

Madmen and Mad Money:

Psychological Disability and Economics in Medieval and Early Modern Literature

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Abstract

In medieval and early modern literature, people with psychological disabilities are commonly represented as nuisances, monsters, and pitiable wretches. This ableist paradigm is partly attributable to the fact that ‘mad’ characters evoke economic anxieties rooted in the socioeconomic climate of the societies in which the respective texts are created. Fictional ‘madmen’ are used as symbols of or scapegoats for economic problems such as rising poverty, price fluctuations, wealth inequality, and evolving inheritance systems. This exacerbates a prevailing belief that the psychologically disabled are undeserving of respect and care, or even that they are less than human. My goal in this dissertation is to document occurrences of this paradigm and analyse how they contribute to the cultural degradation and dehumanisation of people with psychological disabilities. Applying analytical frameworks provided by disability theorists regarding neurodiversity and sanism to medieval and early modern literature, this dissertation will attempt to expand and invigorate the conversation around disabled people’s cultural history. Each chapter finds the seed of its primary focus in scripture – for example, I examine Herod when discussing madness’s effect on the domestic realm and Noah when discussing madness in old age – and each proceeds in a generally chronologically fashion from scripture to medieval literature and finally early modern literature. The medieval texts I analyse are diverse and range from religious poems such as John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (c. 14th century) to the chivalric romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Likewise, the early modern texts under scrutiny include Ben Jonson’s city comedies and Shakespeare’s tragic *Timon of Athens* (1607). The wide-ranging nature of the texts I examine is intended to indicate that the ableist notions being unpacked are not limited by genre or period.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Madness and money do not mix. When they come into contact, all manner of disasters unfold, from the financial ruination of individuals to widespread societal unrest. Throughout this dissertation, I examine texts that promote this message either subtextually or overtly. For the purposes of this introduction, I wish to demonstrate my point by briefly looking at a story that, while too short to be the subject of its own chapter, nonetheless usefully showcases the paradigm described.

Le Farce de Maître Pierre Pathelin or *The Farce of Master Pierre Patelin* is a popular French play, written by an unknown author in 1469 and belonging to a series of medieval farces. Its main character, the lawyer Pierre, finds himself faced with a dilemma. He plans to buy new cloth for himself and for his wife, Guillemette, but has no money with which to do so, largely on account of the fact that his lacklustre skills as a lawyer have left him with few clients. He devises a cunning plan; visiting the draper Joceaulme, he showers him with compliments and admires his cloth. Excited at the prospect of a sale, Joceaulme participates in friendly banter, describing the fine quality of his wool and eventually ‘persuading’ Pierre to purchase a large quantity at the price that is, as he shares with the audience in an aside, not commensurate with its true value. Taking the cloth, Pierre promises to pay the draper when he visits his house that evening for dinner, and Joceaulme agrees despite initial misgivings. But when the draper arrives at Pierre’s home that evening, disaster strikes. Pierre has gone mad – or at least, is pretending to have done so. Guillemette informs Joceaulme that her husband cannot even leave his bed, much less pay his debt. Despite Joceaulme’s best efforts to force Pierre to surrender the money, even basic communication proves to be impossible. Pierre plays the role of the madman to the hilt. Babbling, he pretends not to recognize the draper, then claims to spy a black monk flying

overhead. He behaves like a cat, making hissing noises and attempting to scratch the draper. He caps his performance by using his wife's old gown to dress up as a priest, dancing with Joceaulme, then dressing up as a witch and terrifying the draper by drawing strange symbols on the floor. Guillemette does her part to help the con along by telling Joceaulme that Pierre has also been singing and speaking in foreign tongues. Joceaulme has no choice but to leave without his money.

Madness (albeit assumed madness) is presented as commerce's archenemy in this amusing tale. Financial obligations cannot bind the madman any more than social convention. Worse yet, as the play continues it demonstrates that madness can have a ripple effect throughout the entire socioeconomic community. Joceaulme takes to court a shepherd in his employment who has been stealing his sheep. Unfortunately, the shepherd employs Pierre as his lawyer, and Pierre recycles his trick, having the shepherd feign madness by responding to all the judge's questions with a sheep-like bleat. This swiftly creates chaos in the courtroom. Not only is the judge infuriated by the shepherd's apparent inability to speak, but Joceaulme is so enraged by the sight of Pierre in full health that he struggles to make his case to the judge without breaking off to shake his fist at him. Pierre is able to make the case that both the shepherd and Joceaulme himself are mad. The judge loses his patience and orders them all to leave and never return. By the play's conclusion, madness has deprived a draper of his profit, allowed a thief to escape punishment, and made a mockery of the legal system. In the end, even Pierre falls prey to the economically corrosive powers of madness; when he approaches the shepherd for payment, the shepherd only bleats at him.

The Farce of Master Pierre Patelin is one of many texts from the late medieval and early modern period in which madness is associated with economic instability. My goal in this dissertation is to document such occurrences and analyse how they contribute to the cultural degradation and dehumanisation of people with psychological

disabilities. Before continuing, a note concerning my terminology is required: From this point on, I will use the term ‘mad’ in place of the term ‘psychologically disabled’, as it is the term most commonly deployed by the medieval and early modern writers I scrutinise. It is also the term often preferred by scholars in the field of mad studies as an alternative to pathologising labels which may be felt to be coercive or inaccurate - much in the way that a queer theorist might use the word ‘queer’ in place of ‘homosexual’. I will not try to rigidly define who is and is not ‘mad’, following the example of queer theorists for whom defining who is and is not ‘queer’ is of lesser importance than identifying those structures that legitimize only one sexuality and two gender identities. When I talk about ‘mad people’, I include those whose minds meet with contemporary and historical pathological definitions of psychological disablement; those who self-identify as ‘mentally ill’; those who self-identify as ‘neurodiverse’, and feel that they possess unique brain types which have been incorrectly categorized as ‘ill’; and those who contend that they have had their distress and anger at social injustices pathologised by oppressive structures. The contention upon which this dissertation rests is that all of these positions are valid, and that that the assessment of whether an individual’s brain is in need of celebration, accommodation, or correction is the purview of the individual in question. My aim is to keep the notion of madness as capacious as possible so that it can be a mobile hermeneutical tool when analysing texts from the past. Fits, twitches, manias, melancholia, hallucinations both auditory and visual, daydreaming, distraction, self-starving, suicidal ideation, emotional responses that are regarded as either excessive or lacking, strange beliefs, strange ways of talking, eating, and dressing – all of these fall under the umbrella of ‘madness’ as I conceptualize it. While I will emphasize the diversity of opinions on madness amongst mad people, I want do so in a way that acknowledges the fact that however mad people self-identify, we are all similarly misrepresented in literature and art.

As to why I focus my analysis on texts belonging to medieval and early modern Europe, it is because during this time we see the earliest emergence of full-blooded capitalism in the West, by way of such factors as the transformation of traditional inheritance patterns as a result of a shift in societal understanding of what constitutes property (Bloch 1986; Brenner 1993; Howell 1986; Polyani 1944; Wood 1999). In this transitional period, many of the factors governing the conceptual relationship between disability, diversity, and economy take shape, making it a useful site for analysing the impact money has on the cultural formulation of the madman. Furthermore, my readings of medieval and early modern texts through an economic and disability-centric lens will attempt to fill in gaps in the scholarship surrounding the cultural history of madness.

This scholarship is, admittedly, already extensive (Eghigian 2017; Foucault 1961; Metzler 2013 & 2016; Petersen 1982; Porter 1989 & 2003; Scull 2015; Szasz 1987 & 1997). Michel Foucault's *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la Folie à l'âge Classique* or *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* provides perhaps the most influential account of the historical fluctuations in Western society's understanding of madness. Foucault contends that the seventeenth century sees an unprecedented 'Great Confinement' of mad people and other marginalized parties in institutions, as the category 'madman' and the developing medical model of madness are used by those in positions of authority to contain disruptive and unwanted elements of society (1961: 35). Arguing along similar lines, seminal disability theorist Lennard Davis attempts to provide a broader genealogy of disability in general. He tracks the emergence of the concept back to the nineteenth century, linking it to the rise of the method of statistical analysis and the creation of the statistically 'average' citizen, and argues that, prior to this period, there is no cultural notion of 'the disabled' as a stable collective (2013: 3). These attempts to present the formulation and elaboration of the ideas of madness and disability as largely unilineal have

been contested. Allison Hobgood suggests that Davis's account may be too simplistic, using Shakespeare's representation of epilepsy in *Julius Caesar* (1599) to make the case for a 'less binary formulation of disability's historical evolution that emphasizes both the existence and concurrency of early modern disability narratives' (2009: par. 4). Her foremost contribution to the discussion is a rejection of the idea that

the construction of disability abides some distinct pattern of 'modernization' where medieval understandings of disability as monstrous, mysterious, or divine are usurped by a medical model of disability that identifies 'impaired' individuals and 'cures' them of their 'pathology'. (2009: par. 4)

Hobgood's insistence on the historical co-existence of a range of discourses of disability, each jockeying for predominance but never achieving uniformity, is particularly important for my research, as I will emphasize the diversity of opinion on the subject in medieval and early modern England by showcasing texts that challenge one another's understanding of what 'madness' is.

Just as the history of madness and disability have received increasing attention in recent years, so too has the historic relationship between disability and fiction (Baglieri & Shapiro 2012; Blaska 2004; Davis 2013; Donnelly 2016; Longmore 2003; Margolis & Shapiro 1987; Nixon 2014; Quayson 2012; Schmiesing 2014; Yenika-Agbaw 2011; Zola 1987). For example, Jonathan Gil Harris supplies an in-depth look at the ways early modern mercantilism and England's various epidemics, such as plague and syphilis, work together to influence early modern literature, arguing that 'pathology and economy were interconstitutive domains of discourse' (2004: 3). Carol Neely also utilises theatrical texts to provide a feminist account of how madness is conceptualised in early modern scientific and political thought, questioning the extent to which the theatre reflects social attitudes

towards mad people and suggesting that ‘by representing both madness and the process of reading madness, plays teach audiences how to identify and respond to it’ (2004: 49). David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder offer a particularly compelling explanation for the way strange or disabled bodies and minds saturate Western fiction, attributing this phenomenon to the dual role disability serves in fiction, ‘first, as a stock feature of characterization, and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device’ (2000: 47). They note that ‘while stories rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions’ (2000: 48). I shall determine the extent to which these claims hold up in the face of medieval and early modern literature, and whether economic history can help explain Western fiction’s reliance on the symbolism of madness.

In addition to analysing the development of madness and disability in Western cultural history, a number of researchers have examined disability’s position within the economy. Foucault claims that the Great Confinement ‘constituted one of the answers the seventeenth century gave to an economic crisis that affected the entire Western world: reduction of wages, unemployment, scarcity of coin’ (1961: 45-46). The value of taking economic issues into account in conversations around disability is surmised by Gary L. Albrecht and Michael Bury, who claim that ‘a political economic approach, sensitive to historical and cultural context, shifts the unit of analysis from individuals and their environments to institutions and the social structure’, which uncovers the political freight of representations of the disabled since such images extend beyond the individual and address collective concerns (2001: 586). Many analyses of disability’s socioeconomic ramifications focus on specific countries or regions, or specific types of disability – for example, the financial impact of AIDS on the South African economy or employment rates of the disabled in Bangladesh (Chowdhury & Foley 2006; Mete 2005; Natrass 2004 & 2006; Yilmaz 2011). Those with wider scope highlight the global relationship between disability and poverty and the way this relationship is affected by differing social and cultural contexts (Eide & Ingstad 2011),

while others have discussed the importance of economic liberty in obtaining equal rights for the disabled (Ball, Morris, Hartnette, & Blanck, 2006). My attempt to formulate a new cultural history of madness in this dissertation is partly motivated by the evidence supporting the interconnectedness of the economic marginalization and social disempowerment of disabled people that such analyses provide. It also builds on said analyses by exposing the cultural notions that are implicated in this economic marginalization.

Despite the progress made in expanding our understanding of the role of madness in culture, and culture in madness, there are still some gaps in the scholarship. Literary critics have not yet offered an in-depth examination of the way the specific economic concerns of the medieval and early modern period affect how mad people are represented in literature and art. Historical accounts of what Thomas Szasz refers to as the ‘manufacture of madness’ in the West have not focused on the relationship between mad characters and the medieval and early modern economy, despite the importance of this period to the development of contemporary capitalism (1997: 137). This dissertation will try to redress these critical gaps by synthesizing medieval and early modern literary studies, economic history, disability theory, and mad studies.

Compared to feminist, postcolonial, and queer approaches to literature, mad studies is an underutilized critical resource, despite being influenced by all three critical frameworks, and one that can offer novel ways of reading medieval and early modern texts. Mad studies may be considered an offshoot of the Canadian Mad Pride movement which began in the 1960s in reaction to, firstly, the psychiatric industry’s ‘arsenal of new biogenetic theories and somatic technologies’ and, secondly, the perception among mad people that ‘from our private thoughts to our love lives to the workplace to the world of entertainment and consumption, it seemed that no sphere of late twentieth century life fell beyond the mandate of mental medicine to refashion self and civilisation’ (LeFrançois, Menzies & Reaume,

2013: 3-4). Mad studies is rooted in the arguments and experiences of neurodiverse and disabled activists and those who refer to themselves as psychiatric survivors or consumers. Although the field is not homogenous, it follows from disability studies in its rejection of the supremacy of the medical model, and, by extension, of the authority of a psychiatric system that has historically proven fallible and remains dominated by a small and highly privileged subsection of society. There is disagreement amongst mad theorists as to how to frame madness in a way that is productive and useful to mad people. Key points of contention are the question of impairment and whether madness should be thought of as disability at all (Lewis, 2006). The extreme diversity of opinion as to how to think about disability and madness poses a challenge to any proposed 'Mad Pride'-oriented reading. In the first academic text devoted primarily to mad studies, Brenda LeFrançois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume draw attention to the need to acknowledge the variety of viewpoints on the subject, while at the same time retaining ideological momentum:

In any project affiliated with Mad Studies, Mad movement, and antipsychiatry, participants and 'stakeholders' will necessarily represent a remarkable diversity of identities and life experiences – not to mention a wide array of understandings about mental wellness and distress, and about the mental 'health' system and its role in contemporary society. How to represent and promote this spectrum of Mad involvement, while maintaining a critical edge and resisting a decline into liberal relativism, remains a political and ethical challenge requiring resilience, reflexivity, the willingness to adapt, and a collective vision of the Mad movement as a living, and constantly evolving, field of political engagement and struggle for social justice.

