind were envisaged as degraded in appearance and dress. The downcast and dismal were not only portrayed as emotionally and mentally disordered, but were also characteristically seen as materially distressed, starved, ragged, exposed and bare:

... through penury and pine  
 ... he did never dine.  
 His garment nought but many ragged clouts,  
 With thorns together pin'd and patched was,  
 The which his naked sides he wrapt about.

(Spenser, 1596: 1.9.36)

These portrayals were significantly a product of the close association of the poor insane with vagrancy and beggary, and with the part mythic, part documentary, figure of Poor Tom (of Bedlam).<sup>3</sup> Of course, Poor Toms were not always depicted as naked, for the mad and the foolish were often identified by motley or other outlandish, fantastic garb. The figures of the patients/beggars that formed Bethlem Hospital's poor's boxes and stood in its entrance way from 1676 strongly counterpoint the naked, abject representations of insanity conveyed in other contemporary artistic productions.<sup>4</sup> Most commonly, however, Bedlam beggars were represented as raggedy and nude. One eighteenth-century penny print depicts 'Mad Tom' as a vagrant walking a desolate landscape, 'in the cold nipping Air', straws in one hand and a wanderer's staff in the other (*Catchpenny Prints*, 1970; orig. 1780s/90s).

A plaid cap threaded with straw (signifying his light-headedness) rests upon bedraggled long hair; a long patched cloak and incongruous shoes cover his nakedness. Their status as mental and social vagrants rendered the mad not only lacking clothing, but all basic necessities, including home and bedding. Most classically of all, nakedness for Shakespeare's King Lear (as for Hogarth's Rake), was a moral exemplum of how even the great and the prosperous might be reduced to the degraded level of the poor and the mad.

Literary and artistic representations of nakedness commonly defined the mad (and the poor alike) as closer to Nature, and to the infantile or antediluvian state by which mankind entered the world. 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there' (Job, 1:21). Of course, nakedness was not merely about helplessness or abjection in this formulation. Attention was concurrently drawn to the power and nobility nakedness derived from its connotation with 'natural' states of 'innocence', and with Nature. Nakedness had also long been associated with truth telling, 'naked

truth' having denoted in antiquity and in Christian times being denuded of pretension and guile. As 'a poor, bare, forked animal[s]', Poor Toms, like other lowly lunatics, symbolized 'unaccommodated' men,<sup>5</sup> elemental beings, exposed to, but also unified with, and liberated and empowered by Nature. They were not simply represented as without clothing, but as seeing no need for all basic necessities, as in Thomas D'Urfey's version of the anonymous late medieval poem, 'Mad Tom of Bedlam':

... Bedlam boys are bonney,  
For they all go bare, and they live by the air,  
And they want no drink nor money.

(D'Urfey, 1719, Vol. 4: 192)<sup>6</sup>

Rather than wandering at large as in earlier versions, in many later poems the mad tended to be pictured in hellish confinement, reflecting the growing prominence of carceral responses to insanity (e.g., Climsell/Crimsall, 1638?; Bodleian, mid 18th C? *a* and *b*).<sup>7</sup> But the mad in these texts continued to be classically portrayed as naked, or in tattered clothes and picking straws.

Denuded of the normal constraints of judgement and reason, the maniacal tended to be regarded, like animals, as dominated by prevailing passions or instincts. Yet even though depicted as ravenous as wolves, or as libidinous as goats, the mad were concurrently seen as sharing a bestial or innocent immunity to ordinary bodily discomfort, hunger and thirst:

... like wild beasts lurking in loathsome den,  
And flying fast as Roebucke through the fen,  
All naked without shame, or care of cold.

(Spenser, 1596: 2.10.7)

Such needs were provided for instead by Nature, for Poor Tom lived on 'the air', or else on the berries, wild birds and small animals he caught. While in some guises Poor Tom felt cold, in others he was insensible or oblivious to earthly discomforts and perils: 'fears no cold not robbing' ('Tom', 1660, 164–7).

The mad were depicted as naked for a host of other reasons too, including diversion and amusement. As Wiltenburg (1988) has elucidated, the rude nudity of the mad also served to make them legitimate comic figures, as in 'The Mad Man's Morrice', whose protagonist runs 'naked through the streets/Wrapt [only] in his frantick fits', being abused and mobbed by locals (Crouch, 1637, Vol. 2: 154). Nakedness was also articulated as the positive antithesis of superfluity, fashions and self-indulgent passions/appetites, associated instead with innocence, purity and hardship: 'men ... divested of their Rational Faculties ... appear naked, having no Covering, Vail, or Figg-leaves ... as ... innocent Children'. (see, e.g., Tryon, 1689: 261–2).