(2013: 11)

The challenges described above are not limited to mad studies: debates surrounding the

ways mad people embrace or disavow their conditions are prevalent throughout the field of disability studies as a whole. As Andrew Solomon indicates, some categories of disability are far more likely to result in the formation of a communal identity than others, and even within disabled communities with a long-established and acknowledged cultural history, there are many who may choose not to participate (2014: 3). For example, while the physical disability of deafness and the promotion of alternative methods of communication are important sources of identity in Deaf culture, many deaf people embrace assistive technology.

As stated, throughout this dissertation I will be using the term ‘mad’ to describe the characters being analysed. While it has proven to be an important word in mad studies, two other descriptive terms require acknowledgement as I will occasionally be deploying them as well. ‘Neurodiversity’ and ‘mental distress’ are alternatives proffered by mad writers to the diagnostic system epitomized by the often-updated American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. These terms allow writers in the field to place their emphasis on factors exterior to the individual, as opposed to the term ‘mental illness’ which frames madness as an innately undesirable pathological deviance from the ‘normal’ way of being. The concept of ‘neurodiversity’ has its roots in the autistic self-advocacy movement but can be applied to any type of pathologised mental strangeness, as Scott M. Robertson and Ari D. Ne’eman explain:

The philosophical vision of neurodiversity applies essential principles of society’s embrace of diversity in ethnicity, nationality, religion, and sexual orientation toward people embodying diverse human neurology. Although autistic people acknowledge great challenges with being autistic, they also recognize that autism presents important strengths, talents, abilities, and gifts, such as comfort with structure and consistency, a knack for repetition, and a detailed, intricate world understanding. (2008: par. 9)

Here, the principle of neurodiversity characterizes what is widely perceived as a tragic medical defect as, instead, a valuable or at least neutral quality which renders those who are disabled part of a large if underrepresented global community, connected to one another by shared experiences of disenfranchisement and a specific cultural history that is often unacknowledged in mainstream discourse. That is to say, those who self-identify as ‘neurodiverse’ are deploying a minoritising discourse that promotes solidarity amongst a group that is not often thought to have a community of self-interest. For proponents of this idea, the negative experiences brought about by madness may be considered a natural result of the alienation and disempowerment experienced by any minority group in a society geared to accommodate and privilege the majority. The second notion – ‘mental distress’ – works to reject the pathologisation of what may be deemed extreme or disruptive emotions and behaviors, presenting them instead as the natural result of contemporary capitalist society. In other words, they are ‘the only available response to an obscene system’, in the words of Ted Curtis, Ben Watson, Robert Dellar and Leslie Esther, co-editors of *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture*, one of the earliest anthologies of mad peoples’ voices (2001: 8).

In this dissertation, recognition of the diversity of mad identities, mad experiences, and mad lifestyles will be assumed to be crucial to the development of a progressive and productive philosophy of madness. It is this philosophy that will dominate my examination of the upcoming texts, which, while generally tending to perpetuate ableist stereotypes, do nonetheless offer a broad variety of mad characters with wildly different lives and divergent attitudes towards their madness.

To summarise, my reasons for analysing madness in medieval and early modern European literature are twofold. Firstly, the relationship between disability and economic history requires more scholarly attention, and the threat that mad minds pose to the healthy circulation of capital is a recurring theme in many late medieval and early modern works of

fiction and non-fiction. Secondly, the centrality of recurrent economic upheavals to the current understanding of the social, political, and artistic landscape of medieval and early modern Europe makes it a useful testing ground for assessing the impact of economic factors on the cultural framing of madness. In addition, there is a third, less prominent motivation driving this analysis, namely a desire to show that the idea of individuals taking pride in their madness is not a contemporary peculiarity. On the face of it, Mad Pride may seem a quintessentially twentieth-century phenomenon, arising in reaction to a specific range of modern preoccupations, including questions over the legitimacy of psychiatric authority, concerns regarding pharmaceutical companies' influence and abuse of power, and the use of madness as a scapegoat in the wake of mass shootings resulting from failed gun control policies. However, in characters such as Shakespeare's Timon in *Timon of Athens* (1623) and Jaques in *As You Like It* (1599), we find hints of a Mad Pride that precedes such concerns.

This dissertation is limited in its scope. It does not attempt to offer a full account of the historical evolution of medicine and psychiatry – that has been attempted many times before (Bowers 2017; K. Jackson 2005; M. Jackson 2013; Lindemann 2010; Metzler 2006; Rosenberg 1992; Sumich 2013). Nor will it delve deeply into the impact of discourses surrounding gender on mad people's literary representation, as I believe there is a serious risk that gender, being a far larger field of scholarly interest than madness, might tend to eclipse discussions of madness. One other noteworthy omission from the genre of texts to be scrutinised are autobiographical accounts produced by actual mad and disabled people in the medieval and early modern period, such as *The Booke of Marjory Kempe* or the writings of Thomas Hoccleve. This is not because I do not recognise the importance of promoting mad voices or feel that these texts do not make vital contributions to mad people's literary history. Rather, it is, in part, because texts such as Kempe's and the way they represent disability have already been critically unpacked, most notably by Tory Vandeventer

Pearman (2010), Wendy Harding (1993), Karma Lochrie (1991) and Caroline Walker Bynum (1987). Another reason for the omission of such works is that my intention in this dissertation is to understand why the abled form certain assumptions regarding the mad, for the purposes of which endeavour it makes sense to concentrate on books written from the presumably abled perspective. Also absent are scholarly texts written by self-declared authorities on madness and disability, such as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), as my primary focus is on the way mad people are represented in fiction.

Chapter Two lays the groundwork for my argument, presenting evidence of late medieval and early modern literature's awareness of mad people as economic beings and as harbingers of economic chaos. Starting with the biblical Nebuchadnezzar – perhaps the most famous madman in scripture – I examine how his story is incorporated into medieval literature and given specific economic undertones. Discussing other prominent literary madmen from this period of history, I consider potential factors at play in the medieval economy that help enforce this cultural connection between madness and economic strife. In Chapter 3, moving on in a broadly chronological fashion to early modern literature, I focus on theatrical madmen such as Shakespeare's *Timon* and Ben Jonson's *Trouble-All* from *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), analysing their portrayal and how it is effected by historical economic phenomena such as the rise in urban poverty in the sixteenth century. Chapter Four focuses on how writers show the effects of madness on the most basic unit of medieval and early modern society – the family – and its ability to function economically. Starting, again, with scripture, I examine the mad king Herod's massacre of Bethlehem's children as portrayed in medieval mystery theatre before moving on to two early modern plays in which mad family members endanger the economic stability of their respective households – John Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (1594) and Richard Brome's *The New Academy* (1636). Chapter Five is interested in madness as it manifests in the elderly in literature. The story of Noah's drunkenness is my scriptural bedrock for this chapter, moving on to Chaucer's portrayal of

the economic dangers of senility in landowners in *The Miller's Tale*, before turning to Michel de Montaigne's commentary on ageing, disability and labour. I conclude the chapter by putting four early modern plays into conversation: Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610), Thomas Dekker's *The Pleasant Comedy of Old Fortunatus* (1599), John Fletcher and Phillip Massinger's *The Little French Lawyer* (1647), and Thomas Middleton, William Rowley and Thomas Heywood's *The Old Law or A New Way to Please You* (1656). All four plays feature mad or disabled elderly characters, afforded varying levels of dignity, and their respective plots engage with the economic cost of age-related disability in fascinatingly diverse ways.

Chapter Six will consider how the act of healing madmen is represented in fiction as an economic act and how this establishes the healer figure in a dual role as both destroyer of madness and restorer of economic stability. To do this, I begin by analysing Christ's encounter with the madman possessed by the demon Legion, describing the dynamics between the impeccable healer and his wretched patient, and draw out the story's economic undertones which, to my knowledge, have thus far escaped critical scrutiny. I find a similar narrative embedded in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* or *The Life of Merlin* (c. 1150), and then find the trend sharply by disrupted by Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*, in which an attempt at healing becomes a battle between a self-appointed but flawed healer and one who is determined to cling to and take pride in his madness.

Chapter 2

‘The root of all evil’: Exploring the roots of the relationship between madmen and economic instability in medieval literature

There is a consistent connection between madness and economic instability in medieval and early modern literature. However, the nature and the intensity of the specific economic anxieties mad characters evoke are less consistent. Medieval depictions of mad people display subtextual concerns over price volatility and food availability – both contemporaneously pressing economic issues. Early modern literature uses mad people to explore early modern economic concerns such as rising poverty, new systems of charity and their effectiveness, and the social alienation that comes from being unable to participate in the evermore important urban marketplace.

The basic notion that monetary problems and madness have a close relationship first appears in scripture; specifically, in the story of King Nebuchadnezzar’s madness in the Book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar summons the prophet Daniel to interpret a dream. In this dream, Nebuchadnezzar beholds a mighty tree: ‘Its fruit abundant/ And in it was food for all/ The beasts of the field found shade under it/ The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches/ And all flesh was fed from it’ (Daniel 4: 12). As Nebuchadnezzar watches, the tree is cut down by a messenger who descends from heaven who cries ‘And let him graze with the beasts/ On the grass of the earth/ Let his heart be changed from that of a man/ Let him be given the heart of a beast/ And let seven times pass over him’ (Daniel 4: 16). Only the tree’s stump remains thereafter. Hearing this, Daniel informs the king that the tree represents his royal self, and that it is he who will be similarly cut down and dethroned for seven years ‘till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses’ (Daniel 4: 23). In light of this dire warning, Daniel entreats the king to ‘break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor’ (Daniel 4: 26). Nebuchadnezzar

fails to heed his advice and, a year later, is reflecting upon Babylon's glory, which he deems the result of his own power and creative intent. A voice from the sky rebukes him and announces that his punishment will now begin:

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. (Daniel 4: 33)

This striking transformation remains in effect for seven years before Nebuchadnezzar is allowed to return to his previous way of living, his kingship restored to him and his madness removed. He then acknowledges God's authority, claiming 'My understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever' (Daniel 4: 34).

Scriptural stories of disability have been closely analyzed for what they imply regarding the relationship between the abled and disabled. Jennifer Koosed and Darla Schumm observe that while the apostle John offers several explanations for disabled people's existence, 'God is behind them all. Never is the condition simply an expression of the various possibilities inherent in the human body. Never is the condition an accident. And never is the condition seen as a positive gift of God' (2005: par. 12). Along similar lines, Nancy Eiesland describes a connection between abledness and spiritual perfection in scripture, which automatically places disabled people at a greater distance from God (1994: 586). Despite this, Eiesland sees some ambiguity in the way scripture portrays disabled people, and envisions possibilities for a new theology of disability in the fact that Christianity's 'primal image' is 'the disabled God who embodied both impaired hands and feet and pierced side' (1994: 99).

My interest in the story of Nebuchadnezzar's disability and recovery are twofold; firstly, how the image of Nebuchadnezzar sets a literary precedent for the dehumanization of mad people in medieval and early modern literature, and secondly, how Nebuchadnezzar's madness precedes a literary trend of connecting madness and disability to economic instability. Nebuchadnezzar undergoes a physical transformation, as his nails change into claws and his hair becomes like feathers. However, more important is his mental transformation: he seemingly loses all memory of his previous life and his identity. Nebuchadnezzar's madness has not received as much critical scrutiny as might be warranted, given his status as one of scripture's most prominent mad characters and subsequent influence on the medieval understanding of madness, as Penelope Doob (1974) and M.H. Henze (1999) have discussed. Allen Thiher provides a succinct summation of the story's role in shaping society's reaction to mad people:

It was the biblical tale of the madness of the ruler of Babylon that gave the Middle Ages its key emblem of mental pathology... Bestiality symbolized for the Christian mind the fall from logos, and pointed to the fundamental ontological instability that menaced all taxonomies. This instability was due to humanity's fall from grace, and thus the medieval mind could also interpret humoral disequilibrium as a result of original sin. There was apparently no melancholy in the Garden of Eden. (2009: 47)

Here, Thiher sets out the logic by which medieval culture draws on Nebuchadnezzar's story to justify the association of madness with sinfulness. Reading the story today after the rise of disability studies and the analytical tools it has provided, the ableist ideas embedded in this narrative might seem obvious. Nonetheless, they are worth laying out: Becoming psychologically disabled entails a loss of humanity. Psychologically disabled people, being sinful, are unworthy of respect or sympathy, and are undesirable to society at large.

Psychologically people who are suffering can only be relieved of their suffering by repentance and submission to a being who will ‘fix’ them. Psychologically disabled people’s lives are constantly torturous, humiliating, and pitiable. A psychologically abled person is, by definition, superior in every way to a psychologically disabled person.

Beyond the story’s bigotry, what I am interested in for the purposes of my analysis is its economic subtext. The king, while mad, is impoverished. Moving from psychological abledness into psychological disability entails not only a physical dislocation, transferring him from his throne to the wilderness, but also an economic dislocation, for he takes none of his fantastic wealth with him. This is apparent in the food he must consume – grass – and the lack of adequate clothing implied by his body’s being wet with dew. Specific details regarding the relationship between his madness and his poverty – which one is the more arduous to endure, how one impacts the other – are not provided by the text. What can be ascertained is that a connection between his madness and his poverty exists, as both begin and end at the same time.

In this way, the story serves as a precursor to all the medieval and early modern texts I examine from this point onwards, both those works directly influenced by Nebuchadnezzar’s scriptural story and those whose connection to it is less direct. In this chapter, I examine John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* or *The Lover’s Confession* (c. fourteenth century), which retells Nebuchadnezzar’s story, retaining all its essential elements while exploring the king’s poverty in greater detail and bestowing his madness with traits not evident in scripture. As a result of these alterations, Gower’s retelling transforms the story from a demonstration of God’s power into an exemplum on the proper and improper use of wealth and resources.

After scrutinizing *Confessio Amantis* I briefly depart from chronological order, going a little way back in time to look at a medieval text that is not a direct retelling of Nebuchadnezzar’s story – for which reason I will examine it after Gower – but does much the same work: Chrétien de Troyes’s twelfth-century chivalric romance, *Yvain ou le*

Chevalier au Lion, or *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*. Thereafter, I examine Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* or *The Death of Arthur* (1485), which offers another tale of knightly madness. While Malory's Lancelot is distinct from Chrétien's Yvain in several ways and their stories display different attitudes towards disability and healing, the texts are alike in their assumption that the madman is a creator and a victim of economic instability. Finally, I close the medieval section with a brief look at Sebastian Brant's *Daß Narrenschyff ad Narragoniam* or *The Ship of Fools* (1494). This German satire presents not one mentally 'defective' individual but a society full of them. Despite the differences in subject matter from the texts that have come before it, Brant's influential satire does not depart drastically from their characterization of madness, presenting a clear connection between society's mad population and its economic woes.