Connoting the removal of all artificial coverings and impediments, nakedness might also signify the good guide and the way towards truth. Hence, the blind Gloucester's decision to 'entreat' Edgar/Poor Tom 'to lead me', and Lear's discovery of his own folly and 'unaccommodated' humanity beneath the superficial, deluding trappings of his kingly office. Poor Tom's repeated plaint of being 'cold' reflected the status of the poor insane as exposed outcasts, both negligent of themselves and neglected by others. Yet nakedness also signified the charity and sympathy incumbent on the sane, especially those in superior circumstances. Thus, on being confronted with Edgar in this guise, the blind Gloucester ordered 'bring some covering for this naked soul', while the Old Man promised 'the best 'parel that I have' (Shakespeare, 1608: act iv, scene i).

The former literary and artistic portraits were themselves modelled on a much older tradition of Abraham-men and mad beggars, increasingly conspicuous figures in ballads and drama from the mid-to-late sixteenth century, as well as in contemporary diatribes against vagrants. This literature typically depicted a deranged beggar living off the pickings of the fens, rivers and fields, and whatever else he solicited from passers-by, or alternatively counterfeiting madness in order to deceive the charitable out of their purses (Wiltenburg, 1988). As Poor Tom, Edgar was not merely a 'mad', 'naked fellow/soul', a persecuted vagabond reliant on Nature for all sustenance; not merely a fallen and tormented soul subject to 'heaven's plagues' and to visions of devils (Shakespeare, 1608: act 3, scene iv). He was also a sane impostor, a masquerading, self-mortifying and frightening 'Bedlam beggar', who – disguised in 'filth', 'blanket', knotted hair and 'presented nakedness' – would 'enforce charity', 'outface' temporal persecutions and deceive his observers (act 2, scene iii). The fact alone that, already in the literary works of the mid-sixteenth century the authenticity of such figures was intensely distrusted, counsels caution against treating such constructions as faithful documentations of reality. The Kent J.P. Thomas Harman defined 'abram-men' explicitly as crafty 'knaves', counterfeits who feigned madness and a previous confinement 'in Bethlem' or elsewhere; only one in twenty were genuine (Harman, 1567: 83–4).<sup>8</sup> Other contemporary authorities, including the playwright Thomas Dekker (writing in 1612), concurred with such characterizations and exerted themselves in exposing these phoneyes.<sup>9</sup>

These types of judgements were reinforced by punishments meted out to dissemblers by courts and houses of correction, like London's Bridewell, alongside which Bethlem had been jointly run since the 1550s (Andrews *et al.*, 1997).<sup>10</sup> Counterfeits who used the pretence of being expatients as a licence for begging were so worrying to Bridewell and Bethlem's governors during the 1670s and again in the 1780s that they published extensive repudiations in the London press.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the extremity of such denials had been partly inflamed by intense contemporary antipathy towards

the idle poor and those who took advantage of charity, and by growing concerns about imposture. This literature was also strongly coloured by the campaign against the social problem presented by vagrancy and beggary that the Elizabethan Poor Law had been significantly designed to confront (Beier, 1987).<sup>12</sup> Moralists and dramatists both castigated and celebrated these figures via such vehicles as Poor Tom, concurrently popularizing the imagery of (un)dress which became so intimately associated with them. While counterfeits there certainly were, a number of the wandering offenders who were hauled before Bridewell and other contemporary courts were plainly adjudged genuinely 'distracted' or 'cracked'.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the unreliability of contemporary tests for lunacy and its periodic, inconsistent nature often blurred distinctions between madness and shamming, so that punishment was given to 'impostors' who were at other times clearly identified as insane.<sup>14</sup>

The female equivalent of earlier Tom o' Bedlam depictions were Bess (or Maid) of Bedlam ballads and songs.<sup>15</sup> The anonymous song 'Mad Bess', which Henry Purcell (1659–95) arranged, described a 'Poor senseless' woman, 'cloth'd in her rags and folly', sleeping on 'straw' and acting out her 'melancholy' and grief for her dead lover by making a 'garland'. 'Cold and hungry', nourished only by natural, supernatural or imaginary foods, such as 'ambrosia' and 'nectar', she was also incurable and moribund, an already 'departed spirit'. The version by Robert Herrick (1591–1674), 'The Mad Maid's Song', also employed the (by now) stock, naturalistic imagery of bedewed, torn hair, and morbid bedecking of the beloved's grave with flowers (Herrick, 1648).<sup>16</sup>

The nakedness of the insane could also convey that, like Cupid/Eros (routinely depicted as a naked boy), their passions were denuded of reason, and early modern ballads depicted madwomen (especially) as naked and sexualized (see, e.g., 'Mad Maid', c. 1670). For example, in 'Tom O Bedlam', 'mad Maudlin' is said never to have 'waked, till the naked boy of love ... me found and stript me naked' ('Tom', 1661). Far from any prevailing gender antithesis between (innocent/erotic) images of utter nakedness and bodies bedecked in (only) garlands of flowers and other coverings of Nature, the one state was symbiotically related to the other, often via a conscious parallel of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Tatty dress commonly implied not only mental degradation from rational awareness of normative appearance, but antisocial, regressive brutishness and socio-moral decline, particularly for those fallen from higher standards of social grace and glad rags to madness, tawdriness and poverty. Portrayals of madwomen in total dishevelment, or frantically tearing their hair and clothes, marked these women out as crazy contradictions of the codes of contemporary culture and fashion – for women were expected to take especial pride in their dress and coiffure.<sup>17</sup> Despair, particularly female despair associated with the pain of love, grief and parental/male cruelty, had long been signified

by the tearing of hair and clothing, and is an emblem repeatedly found in early modern art and literature. In her surveys of European sculptures and artistic productions, Jane Kromm has clearly shown that semi-nakedness, dishevelment, torn clothing and hair were central and ubiquitous features of representations of mania. Partly explaining this by the fact that such behaviours were recognized as prominent symptoms of the extremes of mania, Kromm also argues that starker degrees of undress became more particularly associated with female frenzy from the late sixteenth century. Indeed, she demonstrates that it was through such gendered portrayals that didactic links were made between female madness, on the one hand, and sexuality, demonic possession and the ‘furies of mythology’, on the other hand, in part because ‘women’s mania was [conceived as] more violent and excessive than men’s’ (Kromm, 2002: esp. 81–5, 88–9, 106–8, 113, 120).<sup>18</sup> As the madhouse and other vehicles of confinement became more prominent and sociopolitically linked to issues such as liberty and citizenship, both in cultural discourse and in reality, such representations were translated to these settings and increasingly to figures of male madness too.

In literature, the madness of male lovers might also be portrayed as associated with clothes-rending and undress, as in the eighteenth-century ballad staged in a confinement setting, ‘The Distracted Sailor’.<sup>19</sup> Yet more commonly it was through female protagonists that love’s adversities found their echo in those of the madhouse. Particularly strong links between the anguish of courtship gone wrong and its culmination in madness, the tearing of hair and the privations of confinement are found fully articulated in the eighteenth-century ballads ‘The Distracted Maiden’ and ‘The Distracted Maiden’s Lamentation’ (Bodleian, mid-18thC?*b*). Such formulations were readily translated to the literary culture of the colonies, as in the later ballad, ‘Riley’s Courtship’:

... unto a dark chamber ...  
 With nothing but coarse blankets  
 And straw whereon to lie ...  
 She quite distracted went.  
 She wrung her hands and tore her hair ...  
 Unto a private madhouse  
 They hurried her away ...<sup>20</sup>

(Creighton, 1932)

Without doubt, many of the constituents of these models of madness had originally been popularized via the Elizabethan cult of melancholy, and via the fashionableness of mad characters and madhouse scenes in Jacobean theatre (for example, Beaumont and Fletcher, 1616, 1622; Middleton and Rowley, 1619; Webster, 1623). One of the earliest madhouse ballads, Richard Climsell/Crimpsall’s ‘Love’s Lunacie’ which placed ‘Poore Besse’ in Bethlem, ‘defloured’ of all her ‘sense’ by mad Tom, linked the tearing of clothes with

sexual despoliation and frustrated passion (Climsell/Crimsall, 1638?; Wiltenburg, 1988: 117–18).