A wilderness within and without: Medieval madmen, prices, and famine

Beth Allison Barr outlines the expansive nature of medieval 'madness' and describes the lack of consensus among scholars today as to how mad people are treated in medieval society and culture:

Madness is an inclusive term used to describe a variety of conditions in medieval Europe, from mental disorders (such as melancholy and mania, often referred as 'woodness') to hysteria, demonic possession, extreme religious zeal (manifested in visions and erratic behavior) and even conditions of the heart and soul – such as lovesickness, severe depression and despair caused by excessive grief...as well as insanity triggered by anger and fear. (2006: 503)

Scholars have tracked the history of ‘madness’ as a concept back to antiquity, along with the history of attempted cures and of the physical, political and psychological violence perpetrated against people deemed mad (Arnold 2009; Foucault 1961; Scull 2015; Szasz 1987; Turner 2010). Attention has been drawn to the differences between current mainstream culture’s understanding of psychological disability and madness as the medieval world understands it. For example, Thiher points out the lack of a truly rigid differentiation between the abled and the disabled in medieval thought: ‘If we are all born into sin and madness, then we are all to some degree mad’ (2009: 49). Another major difference is the fact that some behaviors that are today associated with psychological disability are perceived by medieval culture as indicators of intense spirituality, such as the ‘foolishness for Christ’ practiced by holy men. Caroline Walker Bynum explores the relationship between medieval women’s religious ascetic practices – for example, self-starvation – and the behavior of twentieth-century anorexic women (1987).

Medieval literature does not feature many mad people when compared to the early modern period or the centuries that follow. One influential text that does feature madness is *Confessio Amantis*, John Gower’s third major poem and the first written in English. Comparing the poem to Gower’s previous works, *Vox Clamantis* and *Mirour de l’Omme* (c. 14th century), Peter Nicholson notes its divergence from its predecessors in that it ‘offers a very different approach both to love and to moral instruction; an exploration rather than a mere set of assertions, a weighing of authorities, of precept against experience, and of moral and emotional truths together’ (2005: 8). Completed in 1390, it concerns a man dying of lovesickness who encounters Venus in a forest. She instructs him to confess his sins to her chaplain. The chaplain uses the stories that follow, many of them taken from Ovid or scripture, to describe to the lover the seven deadly sins. At the end, the lover finishes his confession and is cured by Venus. The framing narrative, therefore, presents a type of madness – lovesickness – as the central conflict to be resolved.

However, it is when chaplain retells Nebuchadnezzar's story that Gower's use of madness takes on its intriguing economic subtext. While Gower faithfully recounts the plot of the biblical story, he places conspicuous emphasis on two particular elements: Nebuchadnezzar's prosperity before he goes mad and Nebuchadnezzar's poverty after he goes mad, primarily signified by the poor quality or absence of shelter, furniture, and food in the wilderness. Nebuchadnezzar's economic situation is noted as soon as the king is introduced: 'As thanne of kinges to his liche/ Was non so myhty ne so riche', writes Gower, establishing Nebuchadnezzar as not simply a wealthy monarch, but wealthy to such an extreme as to create a divide between himself and all those of similar social status (ll. 2791-2). In fact, the king's wealth has enabled him to become so powerful that even the few who share his rank pose no threat to him, as 'with strengthe he putte kinges under' (l. 2797). The source of his wealth is indicated in the lines 'To his empire and to his lawes/ As who seith, alle in thilke dawes/ Were obeissant and tribut bere/ As thogh he godd of erthe were' (l. 2793-6). The affluent king has established a vicious cycle in which the tribute he receives from his subjects gives him the power to intimidate them into surrendering even more tribute. In addition to giving him the means to increase his power, his excessive wealth is used to support a lifestyle Gower portrays as profligate and immoral: 'And wroghte of Pride many a wonder/ He was so full of veine gloire/ That he ne hadde no memoire/ That ther was eny good bot he' (ll. 2798 – 2800). This is another small but significant departure from scripture. Gower draws attention to Nebuchadnezzar's impaired mental processes – a faulty 'memoire' – as a means of showcasing the dangers of hoarding excessive wealth. Both the scriptural king and Gower's rendition are guilty of avarice and pride, but in *Confessio Amantis* Nebuchadnezzar's monetary sins are as serious a problem as his impiety, endangering social harmony and his immortal soul in equal measure.

The text most clearly shows its investment in the story's economic message when recounting Nebuchadnezzar's departure from civilization:

And thus was he from his kingdom
Into the wilde forest drawe,
Wher that the myhti Goddes lawe
Thurgh His pouer dede him transforme
Fro man into a bestes forme;
And lich an oxe under the fot
He graseth, as he nedes mot,
To geten him his lives fode.
Tho thoghte him colde grases goode,
That whilom eet the hote spices.
Thus was he torned fro delices:
The wyn which he was wont to drinke
He tok thanne of the welles brinke
Or of the pet or of the slowh,
It thoghte him thanne good ynowh.
In stede of chambres wel arraied
He was thanne of a buissh wel paied,
The harde ground he lay upon,
For othre pilwes hath he non;
The stormes and the reines falle,
The wyndes blowe upon him alle,
He was tormented day and nyht... (ll. 2968 – 2989)

Gower's description of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in this passage is far more detailed than that which is offered by scripture. In both stories, Nebuchadnezzar's altered outward

appearance signifies the onset of his madness. But in the Book of Daniel, the king merely takes on beast-like traits; nails like claws, hair like feathers, and so forth. In Gower's version, Nebuchadnezzar is more fully transformed 'fro man into a bestes forme' (ll. 2972). Discussing this alteration, Nicholson claims that Gower's choice is appropriate because it emphasizes 'the contrast between his outer and inner state and between the beast who can pray and the richly attired king that he used to be who could not' (2005: 147). This is argued in reference to another of Gower's additions, namely the fact that his Nebuchadnezzar actively repents and prays for forgiveness while mad, whereas in the Bible he only has to wait for his seven years of punishment to conclude (Nicholson 2005: 147). I argue that, as far as a mad/disabled reading is concerned, a more significant alteration lies in Gower's depiction of madness and economic instability as closely intertwined, even mutually sustaining stages of degradation. Gower places significantly more emphasis on the king's poverty than the Book of Daniel does, carefully describing his change in diet to more humble fare and his substituting 'chambres wel arraied' for wells, muddy pits, and bushes. These details draw the reader's attention to the many intimate discomforts that accompany a sudden loss of wealth. This protracted description of poverty's horrors goes so far as to risk thwarting the intended message that the divine love Nebuchadnezzar shunned in favor of his material possessions is the more valuable quantity. Gower's Nebuchadnezzar's poverty is made all the more terrible by how thoroughly it isolates him. No mention is made of any family members, subjects, or allies who might be disturbed to see their monarch eating grass. Any political power he had evaporates as soon as he loses his wealth.

So in Gower's poem, madness is dehumanizing because it entails a loss of property and resources, which is implied to be synonymous with severing ties to one's community and one's humanity. However, this reading is complicated by what we are told of Nebuchadnezzar's attitude towards his altered circumstances. Instead of misery or disgust, Gower says that the king 'thoghte him colde grasses goode' (l. 2976). He is also 'wel paied'

by a bush he finds to sleep on (l. 2984). When he must drink from wells and pits, he is content to do so: 'It thoghte him thanne good ynowh' (l. 2982). These lines all lie at odds with Gower's claim that he is 'tormented day and nyht', suggesting instead that the king is in fact quite content to live in this way (l. 2989). The implication is that it is not simply the case that Nebuchadnezzar's madness has disconnected him from his material resources. Rather, Nebuchadnezzar has become disconnected from his resources specifically because in his madness, he has lost the ability to evaluate his resources correctly. In regarding a pit as 'good ynowh', he demonstrates a failure of judgement, an inability to determine what are valuable objects and what are not. Gower's madness is essentially an impairment of those mental processes that assign to resources their proper value, allowing the madman to confuse grass with food, rocks with a bed, and water with wine. There is another side to this observation: As established earlier, the king's madness is at least in part a punishment for economic mistakes. At the beginning of the poem, Nebuchadnezzar demonstrated an inability to correctly assess the value of his material wealth in proportion to the value of his relationship with God. His madness is, therefore, an extreme exaggeration of a preexisting trait. This reduces madness to the distillation of a person's worst moral failings. In this ableist paradigm, madness becomes both Nebuchadnezzar's crime and his punishment.

Understanding what prompts Gower to repurpose the scriptural story in this fashion requires examining the prevailing economic concerns of the period in which he is writing. Economic historians have identified the period from 1000 to 1500 as containing several unprecedented alterations to the European economy, including demographic shifts, larger crop yields as a result of technological developments, an increase in specialization, alterations to traditional patterns of inheritance, increased trade, and a swelling number of markets and fairs (Britnell 2009; Dyer 2002; Howell 2010). The most important factor Richard Britnell identifies is the fact that [t]he decades either side of 1300 were outstanding for the volume of commerce and the quantity of money in circulation. Urban populations

were larger than that at any other period of the Middle Ages, and the number of formal markets and fairs was at its height. Even by the stronger definition of commercialization – an increase in commercial activity outstripping population growth – there are several indications that the economy was more commercialized in 1300 than 1000. (1996: 228) Britnell identifies the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in particular as key moments in the development of the English economy. Given that this is the period from which *Confessio Amantis* emerges, Gower's interest in the pitfalls awaiting those who mismanage money may very well be influenced by the new perils increased commercialization brings to everyday life.

One such pitfall is spiritual in nature. Gower's first alteration – emphasizing the king's obscene wealth prior to his punishment – may be explained by a growing aversion to such avarice in medieval culture. Lester Little argues:

Until the end of the tenth century, pride was unreservedly dominant as the most important vice; writers who dealt with avarice tended to reduce it to a subcategory of pride. But in the eleventh century, Peter Damian heralded a significant change when stating unequivocally: 'Avarice is the root of all evil'. (1971: 16)

As Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is a religious poem, it makes sense that it would reproduce this facet of medieval religious discourse. But religion was not the only sphere in which greed was roundly condemned, a point worth noting given that the texts that will follow in my analysis are not all religious in nature. Martha Howell observes that both late medieval and early modern society did not confine concerns over greed to religious discourse:

Augustine's centuries-old attack on lust, whether for pleasure, riches or glory, still dominated a vitriolic narrative about the evils of commerce that circulated not just

among monkish moralists but also throughout the very cities where commerce was a way of life. (2010: 11)

Howell describes a widespread hostility towards overtly self-interested economic behavior, a point which Keith Wrightson supports when he describes the late medieval economy as ‘hostile to the notions of untrammelled economic freedom in economic affairs and material gain as an end in itself’ (2002: 29). Tapping into this hostility to unchecked and unethical material gain by making his Nebuchadnezzar so intensely greedy helps Gower emphasize to his readers the severity of the king’s sin and the necessity of his awful punishment.

A second economic danger that emerges in this period and cannot be overlooked is famine. As noted, Gower makes much of the king’s lack of quality sustenance in the wilderness. Although scripture does not provide details on how Nebuchadnezzar sustains himself during his seven-year-long punishment, *Confessio Amantis* has him eat grass and drink from wells; this is perhaps the foremost indicator that the king has fallen as far as he can. One way to read this is as a reaction to famine’s ubiquity in the decades preceding the poem’s creation. Britnell notes that ‘famine threatened the poorer inhabitants of both town and country-side more frequently between 1258 and 1320 than before. The famines and murrains of the years 1315-1318 were the most severe in the recorded history of England’ (1996: 126). William Chester Jordan characterizes this period as ‘more devastating than anything that had occurred over the previous millennium’ and vividly illustrates its ecological causes as well as its widespread social effects:

The catastrophe began with spring rains that seemed never to stop, and continued all through the summer and well into the autumn. This was followed, so far as one can tell, by one of the worst winters in the history of the Middle Ages... the year 1316 was even

worse: 150 days of uninterrupted rain. Conditions continued to be deleterious until the end of 1322, with continuously wet summers succeeded by vicious persistent winters only to be followed by other abnormally wet summers or, equally bad, abnormally dry ones. The immediate consequence was a crisis in the production of crops and, soon after, of draught and food animals. (2002: 290)

The famine, Jordan explains, hit the most vulnerable segments of England's population especially hard. In light of the general consensus that starvation and subsequent disease were God's punishment for sinners, a desire for 'devotional and penitential responses' arose (2002: 295). Those singled out for blame included lepers and Jewish people, 'the toleration of whom provoked God to anger' (2002: 295). Having produced *Confessio Amantis* during a period in history fraught with food insecurity, Gower shows through his mad king a keen awareness of hunger as one of economic hardship's worst and most visible consequences. His use of a disabled person to represent the sinfulness that supposedly caused the famine echoes the social scapegoating seen in the targeting of the other vulnerable groups Jordan lists.

In addition to famine and religious concerns over greed, Gower's retelling responds to a third economic worry particular to medieval Europe; namely, price volatility. As noted, it is not only the case that Gower connects madness and poverty. He goes further, implying that the connection between madness and poverty is rooted in the madman's inability to assess the value of the resources surrounding him. This becomes explicable when considering that the medieval marketplace faces precisely this problem. Raymond de Roover provides insight into how the commercializing economy determined what a purchasable item is worth: he opposes the theory – popular until the mid-twentieth century – that the medieval economy was governed by the 'just price' (1958: 420). According to this 'fairy tale', he states, the just price 'was determined by a criteria of fairness without regard to the elements of supply and demand or at least with the purpose of eliminating the evils of unrestrained

competition' (1958: 418). The truth, De Roover argues, is that

the just price did not correspond to the cost of production as determined by the producers' social status, but was simply the current market price, with this important reservation; in cases of collusion or emergency, the public authorities retained the right to interfere and impose a fair price. (1958: 420-421)

The 'current market price' was, as M.M. Postan claims, highly prone to fluctuation.