Much contemporary literature employed states of (un)dress to equate madness with loss of material and social status, and often for distinctly moral and didactic reasons – for instance, to point out the consequences of ‘unthrift’ (Wiltenburg, 1988: 121–2). Vice versa, other works adverted to overdressing to burlesque the madness of luxury and fashion, and to preach the maintenance of appropriate social styles and boundaries. What seemed peculiarly irrational in this period was the turning upside down of the class distinctions ordinarily conveyed by dress. The rich and the high in status tended to be depicted more often as simply odd or degraded in attire. Augustan writers like Pope and Swift often harped on degradation in states of dress and bodily appearance as markers of mental decay (e.g., Pope, 1713). An idiot or lunatic for Swift was generally one who ‘muddles in the Dirt’ and ‘scow’rs the Streets without a Shirt’. Whether soldiers, poets or ‘persons of quality’, the mad might be recognizable as such because they went ‘naked all the Year’, or wore the discoloured, dirty clothes also sported by brutes, bawds and paupers (Swift, n.d.).<sup>21</sup> The rich and educated, in becoming mad, for the Augustans became almost indistinguishable from the unwashed and ignorant masses, while the poor were apt to be represented as mad when dressing above their station.

One of the reasons that poor lunatics were so commonly depicted as naked in this period was their close association with dirt and excretions. Thus, even when shown clothed, their clothes were often described as stained and stinking. According to contemporary medical authorities such as Pargeter (1792: 43), besides being extremely violent and salacious, maniacs had ‘a total disregard to cleanliness’. Augustan rationalism, in emphasizing the boundaries between the civilized and the barbarous, generally served to enhance the distinctions between the unwashed, tattered poor and the civilized, well-dressed respectable classes. In Swift’s visualizations, the mad were drawn into a close proximity with the savage and the Hottentot who urinated and defecated uncontrollably from trees on the heads of Gulliver/‘rational’ members of society. The equivalent at Bethlem were those incontinent, mischievous patients who dabbled in their urine and dung, or threw the contents of their chamber pots at questionably ‘sane’ visitors (e.g., Swift, 1710: ix; Swift, 1736).<sup>22</sup>

The popularity of such images of mad (un)dress and the regular performance of Mad Tom and kindred ballads may well have made contemporary society acutely familiar with the types of demeanour they describe.<sup>23</sup> Literary constructions helped to establish signifiers of (un)dress as key, recognizable ingredients of representational madness and its theatre. More importantly, such predicative models may also have influenced the genuinely deranged (and expectations of them), whether acting up, or adopting particular kinds of mad/sick roles. Indubitably, these models were partially based on authentic

encounters with the poor insane, for (as Part 2 of this paper will demonstrate) they were in reality often witnessed semi-naked or tearing their clothes and hair. Even if primarily being culturally constructed in states of (un)dress, the poor insane also seem to have engaged in a performative show of their mental distress, a ‘mad’ form of identity parade, sometimes pantomiming for the sympathy, attention and money of their spectators.<sup>24</sup>

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century romanticism embraced many of the themes of these earlier models, while also borrowing from previous, largely feminized incarnations of ‘Melancholy’ and ‘Despair’. Typically, once again, the madwoman was depicted mourning an enforced separation from, or loss of a lover. Perhaps the best known among these later representations is the Gothic romantic cult of Crazy Jane, made famous by Matthew Gregory Lewis in his 1793 ballad.<sup>25</sup> These balladic and artistic renditions of Crazy Jane<sup>26</sup> underlined, in even sharper relief than had Bess of Bedlam productions, madwomen’s putative proximity to Nature. Lewis’s Crazy Jane seems itself to have looked somewhat to William Cowper’s earlier creation, Crazy Kate, part of his epic poem ‘The Task’.

There often wanders one, whom better days  
Saw better clad ...  
A tatter’d apron ...  
Worn as a cloak ... hardly hides a gown  
More tatter’d still ...  
She begs an idle pin of all she meets,  
And hoards them in her sleeve; but needful food,  
Though press’d with hunger oft, or comelier clothes,  
Though pinch’d with cold, asks never. Kate is crazed.

(Cowper, 1785)<sup>27</sup>

Georgian and Victorian artistic productions borrowed from the same canon of naturalistic female madness, as in James John Hill’s ‘Mad Margery’, shown in Fig. 1. Margery’s depiction as a young woman driven mad and living in the fields, typifies contemporary romanticized images of wandering melancholic females: sporting patched clothes, clutching wild flowers, with straw woven in her hair, and a face tearful and grimy, she is eroticized by the exposure of her right shoulder. A ruined abbey in the background may symbolize ruined reason and loss of faith in god/life. Her character was probably taken from a popular song ‘Poor Mad Margery’, c.1790–1800.

Morbidity was often a key part of such conceptualizations. Madness had long been seen as akin to dying, a death of the mind, and love’s madness in particular as a pining away, bringing on physical death. More pertinently, the cold and shivering of the naked mad often presages their perishing. Poor Tom, Mad Bess and Crazy Kate were cold because they were close to the grave. ‘The Mad Wanderer’, Amelia Alderson Opie’s 1808 version of the ‘Poor



FIG. 1. Portrait of 'Mad Margery', by James John Hill. c. 1830-70  
(reproduced by kind permission of Wellcome Library, London)

Kate' ballad, had all the classic ingredients: the descent from 'better days' to 'tatters', wandering, homelessness and exposure, and an insensibility to earthly cold due to a 'hot brain' coupled with a quasi-supernatural foreboding as to the chill of the grave.<sup>28</sup> Wordsworth translated the imagery of the naturalistic, wandering and lamenting madwoman to the despair of the suicidal mother deprived of her baby, or the moribund 'mad mother' bereft of her husband. As had many earlier poets, he portrayed such women bound in spiritual and physical kinship to the natural world, disregarding of customary needs for clothing, warmth and food (Wordsworth, 1798*a*; 1798*b*: 141, 144; Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1798: 194).

Some female romantic poets appear to have balked slightly against previous, more melodramatic characterizations of female distress. However, as Showalter (1985) has argued, most still tended to adopt similar imagery of Ophelia-like women, wandering and waning, in decayed, neglected dress, their melancholic mental states mirrored in Nature. As late as 1840, Jane Taylor, was recycling much of the familiar territory of female madness, despite her evident efforts to free her portrayal from previous genres:

... her whole array  
 Bespoke neglect, indifference, and decay;  
 Yet no wild look betrayed a wandering brain,  
 – It was not 'crazy Kate,' nor 'crazy Jane;'  
 ... A common care-worn person – that was all ...  
 But still her lonely wanderings would prefer,  
 ... low, damp meadows ...  
 And curling vapours ...  
 In that desponding way:- at last she died.

(Taylor, 1840: 55–6, 57, 60–61)

Romantic madwomen continued to be sexualized through their representation in states of (un)dress. Their semi-nakedness displayed them as indecent and unconscious of prevailing decorums, but also as sexual and passionate, if not explicitly erotic and titillating – their clothes 'ill conceal[ing]' their heaving bosoms (Cowper, 1785).

Alongside these encoded meanings linking madness and poverty with unbridled desire and degradation via (un)dress, however, more sympathetic and optimistic readings might also be accommodated. Indeed, the promotion of a more feeling response to poverty and distress was a key facet of the romantic literary project. Although the mad poor were still being conceptualized as something of a race apart, literary critics and historians have long stressed a move away from earlier Augustan-style disdain of the poor towards a romanticized sensibility regarding their plight. This shift is first of all apparent in Age of Sensibility literature, but is all the more discernible in the works of prominent romantic writers, such as Wordsworth, Cowper

and Goldsmith (e.g., Bewell, 1989). These romantics infused the imagery of madness and (un)dress with a wider social poignancy and empathy for the sufferings and circumstances of the poor insane. And their reformulations do seem to reflect a growing recognition of the sensibilities of the poor mentally disabled and of the need for greater protection of their interests.

The images of mad (un)dress discussed above, may (if cautiously interpreted) tell us much about the pervading sociocultural meanings of madness in this period and about continuities and shifts in those meanings. Yet, such media present us with a rather restricted and stereotypical set of genres for viewing the poor insane and have tended to be treated in some historical scholarship as over-literal representations of attitudes to madness. They are even more misleading in seeking an understanding of the genuine provision being made for the clothing of the mad poor in early modern times. Clearly, if we are to know more precisely how the poor insane were (un)dressed in this period, we need to rely on other, more documentary sources.

### **Medical representations of madness, poverty and dress**

Medical theories surrounding insanity, as well as practitioners' direct recorded experience of the symptoms that derangement precipitated, did much to confirm the sense in which denudation and degraded appearance seemed intimate indicators of mental disease. In contemporary medical texts describing madness, denudation was repeatedly harped upon and vividly marked out the insane as insensible and atavistic. For example, in his *Remarks on Dr Battie's Treatise on Madness*, John Monro (Physician to Bethlem, 1751–92) spoke of having observed cases during his years of practice:

where ... every other quality, which distinguishes a man from a brute, seems totally obliterated ... for months (I may say years) together, lying in straw; not suffering even a rag of cloaths on [them] ... without showing any signs of discontent ... (Monro, 1758: 6)

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century medical theories tended to consider the mad as significantly altered in sensibility, and in some cases as totally deprived of sense and feeling. As the mad-doctor and divine, William Pargeter (1792: 8), put it: regarding 'their insensibility to ... cold; they feel no bad effects from its impressions; they resist indeed impressions of every kind ...'.