Examining the centuries prior to *Confessio Amantis*, Postan notes that 'wheat commanded about 1s. 9d per weight in the 1190s but soared to well over 3s. 6d in the four or five years between 1199 and 1203' (1973: 262). Potential causes for sharp short-term fluctuations include unavoidable natural events such as 'the vagaries of harvests' and also 'changes in currency; the debasements of coins by clipping, the reductions of their legal bullion content or the restoration of their full weight by recoinage' (1973: 262-265). Postan makes special note of the years 1315-1317 and their 'disastrous' harvests, when prices skyrocketed (1973: 265). This provides indisputable evidence in the daily lives of everyone living at the time of the intimate relationship between two aspects of the economy: the immaterial values assigned to goods and the material consequences of being unable to afford those goods. While, as De Roover observes, authorities attempt to implement regulations, the increasingly complex commercial sphere makes this a challenging task. Britnell elucidates:

Markets and fairs, multiplying and expanding as the division of labor became more marked, created many problems of organization that had to be tackled in the interests of fairness or public order. Regulation of local trade was the foundation of a complex body of statutes and by-laws. Some were promulgated for the whole kingdom, to regulate weights, measures, currency, and prices. Other developments, even if backed by royal

authorization, were only of local relevance. Local regulation was chiefly concerned with the manner and place in which trade should be conducted. In reality different market authorities interpreted even national regulations differently, so that there was little uniformity of practice. (1996: 90)

Britnell paints a picture of a society struggling to keep up with its own economy, one wherein variations in regulatory practices led to a situation in which the value of a purchasable item is prone to be unstable. Even when the authorities intervened, he notes that ‘it was assumed that the price of goods would fluctuate. From the late twelfth century the main form of price regulation was designed to eliminate excessive profits in retail trades rather than to stabilize prices’ (93). Joel Kaye presents a similar viewpoint, claiming that

Through the fourteenth century and beyond, princes and city councils maintained the right to regulate market prices in the name of the common good. Maximum price edicts remained a traditional governmental response to economic crises. As a rule, however, such interference was never more than temporary. In the all-important area of grain, wine, and other agricultural products, prices were expected to fluctuate and were allowed to do so. (2000: 89)

Taking this into account, Gower’s Nebuchadnezzar’s confusing low-quality food with high-quality food and the worthless wilderness with a satisfactory living space is a metaphorical representation of contemporary tensions around the question of what goods are truly worth. It is not only that the madman symbolizes the suffering brought about by economic hardship.

The madman also symbolizes the disorder and confusion that generates economic hardship. Nebuchadnezzar’s inability to correctly assign value to objects is analogous to the ‘problems of organization’ endemic in the multiplying markets and fairs. In essence, the

madman stands as both a degraded victim of socio-economic chaos and also the root cause of that chaos.

I must address one potential counterargument. Medieval literature boasts a group of people who share Nebuchadnezzar's failure to treat resources in ways that reflect their correct value level, but are applauded for it: saints. For example, in Jacobus Voragine's *Golden Legend* (1298), Saint Jerome foregoes quality food; he wears sackcloth; he endures poverty and the absence of civilization; he associates with animals, describing himself as 'the companion of scorpions and wild beasts' (589). All these actions that denote economic disorder in Nebuchadnezzar's story take on a different meaning in Jerome's, indicating instead holiness and spiritual purity. The reason for this is the fact that, according to Emma Campbell, saints do not abide by the same economic logic that governs ordinary peoples' lives. In her study of Old French hagiography, Campbell notes that 'saints' lives often depict a productive tension between human society and relationship to God that is represented in terms of the donation or reception of gifts... it is often by refusing gifts in a social context that saints are able to demonstrate their withdrawal from society and, conversely to manifest their commitment to God' (2008: 27). In this way, the saint is allowed to 'opt out of the societies in which they live or to engage in forms of giving that modify the logic underpinning such human relations' (2008: 26). Understanding this helps in understanding the distinction between a saint's laudable asceticism and Nebuchadnezzar's dehumanizing poverty. Sainthood is not an inability to correctly assess a resource's value; rather, it is the mark of a canny economic actor, demonstrating a firm understanding that, in Campbell's words, 'what is given is never possessed by the saint in the first place' (2008: 19).

Reading Gower's Nebuchadnezzar's madness as a metaphor for the period's economic struggles becomes more compelling when the text is examined as part of a trend in medieval literature. Chrétien de Troyes also makes the madman a symbol of economic instability in

his earlier twelfth-century chivalric romance, *The Knight of the Lion*. He does so by placing the mad Yvain in contrast to another strange being who resides in the wilderness but whose presence in the text does not conjure up the grim spectre of famine, price volatility, or any other economic crisis. As the story opens, Yvain's cousin, the knight Calogrenant, addresses an audience of fellow knights and Queen Guinevere. Calogrenant describes an encounter in the wilderness with an uncanny individual – 'a peasant who resembled a Moor, ugly and hideous in the extreme' (1991: 297). The character is further described as possessing a head

larger than a nag's or other beast's. His hair was unkempt and his bare forehead was more than two spans wide; his ears were as hairy and as huge as an elephant's; his eyebrows were heavy and his face flat. He had the eyes of an owl and the nose of a cat, jowls split like a wolf's, with the sharp reddish teeth of a boar; he had a russet beard, tangled moustache, a chin down to his breast and a long, twisted spine with a hump. He was leaning on his club and wore a most unusual cloak, made neither of wool nor linen; instead, at his neck he had attached two pelts freshly skinned from two bulls or two oxen (1991: 298).

The peasant's uncanny nature is signified by his manner of dress and by a range of odd physical features. His body is made up of pieces of various animals, similar to the biblical Nebuchadnezzar with his hair 'like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws'.

Contributing to this impression of the character as partly animal is his clothing, which is neither 'wool nor linen', but animal skin. He also gives off an impression of physical strength, as he carries a club, despite his physical disability – a hump on his back – which, in Calogrenant's eyes, makes him all the more monstrous. Initially, it seems as though this character's wild nature will make him another Nebuchadnezzar, a bestial madman roaming

the wilderness without possessions, social bonds, or any capacity for judgement.

Calogrenant certainly seems to expect as much, describing the fear the strange individual evokes in him and wondering if he can even formulate speech. However, the interaction that follows surprises him:

I summoned enough nerve to say to him, "Come now, tell me if you are a good creature or not?" And he answered, "I am a man." "What sort of man are you?" I asked. "Just as you see; and I'm never anything else." "What are you doing here?" "I stand here and watch over the beasts of these woods." "Watch over them? By Saint Peter in Rome, they've never been tamed! I don't believe anyone can watch over wild beasts on the plain or in the woods, nor anywhere else, in any way, unless they are tied up and fenced in." "I watch over these and herd them so they'll never leave this clearing." "How do you do it? Tell me truly." "There's not a one of them that dares move when it sees me coming. For whenever I catch hold of one, I grab it by its two horns with my tough and strong hands so that the others tremble in fear and gather around me as if crying out for mercy. No one except me could have confidence among them, for he would be killed at once. Thus I am lord over my beasts. Now it's your turn to tell me what sort of man you are and what you're seeking" (1991: 299).

The beast lord's conversation with Calogrenant subverts his and our expectations. In Nebuchadnezzar's story, man's relationship to the wilderness is straightforward; it is a space from which humans should remain separate, existing in binary opposition to civilization and all its trappings. At best, it serves as a corrective facility for sinners. Madness is undesirable partly because the poverty that accompanies madness brings the king into contact with the wilderness. This contact entails Nebuchadnezzar's losing his position at the top of the social hierarchy as there are no valuable resources in the wilderness to denote his royal standing. By

contrast, Chrétien's wilderness may be dangerous and unpredictable, but it is not merely a barren place of punishment. Instead, it is a place where previously valueless resources – such as the untamed herd – can be made valuable by being tamed and thereafter guarded. Exerting control over the wilderness in this way is how the lord of beasts proves his humanity to the doubting Calogrenant. Although his appearance animalizes him in Calogrenant's eyes, he insists on a firm distinction between himself and the animals he tends, and when Calogrenant attempts to categorize him as a 'creature', he clarifies, 'I am a man.' He explains this distinction between man and beast by drawing Calogrenant's attention to the power dynamics at work in his relationship with the herd. Although Calogrenant can see none of the tools that, in Camelot, denote the hierarchy of man and beast – specifically, fences or bonds to keep the animals contained – he has devised a means of maintaining his authority without these tools.

The relevance of this to my larger argument is that although the lord of beasts resembles Gower's Nebuchadnezzar in many ways, he is not treated as a madman in the story. Despite being bizarre to those who encounter him, he has agency, interiority, and pride, and his lifestyle adheres to a set of coherently articulated principles – that he is a man, that the beasts are his to command, and that it is his rightful role to wrestle them into submission. This places him in stark contrast to the story's true madman – the protagonist Yvain. After Calogrenant completes his story, in which he is defeated by the knight Esclados, Yvain locates Esclados and avenges his cousin. Falling in love with Esclados's widow Laudine, Yvain eventually wins her heart, but is soon compelled to depart on further adventures by his fellow knights. Laudine permits him to leave, provided that he return to her within one year. When Yvain fails to fulfill his obligation to her, a representative of the widow appears before him and denigrates him publicly. Consumed by shame, he flees to the woods to conceal himself from the world:

He lies in wait for the beasts in the woods, killing them, and then eating the venison raw.

Thus he dwelt in the forest like a madman or a savage, until he came upon a little, low-lying house belonging to a hermit, who was at work clearing his ground. When he saw him coming with nothing on, he could easily perceive that he was not in his right mind; and such was the case, as the hermit very well knew. So, in fear, he shut himself up in his little house, and taking some bread and fresh water, he charitably set it outside the house on a narrow window-ledge. And thither the other comes, hungry for the bread which he takes and eats. I do not believe that he ever before had tasted such hard and bitter bread. The measure of barley kneaded with the straw, of which the bread, sourer than yeast, was made, had not cost more than five sous; and the bread was musty and as dry as bark. But hunger torments and whets his appetite, so that the bread tasted to him like sauce. (1991: 330 - 331)

After a period of suffering, Yvain is saved by the hermit and a lady who offer him food and succor and, in doing so, gradually cure him of his madness and return him to his appropriate socioeconomic status. As in the tale of Nebuchadnezzar, madness is a hideously degraded state of being and the madman inspires pity and horror in equal measure, so much so that L.

T. Topsfield argues that the romance's tone changes entirely once madness enters into it: 'This terrible scene puts an indelible mark on the romance. Its earlier nonchalant air of taking life as it comes changes to a sterner mood' (2010: 186). Like the scriptural king, when Yvain goes mad, he loses his identity, is separated from his friends and community, and is dehumanized; eating raw meat animalizes him in much the same way as the addition of claws to Nebuchadnezzar's hand.

Moreover, once again, to go mad is to descend into poverty. Yvain, like Nebuchadnezzar, confuses a less valuable foodstuff – musty, dry bread – with a more valuable foodstuff – sauce. He also cannot clothe himself, a fact which is drawn attention to when he recovers from his madness and is 'ashamed' (1991: 333). This, I contend, is the key

to understanding how the text distinguishes Yvain's madness from the beast lord's wildness. Both men shun civilization and make their homes in the wilderness, surviving on the animals they are able to catch. Both provoke fear in those who encounter them. But Yvain is voiceless in his madness, while the lord of beasts is allowed to explain his beliefs and actions. Yvain's devouring raw venison seems monstrous when compared to the beast lord's orderly maintenance of his herd. Yvain is powerless and reliant on the charity of others, while the beast lord reigns supreme within his sphere of influence. While the beast lord proudly proclaims his identity to Calogrenant, Yvain cannot even tell people his name and the hermit who sees him wandering naked does not perceive that he was once a lauded knight. Paul Freedman identifies the beast lord as part of a pattern of uncanny peasants in medieval fiction who have fearful appearances but also a degree of dignity and poise. Encounters between such peasants and knights 'often begin with the monstrous but evoke the possibility of the peasant's humanity... none of the rustics in these stories is the equal of the knights, but they come into focus as human from their original bestial semblance' (Freedman 1999: 141). Yvain does not 'come into focus as human' until his madness is cured.

My argument is that the key distinction Chrétien makes between noble wildness and degrading madness lies in these characters' respective levels of economic competence. The beast lord operates in an economically logical way. He is fiscally responsible, correctly assessing the value of his herd and protecting them from potential thieves. Yvain, by contrast, misuses his wealth by surrendering all his material possessions to live in the forest, thereafter displaying an inability to correctly assess the value of the food he finds or is given. This lapse of judgement is foreshadowed by his original sin of failing to return to Laudine, thus demonstrating an inability to assess her value correctly. Moreover, the beast lord does not step outside his assigned socioeconomic role; he is recognized by civilized men as a 'peasant'. Admittedly, this is itself a tricky, unstable position to occupy in

medieval literature, as Freedman explains:

There was a discourse of unease characterized by doubts over whether or not to consider a subordinate people fully human. One sees a reiterated recognition of difference alternating with its disavowal similar to that found in colonial discourse. An obsessive but inconsistent focus on the separation between cultivated and barbaric was accompanied by a nagging refrain of the notion of similarity. (1999: 142)

Freedman makes the case that medieval literary depictions of peasants are characterized by a sense of ambiguity as to their humanity. Peasants are understood to be necessary for the maintenance of economic order and, moreover, cannot be regarded as 'Others' in the same sense as foreigners on account of their being part of Christendom. However, they have much more in common with animals than non-peasants, insofar as they tend to be described as unclean, uncouth, cowardly, and unintelligent. But the beast lord counteracts this ambiguity by insisting on his humanity – 'I am a man' – and refuses to allow Calogrenant to categorize him as an animal despite his bestial appearance and his proximity to the wilderness. In absence of conclusive evidence as to his humanity or lack thereof, the text tolerates his existence. The mad nobleman Yvain, by contrast, has access to no such ambiguity of status. As a knight, he is indisputably human and, as a madman, he descends into indisputable inhumanity.

In addition, the beast lord's wildness does not challenge the maintenance of economic order and social hierarchy simply because he does not step outside his assigned economically subordinate position and so does not endanger the rigid division between who is economically empowered and who is not. His reliance on the wilderness is less horrifying to the reader than Yvain's because it is assumed to be closer to a peasant's normal state of being; we are not invited to suppose that the beast lord underwent any fall from grace.

Yvain's high rank means his descent into mad poverty has connotations of tragedy, squandered potential, and disruption to economic order. As a result, the mad Yvain ruptures the socioeconomic hierarchy he previously benefited from in a way that the beast lord does not. Because of this, Yvain in his madness becomes a nameless animal who must be urgently re-domesticated, while the beast lord exits the story unchanged.