While the vapourish and nervous might be depicted as having refined or heightened sensibilities, the melancholic and maniacal were apt to be viewed on the opposite pole. Whether it was their blood that tended to be seen as thick and viscid, their circulation as torpid, or their nervous vessels and 'integuments' as loaded, their sensations were almost universally represented as dulled or distorted. It was on this basis that the mad were often depicted as having a partial and 'brute-like', or animalistic, immunity to the extremes of

cold and pain. Thomas Tryon's *Treatise* (1689: 279–80), for example, declared 'most *Mad People* ... more able to endure Hardship, Hunger, Cold, and the like ... without prejudice to their health' (original italics).

A similar view was espoused by the famous London physician, Richard Mead (1673–1754): 'Mad folks in general bear hunger, cold, and any other inclemency of the weather ... all bodily inconveniences, with surprising ease.' (Mead, 1755: 619; see also Mead, 1702: 135). And the M.D. and medical statistician, William Black, was reinforcing this medical truism as late as 1810: '... insane persons endure hunger, cold, nakedness and want of sleep with astonishing perseverance, and impunity ... Some ... are ravenous and insatiable as wolves' (Black, 1810: 18).

Such mind-sets, historians have suggested, help to contextualize why contemporaries often provided such meagre covering and physical comforts for poor lunatics (e.g., Scull, 1989: 57). And, such sentiments do underline how much the inadequate clothing and other poor conditions in contemporary institutions for the insane were sustained by the association of madness with insensibility and animality.

The incapacities commonly observed as so definitive of mental afflictions were extended to dress, so that the mad and idiotic were apt to be defined as incapable of dressing themselves appropriately or at all. Accounts of patients in the case histories of contemporary mad-doctors such as William Perfect commonly featured deranged people who had to be dressed and fed by servants (Perfect, 1780: 21). Typically represented and often witnessed as dressed in blankets or even swaddling clothes, lunatics' inability to clothe themselves was often associated with their infant/child-like dependency and powerlessness to control their excretions and passions.

Medical men and patients' families seem to have been particularly concerned when it came to the immodesty of women with respect to (un)dress. A typical case is that of Miss Campden, daughter to a London tavern keeper, of whom the mad-doctor John Monro reported in his private case book: 'has been much indispos'd in her head at times, running into the yard with no cloaths upon her but her shift ...' (Monro, 1766: C-98).

Fifty years earlier, the physician, Daniel Oxenbridge (1715), had reported similar behaviour at considerably greater length than had Monro. The 'poor' and 'raving mad' Goodwife Jackson 'ran up and down the Streets, bare footed, Cloaths torn, Hair loose, was ready to lye down and pull up her Cloaths to every one, pretended Love to one Mr Holland her Master ... at last she tore all things, and struck every one.' His case report reflects the strong medico-moral association of dishevelment, denudation and destruction of dress not only with madness and poverty, but also with sexual indecency and socially inappropriate passion.

Contemporary judicial proceedings involving the insane highlighted analogous conduct. Ann Harman, for example, from near Lewes, Sussex, just prior to her readmission to Bethlem in 1780, was described in an affidavit

before a Sussex J.P. as follows: 'John Stephens and Hannah his Wife went into [her] ... lodging Room ... expecting to find her up and dressed when she suddenly jumped out of the bed stark Naked and in the most furious manner attacked ... John Stephens.'<sup>29</sup>

Contemporary case histories of derangement dwelt repeatedly on those who soiled and spoiled their clothes. The writings of specialists like the Bethlem apothecary, John Haslam, were replete with cases like E.H., who was in the habit of tearing the clothes of others 'to pieces' and destroying their hats 'with his teeth', and W.P. who 'tore every thing to pieces within his reach' (Haslam, 1798: 43, 69–70, 95–6). Such behaviour was far from confined to the asylum. Monro's case book, for example, describes the 'raving' Mrs Dibsdale as 'slavering & spitting upon her cloaths' (Monro, 1766: C-66). That such histories were often derived substantially from the accounts of patients' own relations, furthermore, implies that the judgements as to the conduct they reveal were broadly shared.

It seems a fair assumption that the writings of physicians who began to specialize in treating the insane in this period might reveal a substantial amount about the (un)dress of the mad poor. What about, for example, the voluminous case books of the seventeenth-century Buckinghamshire clergyman-practitioner, Richard Napier, which Michael MacDonald (1981) mined so successfully? Emphasizing the frequency of Napier's mentally afflicted cases who had torn, spoiled or removed their clothing and of literary representations of the semi-nude insane, MacDonald claimed that such forms of flouting dress norms were significant constituents of madness in this period, and drew madness into a closer identification with vagrancy. Yet physicians like Napier charged a shilling a time for a consultation, a week's wages for most contemporary labourers, while the fees of specialists like Monro were even further beyond the means of paupers. It is dubious, therefore, how much the 'mad' behaviours of their sort of clientele can tell us about the genuinely poor.

One might hope for better purchase from the records of those practising in closer proximity to the pauper insane, those who were contracted for their medical services by parish officers. However, surviving metropolitan parish practitioner records tend to be disappointingly meagre in scope and nature, and of little help in assessing the behaviour or clothing of the mad poor. By contrast, vestry minutes and poor law officials' records of disbursements generally proffer more detailed information, and may be combined with institutional records to fill in many of the gaps in our knowledge of such provision. So were large numbers of the insane really being kept in their parishes, in other locales, or in institutions in filthy, ragged clothes, or in conditions approaching nakedness, as any literal reading of contemporary literature would imply? Part 2 of this paper will attempt to address such questions more fully by recourse to records of Bethlem and the parishes it served.

## Notes

1. Excellent surveys of this theme in contemporary literature include: Byrd, 1974; DePorte, 1974.
2. The iconography of madness is brilliantly discussed in Kromm, 2002.
3. For collections of Bedlam and Mad Tom ballads, see: Kinney, 1990; Lindsay, 1969. For ballads concerning madness and poverty, see: *Broadside Ballads*, 1930; *Euing Collection*, 1971; Holloway and Black, 1975/1979; Livingston, 1991; Marshburn and Velie, 1973; *Street Literature*, 1980. For literary and historical background on madness, vagrancy and beggary, see: Beier, 1987; MacDonald, 1981; Neaman, 1975; Neely, 2004.
4. The iconographic derivation of these wooden sculptures remains obscure, despite apparent links with Italian Renaissance beggars. With begging bowls held in their hands, long gowns and appealing, needy expressions, they were designed to exhort and receive the charity of Bethlem's visitors.
5. For 'unaccommodated man', see: Gilman, 1982: 54; Shakespeare, 1608: Lear, act iii, scene iv, lines 105–7; Tryon, 1689: 168.
6. Tom of Bedlam songs exploded into print during early modern times, partially reflecting the growing notoriety of Bethlem and madness itself as a public spectacle; see (in chronological order): 'Tom', c.1670; Hayden, c.1720; 'Tom', 1725, c.1760, c.1790a, c.1790b; Percy, 1765; Chappell, 1855–59; Lindsay, 1969.
7. This ballad employed the common analogy between Bethlem and hell, the inmates of both represented as tortured souls, tearing clothes. Renaissance and medieval culture had long associated madness and the tearing of clothes/hair with the devil, witchcraft and possession.
8. Madness was just one among a large wardrobe of disguises.
9. Dekker, 1612: 'the abram ... a sheet about his body ... without breeches ... his legs and arms are bare ... his hair long and filthy knotted ... walking up and down the country ... terrible to women and children', bearing a variety of bodily marks, which he pretends 'is the mark of Bedlam'.
10. For fake madmen/'Toms of Bedlam', see cases of William Scavenger, Benjamin Harrison, and Harris: Bethlem Court of Governors Minutes [henceforth, BCGM] 23 April 1673, 501; PRO London Sessions Papers [henceforth, LS] 13/87, recognizances 13 & 30 Dec. 1686; LS13/172, 37, 23 July 1679.
11. The first advertisement inserted in the papers gave 'Notice': 'Whereas several Vagrant Persons do wander about ... London, and Counties, p[re]tending themselves to be Lunaticks, under Cure in ... Bethlem ... with Brass Plates about their Arms, and Inscriptions thereon ... there is no such Liberty given to any Patients kept in the said Hospitall ... neither is any such Plate ... put upon any Lunatick ... the same is a false pretence, to colour their wandring and Begging, and to deceive the People, to the dishonour of the Government of the Hospitall.' (BCGM 13 Aug. 1674, 18 June 1675, 29, 138; *The London Gazette*, 17–21 June, 21–24 June, 24–28 June, 28 June–1 July, 5–12 July 1675). A second similarly composed advertisement inserted by another generation of governors a century later reflects the persistence of this problem (Bethlem Sub-Committee Minutes [henceforth, BSCM] 1 Feb. 1783).
12. Unsystematically striving to impose limits on such wandering, central authorities issued directives to local officials, occasionally singling out the mad for apprehension (e.g., Acts of the Privy Council, 2/40, 10 Nov. 1630, 108).
13. BCGM, 18 April 1638, 22 Sept. 1641, 1 and 29 April 1642, 10 Nov. 1643, 17 April 1646, 31 Aug. 1649, 175, 349, 374, 380, 76, 256, 398: cases of Strawbridge, Huddleston, Stott,