One final difference between Chrétien's mad knight and Gower's mad king is that Chrétien describes at length the measures taken to restore Yvain to his original state of abledness and economic security. The only prominent characters in Nebuchadnezzar's story are the king himself and God, and only God has the power to end the punishment. In Yvain's case, this power is placed in the hands of kindly strangers. He is weaned off a diet of raw meat by the hermit, who accepts the meat that Yvain brings him and, in return, routinely leaves out food for him that has been properly prepared: 'the good man undertook to skin the game and put a sufficient amount of meat on to cook. The bread and the pitcher of water were always at the window to nourish the madman... and the good man was at pains to sell the skins and purchase unleavened bread of barley and oats' (1991: 331). Because of the hermit's ability to make sound financial choices, treating his venison like the valuable meat it is and making use of its hide, Yvain slowly regains his ties to civilization through what is presented as a process of domestication: 'no one, no matter how mad, would fail to return very gladly to a place where he had been kindly received' (1991: 331). Dorothy Yamamoto notes the important role the hermit's good economic sense plays in Yvain's recovery:

Yvain's improving diet mirrors his gradual return to the higher life from which he had fallen. As his madness began with the shattering of all attachments, so his recovery of health begins with the establishment of the simplest of all relationships – one of basic trading – with another human being. (2000: 184-185)

As Yamamoto correctly observes, an ability to participate in trade is indeed portrayed as the first step on the road to rejoining the healthy, abled community. The second step is acquiring and possessing property. This occurs when a nameless lady comes upon Yvain and heals him with an ointment she received from Morgan the Wise. She also gives him clothing, ‘a bright-colored gown, a coat, and a mantle of red-dyed silk’, along with ‘a fine palfrey’ and ‘a shirt and soft breeches and black, fine-spun hose’ (1991: 332). These expensive items signify social status, so Yvain’s return to abledness is inexorably connected to assuming his proper place in the social hierarchy. All of which is to say that returning to the madman to abledness and to appropriate economic behavior is a process in which the abled are encouraged to take part.

Indeed, curing mad people is impossible without them. This resonates with one of disability theory’s most prominent arguments, first put forward by Paul Longmore in his influential critique of the telethons produced by various American organizations dedicated to promoting charity for disabled young people in the late twentieth century. Longmore claims that, in seeking to help disabled youth, such telethons encouraged a demeaning and paternalistic relationship between the abled and the disabled, the latter being portrayed as ‘dependent objects of beneficence whose most important needs were medical’ (2013: 38). Longmore’s primary literary reference is Charles Dickens’s Tiny Tim, but Chrétien’s Yvain is portrayed in much the same way, except that his most important needs are not medieval intervention but economic education.

Gower and Chrétien both connect madness to economic instability. Moreover, they both use mad characters to draw attention to contemporary economic concerns such as food availability, price volatility, and social hierarchy. This literary trend persists into the later medieval period, as evidenced by Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1487). Drawing inspiration from the Vulgate Cycle, Malory presents the tale of Sir Lancelot’s madness; like Yvain, Lancelot runs mad into the wilderness, in his case, after being

scorned by a lady. If I compare *Le Morte d'Arthur* to Gower and Chrétien's works, Malory's story portrays disability with greater nuance, while still retaining the economic anxieties that underpin depictions of madness in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Knight of the Lion*.

From the first, Lancelot's madness and his community's reaction to it are portrayed with more detail and depth than is given to Chrétien's Yvain. Following a quarrel with Guinevere, he faints, and when he wakes up he has lost his mind:

He leapt out at a bay window into a garden, and there with thorns he was all scratched in his visage and his body; and so he ran forth he wist not wither and was wild wood as ever was man; and so he ran two year, and never man might have grace to know him.

(1998: 202)

This marks the beginning of a long and strange journey through madness. Guinevere sends knights out to find her lover and they ride throughout the country asking after 'a naked man, in his shirt, with a sword in his hand' (1998: 205). Lancelot comes upon a knight and his servant in the forest, first attacking them and then being taken to the knight's castle to be cured. His hands and feet are bound and he is given 'good meats and good drinks and brought him again to his strength and his fairness; but in his wit they could not bring him again, nor to know himself' (1998: 217). Thereafter, Lancelot leaves the knight's home in pursuit of a boar, only to be injured while fighting the animal and found by a hermit. While this hermit is as kindly and well-intentioned as Chrétien's hermit, his effectiveness stands in stark contrast. He invites Lancelot into his home and cares for his physical injury; however, his poverty prevents him from supplying the knight with food, with dire consequences:

But the hermit might not find Sir Lancelot's sustenance, and so he impaired and waxed

feeble, both of his body and of his wit; for the default of his sustenance he waxed more wooder than he was aforehand. (1998: 219)

Lancelot eventually moves on. After being chased into a castle by people throwing stones, he finds succor and is given food, although little respect or dignity, as ‘they would throw him meat and set him drink, but there was but few would bring him meat to his hands’ (1998: 220). Thereafter, the newly-knighted Castor has Lancelot serve as his fool, giving him a scarlet robe, whereupon the narrator notes that ‘when Sir Lancelot was so arrayed like a knight he was the seemliest man in all the court, and none so well made’ (1998: 220). Lastly, Lancelot is found sleeping in the garden by the lady Elaine, who recognizes him. She and her friends quickly set about restoring his abledness, a process that explicitly takes place without his consent and involves violence: Lancelot is taken to the holy sangrail ‘by force’, after which ‘there came an holy man and unhilled that vessel and so by miracle and by virtue of that holy vessel Sir Lancelot was healed and recovered’ (1998: 221).

There are many obvious similarities between this and the earlier medieval depictions of madness. Like Yvain and Nebuchadnezzar, Lancelot’s madness is marked by poverty and a lack of appropriate clothing and food. The incident with Castor drives the point home, highlighting the importance of clothing, for even while mad, when Lancelot is dressed in a red cloak his identity as a knight is restored to him. Lancelot’s first action upon going mad is to abandon civilization for the wilderness, where he endures ‘many sharp showers’ and must eat ‘fruit and such as he might get’ (1998: 215). Moreover, as in the earlier chivalric romance, most people Lancelot encounters are well-intentioned and, the text implies, admirable for their basic decency towards a disabled man. That said, there are also crucial differences in Malory’s portrayal of madness. For one thing, madness is presented as a spectrum rather than a fixed state of being. Lancelot has moments when he attacks others without provocation and, at one point, rushes into a lady’s bed to sleep while she is still in it,

forcing her to flee from the room. At other points, he is capable of coherent, polite speech, such as when he informs the hermit of the injury he has sustained from the boar. Most significantly, however, is the fact that he still has some – albeit reduced – capacity to evaluate resources. This is shown when he comes upon a shield, two swords, and two spears left by a tree in the forest. His first action is to seize a sword and use it to fend off its rightful owner who arrives soon after. Later, Lancelot sees a huge boar pursued by many dogs and hunters. As he watches, one hunter abandons the chase, tying his horse to a tree and leaning his spear against the trunk. Immediately, Lancelot identifies these valuable items and procures them, going off in pursuit of the boar himself. Both these acts of theft demonstrate how far he has fallen from his previous knightly virtue, but they also show that he retains an understanding of these implements' value to a knight and thus an understanding of the sort of property a knight should own. This would have been impossible for Chrétien's Yvain. Likewise, Lancelot's attacking the knight without provocation is an unworthy deed, but his quick victory testifies to his skill in combat, thereby restoring some part of his identity.

Malory's madman is therefore less emphatically a symbol of economic instability. Where economic concerns manifest clearly is more in others' reactions to him; Lancelot's madness gives abled characters the chance to demonstrate their economic intelligence. Queen Guinevere has access to enormous wealth and is the first to pour money into saving Lancelot after his disappearance. She gives Sir Bors, Sir Ector, and Sir Lionel 'treasure enough for their expenses' (1998: 205). The journey to cure the madman could not have been embarked upon without the queen's initial injection of capital, which is also the means through which she does penance for causing his madness. Thereafter, those who encounter Lancelot try a range of restorative processes, all made possible by the economic resources they have available. Lancelot accepts 'good meats and good drinks' from the knight, and also during his stay at the castle, when in addition to food he receives the aforementioned cloak. All these charitable acts help edge him closer to abledness. Moreover, it is made

apparent that the power of such charity lies in its substance, not in the giver's good intentions. Lancelot's condition worsens when he stays with the hermit, who heals his body but cannot afford quality food for him to eat. Those who are in an economically unstable situation cannot cure madness, which is logical given that curing madness is synonymous with being returned to economic stability in Malory's story just as it is in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Knight of the Lion*. In fact, Malory achieves a perfect blend of the two previous writers' cure narratives. As in *The Knight of the Lion*, the madman relies on charity and other people's financial intelligence to lift him from his degraded state. As in Nebuchadnezzar's story, both the scriptural and medieval version, divine intervention is what ultimately removes his madness entirely.

On the whole, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is notably more humane towards mad people. Lancelot is not dehumanized to the same extent as Yvain and Nebuchadnezzar. While mad, he is shown to have varying moods, can speak for himself, and is recognized for his competence as a warrior and for his comeliness. However, despite the text's willingness to acknowledge the madman's humanity, it continues the trend under scrutiny, namely connecting madness to economic instability. Lancelot is, first and foremost, an economic problem; his humanity, his suffering and his dignity are secondary concerns.

The trend rears its head yet again in a later medieval work. In 1494, Sebastian Brant published in German the *Narrenschiff* or *The Ship of Fools*. Based on an allegory in Plato's *Republic*, this satirical piece portrays society as a vessel populated by fools; it was immensely popular. David Wellbery notes that 'sixty-nine editions of *The Ship of Fools* are known to have been printed between 1494 and 1600' (2004: 200). This popularity was in part facilitated by the work's woodcuts, which allowed illiterate readers to engage with it, and contributed to the impact Brant's work had on other writers such as Desiderus Erasmus (Screech 2015; Wellbery 2004). Brant's text made its way into the English literary canon when it was translated by the monk Alexander Barclay in 1509. The satire's chief concern is

‘folly’, a word whose meaning is, at this historical moment, highly elastic. Paromita Chakravarti claims that ‘folly’ is ‘generally identified with madness and idiocy, but also evoking innocence, poetic or divine ecstasy, boorishness, piety, cultural difference and sexual promiscuity’ (2011: 209). Wellbery observes that ‘the fool and the madman symbolized man’s position in the eyes of an omnipotent God’ and that Brant’s innovation was to go beyond symbolism and ‘depict the entire human race as an assembly of fools’ (2004: 200).

The fools are divided into groups, such as gluttons, drunkards, false accusers, the lecherous, and many more. In his introduction, Barclay states that the satire encompasses ‘al suche as wandre from the way of trouth and from the open Path of holsom vnderstondyng and wysdom: fallynge into dyuers blyndnesses of ye mynde, folysshe sensualitytes, and vndlawful delectacions of the body’ (par. 1). While Nebuchadnezzar, Yvain, and Lancelot are remarkable and disturbing in their respective texts because there are no other characters quite like them, the fools who populate the allegorical ship are disturbing because there are so many of them, all diverse in their mental defects and in the threat they pose to social harmony. Despite the fact that madness is more widespread in *The Ship of Fools* than in Gower, Chrétien’s, or Malory’s texts, it is still portrayed as an evil that can and must be corrected – or more accurately cured, in Nigel Harris’s words. In his reading, the text approaches folly as a sickness, in that it does not

merely reflect trends presents in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century society, but it also seeks both to diagnose and cure society’s ills. These ills, it suggests, can be reduced to a single common denominator, namely folly; and folly, ultimately, is curable. (2015: 140)

As Harris points out, the book identifies the root cause of societal problems not in

dysfunctional social systems but instead in the flawed minds of individuals. Those whose minds do not function in a way the narrative sees as ideal are scapegoats for society as a whole. Considering this, the fools are as much an example of ableism in literature as the feral, frightening characters presented by Gower, Chrétien, and Malory. In fact, the ableist perspective *The Ship of Fools* puts forward is far more vicious than any of these. In the three previous texts, although the madman represents man's nadir, he is not solely to blame for every imaginable social problem; in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, at least, he is far more a victim of society than its destroyer.

But what of the text's take on the relationship between madmen and the economy? This comes to the fore in the section critiquing those who 'loue and worshyp ryches to feruently' (2). In this section, the text tackles the problem of excessive consumption, incriminating people who prioritize hoarded wealth and self-indulgent luxuries over spiritual betterment. In doing so, it reproduces the many of the stereotypes found in the aforementioned medieval texts regarding madmen's economic instability. The narrator analyses his subject's defective minds in terms that are not simply disdainful, but do the same dehumanizing work as any of the previous medieval writers. Juxtaposing rich fools against poor wise men who embrace poverty and 'hath sadness, wysdom and scyence' (7), he claims that while society disempowers the poor, a rich fool may be 'called to counseyll in the lawe/ though that his brayne be scarcely worth a straw' (20-21). These lines dissect the madman, separating his lauded external trappings and social status from his worthless brain. Moreover, assigning the brain an economic value lets the narrator signal to his reader the importance of being able to evaluate objects, even brains. This is precisely what the wealthy madman cannot do. He fails to make sensible investments in 'cunnyng, wysdome and holynes' (31) and instead is only interested in 'what rentes what londes howe great possession/ What stufte of housholde what store of grotz and pens' (33-34).

As the narrator delves deeper into the topic, he begins to paint a picture of

accumulating wealth as an obsessive practice, even a type of mania: ‘And yet is this ryche caytyf nat content/ Though he haue all yet wolde he haue more/ O cursyd hunger o mad mynde and delyte/ To laboure for that whiche neuer shall do profyte’ (64-67). Describing the ‘cursyd hunger’ suffered by someone with a ‘mad mynde’ invites the reader to feel pity for the rich fool in the wake of the scorn that has been poured on him up to this point. It also, however, recalls the cursed, hungry Nebuchadnezzar in the wilderness, whose obsessive hoarding of wealth led to his downfall. The reference to the rich fool’s wasted labor brings the economic subtext into sharp focus. Hoarding wealth is depicted as a type of labor which ultimately yields no profit and instead degrades the soul, whose value should be measured above all material goods. So once again, madness is intimately connected to economic instability and synonymous with an inability to assign value to resources. This is a trend that continues into early modern literature, as shall be shown in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

‘A little oil and root’: Further exploring the roots of the relationship between madmen and economic instability in early modern literature

The early modern period brings many evolutions to European society’s knowledge of madness and disability, as medical historians and disability theorists have observed (Arnold 2009; Dimitrijevic 2015; Goodey 2004; Harris 2004; Lindemann 2010; Lund 2010; MacDonald 1983; Neely 2004; Pelling & White 2003). Among the most impactful is the new importance scholars place upon internal causation when trying to understand why madness occurs, as Roy Porter explains:

Mania and melancholy, physicians now argued, originated not from transcendental powers but from the body; the aetiology of insanity was organic, its source not Satan but the soma. Moreover, among the medical community, the old humoral readings of mental disorder, which had highlighted the role of blood or yellow bile (‘choler’) in precipitating mania, and of black bile in melancholia, lost credit as the ‘new science’ pictured the body in mechanistic terms, stressing not the fluids but the solids. (2005: 307)

This emerging science might arguably be considered the earliest iteration of the oft-critiqued ‘medical model’ of disability, aided by the distribution of popular, influential texts such as Andreas Vesalius’s *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, or *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (1543) and Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). In addition to this new science, a new attitude towards madness develops in the early modern period, as ‘people became more concerned about the prevalence of madness, gloom and self-murder than they ever had been before’ (Macdonald 1983: 2). This results in the development of new social mechanisms put in place for contending with mad people, as ‘private entrepreneurs founded specialized

institutions to manage mad people and municipal officials established public madhouses’ (Macdonald 1983: 2). This is not to suggest that the medieval model of madness is replaced entirely, nor that during this period we see a more respectful attitude towards the disabled develop. Practices such as involuntary commitment and inhumane treatment and the conditions endured by disabled men and women in the infamous Bethlem Royal Asylum or ‘Bedlam’ make clear that this is not the case. Chakravarti points out that early modern literature was often kinder in its depictions of mad people than early modern society was in its treatment of them, contrasting the period’s ‘humanist valorizations of the role-playing literary wise fool’ such as those which proliferate Shakespeare’s plays alongside ‘medico-legal discourses taxonomizing fools and madmen, segregating them from “normal”, rational society’ (2011: 213).

Concomitant with these developments in medicine are numerous socioeconomic upheavals, including the growth of the market economy, the rise of mercantilism, increased international trade, dramatic urban expansion, increased poverty, religious and political upheaval (Britnell 2009; Harris 2004; Howard 2011; Howell 2010; Kaye 2000; Korda 2002; Cowen Orlin 2000; Sacks 1992; Wrightson 2002). Economic historians have commented at length on the period’s demographic changes and the swelling urban population (Boulton 1987; Harding 1990; Griffiths, Landers, Pelling, Tyson, 2000; Guy 1984; Wrightson 2002). London is especially notable in this regard; because of the employment opportunities the city offered, its population rose ‘from about 50,000 in 1485 to 700,000 by 1750’ (Bucholz & Key 2013: 30). Lena Cowen Orlin describes the way London’s ballooning size and economic strength rendered it ‘the proverbial measure for wealth, against which the riches of other English places were compared’ (2000: 21). At the same time the social pressures and tensions such wealth created made London as temperamentally unstable and restless as any literary madman, ‘a proverbial site of dissent, where not even the tolling bells could agree on the hour; a crowded place, full

of jostling bodies on the streets and the sound of angry words' (Cowen Orlin, 2000: 21). In the early modern texts I examine, writers grapple with these alterations to the economic landscape while at the same time remaining cognizant of the economic issues that influence how madmen are depicted in medieval literature. Consequently, literature brings the madman into the sixteenth century containing many of the same essential elements; he still struggles to assign correct values to resources and brings with him the specters of price fluctuations and famine. However, early modern madmen are, on the whole, more diverse and complex than their predecessors, partly because there are far more of them. Early modern theatre in particular boasts a great many madmen.

Firstly, I examine Desiderius Erasmus's satirical text *Moriae Encomium* or *In Praise of Folly* (1511). Like Brant, Erasmus critiques his society by presenting it as being in the grip of madness, with dire economic consequences. I then analyze Ben Jonson's city comedy *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), which shows how the economic instability associated with madmen in medieval texts manifests on the early modern stage, albeit now augmented by new anxieties brought about by the changing economic structures in which the early modern madman operates. Lastly, I examine Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (1607), again breaking from chronological order. I do this to keep my central argument clear, for Shakespeare, unlike Jonson, departs in fundamental ways from the established paradigm. While all the previous texts demonstrate diverse and at points mutually contradictory ideas regarding the madman's place in the economy, all nonetheless retain the core principle that mad people are sources of economic instability. *Timon of Athens* is clearly aware of this literary trend, but stands apart in its willingness to question the ableist rhetoric upon which it rests. In doing so, it offers a nuanced and humane portrayal of a madman interwoven with a critique of pervasive societal economic immorality.

Desiderius Erasmus's essay *In Praise of Folly* or *Moriae Encomium* was first published in 1511 in Latin. Written in honor of Thomas More, the text is described by Anthony Grafton

as a ‘complex, puzzling and often-polemical discourse on contemporary society and religion’ (2015: ix). This text is useful in part because of how easily it can be compared to Brant’s *Ship of Fools*. Both are satirical works that critique society. Both tackle pervading social dysfunction at the level of the individual, attributing corruption and strife not to oppressive external political or economic systems but instead to internal mental defects. Both dismiss the binaries between perfect psychological abledness and total psychological dysfunction that appear in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Knight of the Lion*. Like *The Ship of Fools*, *In Praise of Folly* portrays a world full of diverse kinds of folly. As Thomas Conley puts it, ‘virtually every group imaginable’ is satirized, scrutinized, and found guilty of follies great and small (1990: 121). Despite these similarities, *In Praise of Folly* demonstrates the point made in the previous paragraph; it is an early modern text that is no less vicious in its ableism, but does offer a greater amount of variety in the attitudes its narrator takes towards madness. Michael A. Screech discusses the extent to which Erasmus was influenced by *The Ship of Fools*, noting that Brant’s text is, by comparison, an ‘accessible work’ with ‘few literary pretensions’ (2015: 186). Erasmus is more ambitious, his narrator intertwining ‘eulogies of good Christian madness and satires of multiform bad or merely silly madness’ (Screech 2015: 188). Similarly, Johan Huizinga states that ‘throughout the work, two themes are intertwined; that of salutary folly, which is true wisdom, and that of deluded wisdom, which is pure folly’ (1984: 74). Allen Thiher notes that one of the most significant ways Erasmus diverges from Brant is in distancing madness from sinfulness:

Folly defines madness with precision. She does not call her own every aberration of the mind, nor every hallucination or delirium. She accepts as hers only those cases where in addition to the senses, judgement goes astray, pathologically and with continuity. In other words, her insanity is medically and juridically defined – and there is nothing demonic about insanity at all... With irony Erasmus tries to get around the medieval incapacity to

view madness theoretically except as one aspect of the same allegory of sin recurring universally after the fall. (2009: 52-53)

Erasmus, therefore, offers a more modern, sophisticated interpretation of madness. While acknowledging this, my aim is to show that *In Praise of Folly* nonetheless perpetuates the aforementioned medieval texts' insistence on a connection between madmen and economic instability.

Erasmus's text opens with the goddess Folly addressing an audience flanked by her handmaidens Flattery, Forgetfulness, Sloth, Self-love, Sensuality, and Madness – 'she that stares so wildly, and rolls about her eyes' (par. 6). Folly starts by praising herself fulsomely, presenting herself as the propagator of the human race and the source of all that is enjoyable in an otherwise unbearable world. She takes credit for human civilization, arguing that 'naturally savage' mankind united due to 'flattery, one of my chiefest virtues' (par. 27). Regarding madness, she contends that there are two very different sorts. The first is 'the one that which the furies bring from hell', which leads to 'an inexhaustible thirst for power and riches' (par. 54). The second is a 'thoroughly good and desirable' madness, which occurs 'when by a harmless mistake in the judgment of things the mind is freed from those cares which would otherwise gratingly afflict it' (par. 54). This is an idea that would not have been put forward in Gower's, Chrétien's, or Malory's texts, none of which entertain the prospect of desirable madness. E. E. Reynolds notes that the text's first half, where Folly promotes herself, is 'amusing and light-hearted', and that Folly is depicted as 'the incarnation of light-heartedness, high spirits and fun. It would not be straining the meaning too far to say that this little book is a defense of a sense of humor and of sincerity' (1965: 67). However, the book undergoes a tonal change when Erasmus takes over the narration. Reynolds notes that the people Erasmus presents as being Folly's servants are 'marked by pride, ostentation, affectation, self-seeking and hypocrisy' (1965: 7). Here is where I find reproduced the

association of madness with economic instability.

Consider Erasmus's attack on those who are addicted to gambling. 'At the first rattle of the box their heart shakes within them, and keeps consort with the motion of the dice', he claims, the first of many physical symptoms that accompany this type of madness in his account, including swearing, poor vision, and gout (par. 38). Gamblers erode their own economic stability until they 'have thrown away their whole estate, and made shipwreck of all they have, scarce escaping to shore with their own clothes to their backs' (par. 39). Worse, gamblers' madness threatens to destabilize their whole community's economy, as they 'will cheat any creditor' and will eventually spread the contagion by drawing in others 'to throw for them' (par. 39). So extreme are the consequences of gambling that Erasmus notes that 'it ends so oft in downright madness, that it seems rather to belong to the furies than to folly' (par. 40). This blurring of the line between 'folly' and 'the furies', the moment when tolerable madness becomes intolerable, is a direct result of the economic consequences of this particular type of madness.

Similarly, when attacking courtly corruption, Erasmus once again reduces a widespread socioeconomic problem down to the level of individuals' mental flaws, focusing all his attention on the supposed mental defects of courtiers who value material possessions too highly. They 'adorn their bodies with gold, jewels, purple, and other glorious ensigns of virtue and wisdom, but leave their minds empty and unfraught' (par. 112). In the case of such 'sots and dolts', madness is described as a mental and spiritual vacuum, nothing more than a placid emptiness where true virtue and wisdom should reside. This internal void results in behavioral defects, as the courtiers 'sleep generally till noon', moving straight from breakfast to dinner with 'one or two afternoon banquets' in between (par. 113).

In addition to these sections where Erasmus decries overconsumption and wastefulness, there is another point in the text where the economic side of madness is brought to the fore. As noted earlier, the continuous thread between the medieval writers examined is that they

characterize madness as a failure to assess the value of resources. This idea recurs when Erasmus places the dividing line between what is regarded as commonplace folly and what is regarded as madness under critical scrutiny and finds it to be rooted in questionable logic:

I have not yet determined whether it be proper to include all the defects of sense and understanding under the common genius of madness. For if anyone be so short-sighted as to take a mule for an ass, or so shallow pated as to admire a paltry ballad for an elegant poem, he is not thereupon immediately censured as mad. But if anyone let not only his senses but his judgment be imposed upon in the most ordinary common concerns, he shall come under the scandal of being thought next door to a madman. As suppose any one should hear an ass bray, and should take it for ravishing music; or if any one, born a beggar, should fancy himself as great as a prince, or the like. But this sort of madness, if (as is most usual) it be accompanied with pleasure, brings a great satisfaction both to those who are possessed with it themselves, and those who deride it in others, though they are not both equally frantic. And this species of madness is of larger extent than the world commonly imagines. Thus the whole tribe of madmen make sport among themselves, while one laughs at another; he that is more mad many times jeering him that is less so. But indeed the greater each man's madness is, the greater is his happiness, if it be but such a sort as proceeds from an excess of folly, which is so epidemical a distemper that it is hard to find any one man so uninfected as not to have sometimes a fit or two of some sort of frenzy. There is only this difference between the several patients, he that shall take a broom-stick for a strait-bodied woman is without more ado sentenced for a madman, because this is so strange a blunder as very seldom happens; whereas he whose wife is a common jilt, that keeps a warehouse free for all customers, and yet swears she is as chaste as an untouched virgin, and hugs himself in his contented mistake, is scarce taken notice of, because he fares no worse than a great many more of his good-natured neighbors (par.

54).

In this extract, Erasmus posits several instances in which an individual might be mistaken as to an object's value, such as a 'paltry ballad' being mistaken for an 'elegant poem'. However, not every instance of erroneous evaluation is taken as madness. Mistaking a mule for an ass might simply indicate short-sightedness. It is when a man lets 'not only his senses but his judgement' assign an incorrect value to an object that he veers dangerously close to madness. An example of this is to mistake a prince for a beggar, a very serious economic error implying unfamiliarity with the socioeconomic sphere's most basic rules. While the sinful Nebuchadnezzar and the tragic Lancelot and Yvain may seem to have little in common on the surface with Erasmus's comical fool who can mistake a beggar for a prince, at core they have one basic similarity; all mistake less valuable objects – muddy pits, dry bread, and beggars – for more valuable objects – luxurious rooms, sauce, and princes respectively.

However, as noted, *In Praise of Folly* is representative of early modern literature in general insofar as it treats this paradigm more critically. Firstly, Erasmus dissociates madness from the horror that accompanies it in Gower's, Chrétien's and Malory's works by playfully suggesting that its benefits may outweigh its cost. Mistaking a less valuable object for a more valuable one brings satisfaction both to those who make the error and those who enjoy mocking the error. The horror is further reduced by Erasmus's extraordinary claim as to madness's commonality; that there are more mad people 'than the world commonly imagines'. Once again, he dismantles the abled/mad binary by presenting madness as a spectrum, where those who are mad laugh at those who are more so, who in turn laugh at those even more mad than they.

Secondly, Erasmus points out that not all economic misjudgments are created equal. He uses the example of a man's perception of a woman's value. To mistake a broomstick for a woman is considered madness; but to mistake an adulterous wife for a chaste wife is not. The

difference between the two instances is that the first is ‘so strange a blunder as very seldom happens’. In other words, what separates the madman’s economic misjudgments from those of men considered sane is the frequency with which others make the same error. Or to put it another way, an economic mistake will not be labelled madness provided it is one that everyone or at least a substantial number of people make. An item’s ‘real’ value is therefore less important than a general consensus as to its value; it is when the misevaluation strays too far from the consensus that madness is identified.