- Morton, Oabibus, Bowringe, Quarles, Rawlinson and Kiminge, sent to Bridewell for petty offences, but delivered to their relatives/parishes as ‘distracted’/‘crackt brayned’.
14. For example, Mary Coglan, sent to Bethlem in 1677, was initially dismissed as counterfeit and sent to Tuthill Fields Bridewell (LS13/86; LS13/104, 95; LS13/171, 356). Likewise, William Landy, confined 1675–1704 in Bethlem, Bridewell and prison, was sometimes adjudged a lunatic and at other times ‘a counterfeit idle fellow’ (BCGM 18 June 1675, 1 July 1681, 28 July 1682, 29 Sept. 1704, 137, 236, 315, 216; LS13/172, 37).
  15. Both ballads, put to music in the seventeenth century by Purcell, were regularly rehashed and performed in the following centuries, e.g., ‘Tom’, *c.*1780; *c.*1790*a*, *c.*1790*b*; 1815; *c.*1835; *Bess of Bedlam ...*, *c.*1710, 1720, 1725; *c.*1790; *c.*1800. Some literary renditions combined both protagonists: ‘Tom’, 1709.
  16. Compare S. N., 1787.
  17. Contrast Clare (1820), where no degradation in Crazy Nell’s appearance is mentioned.
  18. Classical images such as the Furies and Medusa, closely associating wild, ravaged hair and clothing with female madness and passion, sometimes found their way into medical texts (e.g., Pargeter, 1792: 55).
  19. Here, the protagonist not only rends his clothes and is confined on Bedlam ‘straw’, but becomes an object of curiosity and didactic morality for the public (Bodleian, mid-18thC?*a*).
  20. For a similar rendition, see, e.g., ‘Lady’, 1800?*a*, [1800]*b*.
  21. Swift (1726: 178–9) famously satirized the Royal Academy as the objects of a Bedlam-like tour of Lagado ‘projectors’, lampooning their clothing and dirtiness to highlight the madness of their projects.
  22. For similar documented scenes, including patients throwing ‘filth & Excrement’ into Bethlem’s yards, see: BCGM, 18 Aug. 1671, 18 Sept. 1672, 20 June 1765, 334, 445, 133.
  23. These ballads’ transmission and audience remain complex issues (Shepard, 1962, 1973; Wiltenburg, 1988: 102–3).
  24. Literary and medical historians have often emphasized the performative aspects of early modern madness (Hattori, 1995; Porter, 1987).
  25. Later versions were put to music: ‘Crazy Jane’, *c.*1799; ‘Crazy Jane’, *c.*1797–1806. There was also a dramatic version: Somerset, 1829.
  26. Artists’ versions of Crazy Jane include George Shepheard’s 1815 portrait and Richard Dadd’s 1855 sketch. However, here the genre was in the realm of Ophelia-like naturalism, bucolic invocation and pastoral wandering, Jane’s attire an amalgam of wild flowers, and patched and tattered robes. For literary genre variations, see, e.g.: Bolton, *c.*1800; ‘Crazy Jane’, *c.*1795*a*, 1795*b*, *c.*1799.
  27. Both ballads were rehashed by composers/romantic poets from the 1790s into the 1840s; see previous note and *Crazy Kate*, 1790*a*, 1790*b*.
  28. The mad were frequently rendered as not merely naked, but as almost transparent, ghost-like, e.g. Bodleian, 1700; D’Urfey, 1719.
  29. Affidavit, 3 May 1780, in Bethlem Archives box labelled ‘Army and Navy Patients’.

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