The importance Erasmus places on value might be prompted by the fact that, as in Gower’s century, price fluctuations are an ongoing concern for the early modern world. As Keith Wrightson notes, ‘sixteenth-century people... lived in a world in which the prices of basic necessities could fluctuate wildly from year to year, above all in accordance with the state of the harvest’ (2002: 116). The early modern period faced this challenge and also another problem relating to value that the medieval period did not have to contend with; namely, the shift in value of luxury items. Natasha Korda contends that ‘the increasing availability of such comforts to non- and would-be elite householders rendered distinctions between “useful” and “necessary” goods and “superfluous” or luxury goods increasingly unstable and difficult to fix’ (2002: 18). Gower’s Nebuchadnezzar’s madness manifests as an inability to identify correctly the value of his food and accommodation, echoing the uncertainty provoked by medieval economic shifts that could see the prices of mundane items like bread fluctuating from market to market and week to week. Erasmus’s world of madmen decide whether or not to label their peers madmen depending on whether or not their particular delusions accord with the general economic consensus as to what objects are worth. The implication is that without consensus, there would be no social mechanism for identifying madness, and the harmonious chain of good-natured mockery from one madman to the next would break down. A world in which price fluctuations and confusion over what constitutes ‘luxury’ make evident the lack of a prevailing economic consensus means that

there is no 'great satisfaction' to be had by anyone.

These, then, are the features of the medieval madman offered by Gower, Chrétien and Malory that Erasmus retains: his inability to evaluate resources and the danger his economic incompetence poses to his own well-being and to the socioeconomic sphere in general. With that said, previously significant aspects of the stereotype are not deployed – closeness to the wilderness and animal traits, for example. This is a trend throughout early modern literature. Madness is still associated with economic instability, but this instability manifests in ways other than feral behavior and starvation in the wilderness, ways more often related to economic developments that emerge in the period. The early modern madman is not more or less economically dangerous than the medieval madman, but the specific economic threat he poses has changed.

As noted, early modern theatre contains a higher number of mad characters than medieval literature. It also offers greater diversity and complexity in the way it depicts madness. In this chapter and those to come, the early modern texts examined show madmen holding many varied social roles. While the wilderness still occasionally draws in madmen – in *King Lear* (1606), for example – it no longer seems to be the madman's 'natural habitat' in literature. On the early modern stage, madmen dwell in Bedlam and other asylums, but are also found in the home, in the street and in the marketplace. Madness no longer necessitates immediate removal from one's previous dwelling or career, and rather losing their social status, connections, influence, and memory, madmen on the stage often remain where they are and cling to pieces of their previous life. Ferdinand in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) is a nobleman who succumbs to madness gradually, retaining much of his power right up until his death, even as his actions become increasingly violent and unpredictable.

This ability to infiltrate any sector of society only increases the economic havoc madmen can create. The play that, to my mind, demonstrates most clearly the dangers of madness roaming free in particularly sensitive economic zones such as the marketplace is

Ben Jonson's city comedy *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). Like those who have come before him, Jonson uses the madman as a symbol of economic dysfunctionality. In previous texts, this dysfunctionality has included problems such as price fluctuations, food scarcity, and overconsumption. Jonson focuses on two main issues: underconsumption (which amounts to a failure to competently participate in the marketplace and, by extension, the city's socioeconomic world) and the failure of charity to alleviate poverty.

Jonson is known for his 'extravagant and immoderate characters', as Gordon Campbell notes (1995: vii). But while many of his prominent characters possess traits that might today signify some degree of psychological disability, those that are plainly and indisputably categorized as mad by the rest of the cast are quite few and do not have starring roles. There are no King Lear's in Jonson's works, tragic protagonists whose madness is the play's central concern; there are no Ferdinands, frightful antagonists whose madness is an inextricable part of the play's plot. Instead, the two most prominent, unquestionably mad people in Jonson's plays are the mad nobleman's sister presented to Sir Epicure Mammon in *The Alchemist* (1610), and the unfortunate Trouble-All who haunts the marketplace in *Bartholomew Fair*. Of these two, Trouble-All is the only 'real' mad person, the nobleman's sister being merely a disguise adopted by one of *The Alchemist*'s con artists to fool Mammon. For this reason, *Bartholomew Fair* deserves more scrutiny from a mad studies perspective than it has received up to this point.

The plot follows a diverse range of characters going about their business and identifying a central protagonist is difficult. In Campbell's assessment, the play 'contains no such starring role because, as the title indicates, it is the fair rather than any particular character that is at the center of the action' (1995: xxi). Some have come to the fair as customers wishing to indulge their appetites. Some have come on behalf of the law in an attempt to control those appetites. Some have come to sell their wares and others to rob the unwary. Justice Overdo, described by David Bevington as 'the embodiment of the law',

attends the fair in disguise rather than rely on spies and informants, planning to catch unsuspecting criminals (2000: 85). Soon, Overdo finds himself being made to suffer numerous humiliations, including being placed in the stocks. Along the way, he encounters Trouble-All, a local madman. He learns that Trouble-All was once one of his officers until excess devotion to Overdo's philosophy of austere, uncompassionate deference to authority drove him mad. These days, he haunts the fair asking random passersby if they have a warrant for whatever activity they are engaged in.

The character Trouble-All has received comparatively little critical attention. Alexander Leggat, who describes the play's central thematic interest as the 'opposition between carnival misrule and the authority that seeks to suppress it' reads him as a simple critique of having excess faith in authority: '...the obsession of Trouble-All, who will not eat, drink, or urinate without Justice Overdo's warrant implies that deference to authority is ultimately madness' (2007: xv). However, I argue that there is far more to the character than this when we consider him in light of the established literary trend of using mad people to express economic anxieties.

In this case, the particular economic anxieties Trouble-All evokes are early modern London's awareness of the urban marketplace's increasing socioeconomic importance and the risk of failing to engage with it in a way that ensures one's ongoing financial and social security. Unlike the rest of the cast, Trouble-All has not attended the fair in the hope of profiting from the venture. Not only does he not desire the luxury items that Overdo rails against like tobacco, he does not express desire for anything but a warrant. He owns nothing and does not want to own anything, and we are told by a man familiar with him that he will neither eat, drink, nor change his clothing without Overdo's warrant. The consequences of this extreme underconsumption are, at a personal level, very dire indeed. Having no possessions means that Trouble-All, like Nebuchadnezzar, lacks any signs that might communicate his social identity to the world. In the early modern period especially, material

objects were increasingly important when it comes to self-identification. Natasha Korda, discussing the evolving status of valuable objects in the period, argues that prior to this period

the role of objects within a household economy based on domestic production is to serve as use-values within and for the home. With the transition to a market economy, however, the value and significance of household objects was determined outside the home, by the market and by the culture at large... Household objects thereby functioned to signify the subject's place within the social order. (2002: 19)

With no objects to his name and possessed of a madness that renders him unable to accumulate objects, Trouble-All's place within the social order is dangerously fluid. Even men who pride themselves on their powers of observation can fail to recognize him as a madman; when Justice Overdo first sees Trouble-All requesting Overdo's warrant from random individuals, he comically misinterprets the situation. 'He seems a sober and discreet person!' muses Overdo, adding, 'It is a comfort to a good conscience, to be followed with a good fame, in his sufferings' (4: 1: 23-25).

The erosion of Trouble-All's identity reaches its climax in the play's second half, where he is robbed of all his clothing. Clothes in *Bartholomew Fair* have received considerable critical attention. Laura Levine discusses the infamous puppet show, in which a puppet, in response to an 'old stale argument against the players' that decries theatrical cross-dressing, raises its skirt and exposes its lack of genitals, rendering the point moot (1986: 89). She argues that 'the puppet enacts not the loss or collapse of gender which the anti-theatricalists fear, but its radical and given absence' (1986: 89). Jean Macintyre notes that 'the cutpurse Edgeworth uses gallant attire to turn suspicion from himself to people who look more like criminals' (1992: 237). Regarding the prostitute Alice, Paul Yachin argues that she 'underlines the importance of fine dress in a competitive marketplace when she upbraids

Justice Overdo's wife' (2001: 62). Of foremost relevance to my argument is the fact that Jonson's use of apparel demonstrates Korda's point that 'clothing served in the period both to make and to unmake the social identity of the subject' (2002: 19-20). Trouble-All's unmaking comes shortly after he is spotted by Dame Purecraft, a foolish woman who has been told by a charlatan that she will marry a madman, and who has spent months visiting Bedlam in the hope of selecting a partner. She falls in love with him at first sight, but he wanders off before she can act. Quarlous hopes to win Purecraft's hand, and so accosts Trouble-All and steals his clothing. Left naked like the medieval madmen before him, Trouble-All does not appear again until the play's final scene, when Quarlous reveals the deception. In losing his clothing, Trouble-All loses the only indicator of his social identity he has, essentially suffering social cannibalization at the hands of Quarlous, although Jonson does not treat this as any more serious an occurrence than any of the absurd predicaments in which other characters find themselves.

In addition to stripping him of his identity, Trouble-All's inability to acquire possessions or participate in commerce in any way also leaves him socially isolated, existing on the fringes of the marketplace and the community in general. Leggat identifies him as the peak of the kinesis that permeates the cast as they wander through the fair, never rooting themselves in a single location: '...the general restlessness reaches its climax in the mad Trouble-All, who in his first scene leaves and re-enters five times in little more than eighty lines' (1999: 138). What separates Trouble-All from the rest of the cast is not just that he is less anchored than any of them, but also that he wanders alone and without purpose. While other characters are connected to one another by family ties, friendship, animosity, customership, and above all a desire to profit from the acquaintance, Trouble-All stands alone, without friends, family, or anyone who is invested in his continued existence.

Although a wife is mentioned, she never appears onstage. His isolation results from the fact that commerce is, in this play, the medium through which new acquaintances and social

bonds are formed, characters connecting with one another in the course of buying or selling items, and Trouble-All has neither the desire nor the ability to participate in commerce.

To fully understand the broader ramifications of Trouble-All's madness being let loose upon the marketplace, it is necessary to examine its cause: Justice Overdo, the man who taught Trouble-All this austere philosophy of underconsumption. If the play has a chief antagonist, it is Overdo. While characters at the fair such as pickpockets or con artists pose a threat to the innocent or the gullible, only Overdo presents a threat to the fair's very existence. As noted by Leggat, he embodies the overbearing authority that the play challenges. While he may not be the play's most immoral character, he receives its harshest punishment, being placed in the stocks, publicly humiliated by his wife's drunkenness, and eventually made to concede the error of his ways. In the play's final scene, he is obliged to invite the other fairgoers to a feast; presumably a costly endeavor. Regarding Overdo's foolishness, Adam Zucker notes that 'the costs of idiocy at the conclusion of *Bartholomew Fair* turn out, like Quarlous' profits, to be more than social. They will be measureable, like fairground fines, in pounds and pennies' (2011: 99). What earns Overdo this fate – and what drives Trouble-All mad – is his total hostility towards any consumption that might be construed as excessive. In the context of the fair, this amounts to a hostility towards just about every economic exchange that might conceivably take place, as all the purchasable wares we see are non-essentials like gingerbread, pork, and alcohol. To oppose excess in *Bartholomew Fair* is to oppose commerce. In his introductory monologue, we receive insight into the extreme nature of his devotion to the cause, as he lays out what he sees as a judge's ethical duty:

JUSTICE OVERDO

Marry, go you into every alehouse, and down into every cellar; measure the length of puddings, take the gauge of black pots, and cans, aye, and custards with a stick; and their circumference, with a thread; weight the loaves of bread on his middle finger; then would

he send for 'em, home; give the puddings to the poor, the bread to the hungry, the custards to his children; breaks the pots, and burn the cans himself; he would not trust his corrupt officers; he would do it himself (2: 1: 16-23).

This extract demonstrates two key features of Overdo's philosophy. The first is that he sees all zones of commercial activity, not just the fair, as battlegrounds upon which his war against excess consumption might be waged. And it is indeed a war; Overdo's preferred methods entail a process of steadily increasing violence. It begins by measuring purchasable items, then confiscating those items from business owners, and finally breaking and burning the means by which those items are made. It is apparent that if this philosophy were imposed on those selling their wares at the fair, there would soon be no fair at all.

That said, the audience is invited to sympathize with Overdo's goal. The uncontrolled greed and excesses indulged in by the rest of the cast do indeed often seem harmful. A prime example is when Overdo's own wife drinks too much and vomits on him. Consumption unfettered by morality allows criminals free reign and unchecked commercialism leads to the sale of low-quality, even dangerous goods such as Joan Trash's rotten gingerbread. Jonson does not downplay the fair's darker side, instead painting a detailed picture of this early modern economic hub's sordid and dynamic inner workings, complete with thieves, con artists, and routine violence. In this urban wilderness, as in the medieval forests in which Nebuchadnezzar and the mad knights roam, man is reduced to animal instincts, the true value of food is hard to ascertain, and any measure of succor and comfort is hard to find. This is in keeping with Jonson's attitude toward cities in general, as Adam Zucker observes:

Perhaps no other took such bitter pleasure in pointing out the contemporary failures and fault-lines in this cohesive, communal space; the conflicting social possibilities, the degrading competitions over status or wealth and the deep injustices that accompanied the

diversification and diffusion of commerce and civility in London and Westminster. (2011: 97)

Despite this, the fair is, on the whole, depicted as a positive institution, driving economic activity and human social interaction. As Bevington argues, despite its dangers, it ‘bustles with vitality... a kind of Saturnalia, an occasion of profane release and celebration and occasional riot’ (2000: 85). And while the consequences of overconsumption are dire, the consequences of underconsumption are shown to be far more serious. Overconsumption may damage individuals’ bodies, but ultimately even its worst effects – drunkenness, public humiliation, loss of property and brawling – are only temporary in the play, and almost everyone who overindulges is allowed to leave the fair either satisfied or no worse off. Underconsumption does permanent damage to the soul, as Trouble-All proves. This point is driven home when Overdo interacts with Trouble-All for the first time and sees what he has created. After infiltrating a tavern, Overdo begins preaching against the consumption of tobacco:

JUSTICE OVERDO

Hark, O you sons and daughters of Smithfield! And hear what malady it doth the mind. It causeth swearing, it causeth swaggering, it causeth snuffling and snarling, and now and then a hurt (2: 6: 61-64).

He presents his critiques of this luxury good in terms of the damage it does to mental capacities, thereby presenting himself as a defender of mental abledness and an enemy to madness. The irony of this misguided self-assessment is driven home when, shortly afterwards, Overdo is escorted to the stocks and encounters Trouble-All. Inquiring after this ‘sober and discreet’ person, Overdo is informed by the Watch officer Bristle as to Trouble-

All's true nature:

BRISTLE

He is a fellow that is distracted, they say; one Trouble-All; he was an officer in the Court of Piepowders, here last years, and put out on his place by Justice Overdo.

JUSTICE OVERDO

Hah!

BRISTLE

Upon which, he took an idle conceit, and run's mad upon't. So that ever since, he will do nothing but by Justice Overdo's warrant, he will not eat a crust, nor drink a little, nor make him in apparel, ready. His wife, sir-reverence, cannot get him make his water, or shift his shirt, without his warrant.

JUSTICE OVERDO

If this be true, this is my greatest disaster! How am I bound to satisfy this poor man, that is of so good a nature to me, out of his wits! Where there is no room left for dissembling (4: 1: 45-56).

If it were not already clear that Overdo's frenzied imaginings about the dangers of tobacco are misplaced when compared to the serious threat underconsumption poses to one's sanity, it is now. The 'swaggering', 'swearing', and 'snuffling' brought about by tobacco cannot surely be compared to the horror of a young and promising officer of the law being reduced to the impoverished subject of marketplace mockery.

Worse yet, when Justice Overdo attempts to correct his mistake, he only succeeds in

drawing the audience's attention towards another economic anxiety permeating early modern society, namely, the distribution of charity. Charity is a subject of great concern in the period, as a sharp rise in poverty results from, among other factors, 'the decline of the traditional woolen broadcloth industry', 'growth of the landless, or near-landless, cottage-laborer element in society' and the 'decline of middle-sized peasant holdings' (Beier, 1989: 238).

Robert Bucholz and Newton Key note the severity of the problem:

It has been estimated that at the end of the Tudor period, depending on the current state of the economy, something like ten to twenty percent of the general population could not meet their expenses out of their income, about a third resorted to begging and some 20,000 - 40,000 people were in a state of near-perpetual migration. (2013: 185)

As poverty rises, new mechanisms are developed to counteract it. W.K. Jordan identifies the sixteenth century as the first time poverty is 'systematically attacked' in Europe (1959: 17). In his estimation, merchants and gentry are mainly responsible for this, as 'older classes of men, and most particularly the nobility and clergy, were quietly withdrawing from the tasks of responsibility', which he attributes in part to increased economic pressures on the nobility and clergy (1959: 19). Giving aid to the poor was not unknown up to this time; however, Jordan states that 'the medieval system of alms, administered principally by the monastic foundations, was at once casual and ineffective in its incidence, never seeking to do more than relieve conspicuous and abject suffering' (1959: 17). That said, the structures put in place for dealing with poverty in the early modern period are often cruel and punitive. The Poor Laws were intended to 'reduce the tax burden the poor represented', but are often little more than 'a means to coerce proper behavior and, where charity was denied, expel the undesirable from the community' (Bucholz & Key, 2013: 187). Beyond formal legislation, Bucholz and Key describe a more insidious attitude of 'fear and loathing' towards the poor arising in this period,

a perception that ‘vagrant and beggars were a nuisance, and one could never tell who was really deserving, who just too lazy to work. Nor could one easily distinguish them from thieves, pickpockets, pimps, prostitutes, or murderers’ (2013: 384). So even as early modern society offers more charity to the poor, it associates them with criminality, immorality and general disorder. Overdo embodies the hypocrisy of this attitude in his attempts to alleviate Trouble- All’s plight. After escaping the stocks, he encounters Trouble-All once again – or rather, Quarlous in the guise of Trouble-All – and offers him help:

JUSTICE OVERDO

Do you want a house, or meat, or drink, or clothes? Speak whatsoever it is, it shall be supplied you, what want you? (5: 2: 83-85)

As might be expected, Overdo’s efforts fail; Quarlous, correctly guessing Trouble-All’s likeliest reaction, professes to want nothing besides a warrant, which Overdo eventually gives to him in despair. ‘Trouble-All’s lunacy is beyond redress, even by the man who caused it’ (Barton 1984: 203). While this may be true, the more important point is that Overdo, who had previously associated consumption with immorality and madness, now tries to cure madness by persuading Trouble-All to become a consumer once more. In offering Trouble-All the material goods he has spent the whole play preaching against, Overdo not only gives the madman permission to consume, he tries to make him want to consume. Such an inconsistent, illogical attitude towards the act of consumption turns Overdo’s character into a harsh critique of early modern charity as a whole. Charity, Jonson suggests, is primarily motivated by guilt rather than genuine compassion – a trait Overdo lacks throughout the play – and is ultimately ineffective. It may even be toxic, for when we think back to Overdo’s introductory monologue, we might recall his plan to ‘give the puddings to the poor, the bread to the hungry, the custards to his children’ being uttered in the same breath as his violent desire to ‘breaks the pots and

burn the cans' (2: 1: 16-23). The close alignment of charity and destruction in these lines suggests that they are both motivated by the same paternalistic arrogance characterizing those who wish to control consumption.

Bartholomew Fair taps into the model of madness established by scripture, *Confessio Amantis*, *The Knight of the Lion*, and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, while also building upon this model to examine early modern economic concerns. What Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (1607) offers is something a bit different; a complete deconstruction of the archetypal madman. He mounts an attack on the basic assumptions underlying the ableism inherent in all the aforementioned stories while also dissecting the correlation between madness and economic instability.

First performed in 1607 and the likely result of a collaboration between Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens* is widely regarded as a play about money. Karl Marx assessed it as such in 1844 and examinations of its investment in socioeconomic issues have characterized a significant proportion of critical readings since. Usury, greed, credit, and the penal debt bond have been identified as central themes (Bailey 2011; Chorost 1991; Grady 2003). The British National Theatre's 2012 production was applauded by reviewers Paul Mason and Johan Lahr, writing for the *Guardian* and the *New Yorker* respectively, because of the skill with which director Nicholas Hynter evokes the 2008 global economic crisis. Critics have also noted the play's interest in bodily sickness, in particular syphilis and leprosy (Bentley 1989; Cranfill 1975; Grigsby 2004; Harris 2004). The plot concerns a wealthy nobleman known for his generosity. It is soon revealed that he is deeply in debt and must call upon those who previously benefited from his largesse for assistance.

When all reject his pleas, Timon invites them to a final feast where he rebukes them in a spectacular fashion, serving them rocks and water which he then throws at them. 'He's but a mad lord, and naught but humor sways him,' observe his guests in the wake of Timon's outburst (2: 108-109). Thereafter, he departs for the wilderness where he lives naked and

impoverished, adopting a philosophy of extreme misanthropy and denouncing mankind to all who come upon him. While digging for roots to eat, he comes upon a casket of gold, but rather than being delighted at his changed fortunes, he condemns his treasure by describing all the social ills money creates. He then gives away his newfound wealth to those he feels will use it to hasten Athens' destruction, before dying alone.

I argue that in addition to being a play about money, *Timon of Athens* is every bit as much a play about madness. There is room in the text to read Timon as the lone voice of sanity in a city of men driven mad by a self-destructive economic system that prizes money over social bonds. However, I argue that this reading enforces exactly the sort of abled/disabled binary that the text works to deconstruct. Reading Shakespeare's Timon as a madman offers far richer possibilities than the 'one sane man' narrative.

Most significant is Shakespeare's evisceration of the stereotypical economically unstable madmen who populate medieval literature. On the surface, Timon has much in common with Nebuchadnezzar and Yvain; upon going mad, he abandons civilization and all its trappings in favor of living exposed to the elements and dining on roots. However, while Nebuchadnezzar and Yvain's madness results from sinful behavior, Timon's emotional breakdown results from the abuses heaped upon him by his erstwhile friends. Moreover, in the medieval texts, madness is characterized by economic incompetence, most importantly an inability to evaluate resources. Timon's madness, by contrast, marks his departure from the willfully self-destructive economic behavior embedded in his community. What drives him to abandon civilization and dine exclusively on roots is not a failure to recognize their worthlessness as a source of nutrition. Instead, Timon values the roots because of his realization that the items he had previously prized are in fact worthless, unable to protect him from bankruptcy, social isolation and betrayal. He repeatedly lays out the virtues of humble roots compared to the lavish feasts which led to his bankruptcy and loss of faith in mankind. The root is one of the few foods which can be obtained without necessitating interaction with

other people. It does not have to be purchased or prepared and is accessible to anyone, coming directly from the ‘common mother, thou whose womb immeasurable and infinite breast teems and feeds all’ (14: 178-180). Moreover, unlike the illusory value of Timon’s lavish feasts, the root’s value does not fluctuate or fade. So ardent is Timon in his preference for these supposedly worthless items that, when he comes upon the cache of gold, he exclaims: ‘No, gods/ I am no idle votarist: roots, you clear heavens!’ (14: 27-28). Similarly, when he hosts a party to get revenge on his abusers, he serves them rocks and water, imbuing these supposedly worthless items with value as they become props supporting his symbolic gesture. They gain another level of value when he turns them into weapons, flinging them at his enemies to make them disburse.

This is all to say that while the text allows for the possibility that Timon’s decisions are misguided or ineffective, it does not allow the audience to dismiss them as the irrelevant results of a defective mind. Timon articulates his motives for leaving the city, and for leaving behind all worldly possessions that remain to him: ‘Nothing I’ll bear from thee/ But nakedness, thou detestable town!’ (12: 33-34). Here, ‘nothing’ itself has value, being a resource Timon will take with him. This idea returns later in the text when Timon is dying and claims: ‘My long sickness/ of health and life now begins to mend/ And nothing brings me all things’ (14: 720-722). Owning no property no longer implies inhumanity and a loss of identity. Instead, it becomes evidence of interiority and of the philosophy he has consciously adopted, a symbol of his frustration with society’s economic failings. The significance of this lies in the fact that in all previous texts, characters identified as mad have not been permitted the agency to comment upon their actions or reflect upon their feelings towards their newfound poverty. When Nebuchadnezzar, Yvain, Lancelot, and Trouble-All go mad, it is assumed they no longer have meaningful thoughts and feelings the reader or audience might want to know about. Timon has more in common with Chrétien’s beast lord than Chrétien’s Yvain in that however unfathomable his actions are to those he encounters, he is not devoid

of purpose or reason.

The play does not go too far in the opposite direction, dehumanizing the madman by making him a wise seer imbued with insight the abled cannot access. While Timon's philosophy is understandable, it is rarely presented as admirable. Consider one of his last acts, giving the gold he finds to his steward, along with these instructions:

TIMON

Hate all, curse all, show charity to none

But let the famished flesh slide from the bone

Ere thou relieve the beggar.

Give to dogs

What thou deniest to men.

Let prisons swallow 'em,

Debts wither 'em to nothing;

be men like blasted woods

And may diseases lick up their false bloods (14: 526-531).

It is hard to remain sympathetic to Timon after reading these words. Losing all his money and power does not make him sympathetic to the poor and vulnerable. In fact, he seems to embody at this moment all the cruellest aspects of early modern society's attitudes towards the poor, advocating imprisonment and a total lack of compassion. He is also inconsistent in his bile. At one point, the earth is 'the common mother'; at another point, it is the 'damned earth, common whore of mankind, that puts odds among the route of nations' (14: 42-44).

Making him fallible in this way distinguishes him from the wise ascetic holy men who populate the wilderness in texts such as Voragine's *Golden Legend*. Timon is no Saint Jerome. But neither is he a voiceless, feral Nebuchadnezzar or Yvain.

Timon's wilderness is itself a deconstruction of the wilderness as depicted in medieval texts. Gower, Chrétien and Malory depict the wilderness as the exact opposite of civilization, the farthest place imaginable from Nebuchadnezzar's palatial home or Arthur's grand court. It is a place where men get lost, for once the madman has left the stabilizing influence of civilization he has no social anchors to connect him to his previous identity, and is cast adrift, to wander without purpose until such time as he is retrieved. By contrast, in *Timon of Athens* we find a thorough muddying of the distinction between civilization and the wilderness. Apemantus, a proudly misanthropic philosopher and Timon's ally, observes that 'The commonwealth of Athens is become a forest of beasts' (14: 348), and Timon's final address to Athens upon his departure includes the entreaty, 'O thou wall/ That girdlest in those wolves, dive in the earth/ And fence not Athens!' (12: 1-3). That men are beasts, or that beasts are preferable to men, is a notion raised several times throughout the play: 'Timon will to the woods; where he shall find/ The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind' (12: 35-36). Lines like these draw attention to the transient boundaries of what is considered 'wilderness', as does the fact that Timon encounters so many Athenian visitors upon retreating to his cave, and even finds a large amount of gold buried in the earth by bandits. Even one who is trying his hardest to establish a corner of the wilderness as a space fortified against civilization cannot escape the encroachment.

Shakespeare makes one final, intriguing departure from the archetypal madman's story: He gives his madman a friend. This is something we have not seen before. In all those texts we have examined, save for the satires, madmen are solitary figures. The best they can hope for in terms of companionship are benevolent helpers and carers dedicated to restoring them to abledness and economic stability. But Timon is granted a companion who converses with him – albeit belligerently – as an equal. From the play's opening scene, Apemantus

distinguishes himself as the only one of Timon's acquaintances who has no interest in flattering him or profiting from his wealth and generosity. When observing the dancing girls brought in to entertain Timon's guests, Apemantus proclaims, 'Like madness is the glory of this life/ As this pomp shows to a little oil and root' (2: 130-131). 'Oil and root' refer to the ascetic philosopher's humble fare. That Apemantus imagines himself such a philosopher is shown through his bemoaning the fact that 'rich men sin, and I eat root' (2: 71). Haughty and irrepressible, he goes so far as to describe Timon's other guests as cannibals: 'O you gods, what a number of men eat Timon, and he sees 'em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man's blood; and all the madness is, he cheers them up, too' (2: 39-42). It is clear that Apemantus views Timon in the same way Erasmus's narrator views the wealthy fools derided in *In Praise of Folly*.

But it is when Apemantus stops being a mere spectator to Timon's story and tries to take a more active role in it that their relationship evolves beyond the complacent superiority of the abled gaze. When Timon departs Athens, Apemantus follows him into the wilderness and, for a time, tries to play the role of the wise hermit, ready to guide and correct the madman:

APEMANTUS

What, think'st

That the bleak air, thy boisterous chamberlain,

Will put thy shirt on warm? Will these moss'd trees,

That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,

And skip where thou point'st out? will the cold brook,

Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste,

To cure thy o'er-night's surfeit? Call the creatures

Whose naked natures live in an the spite

Of wreakful heaven, whose bare unhoused trunks,
To the conflicting elements exposed,
Answer mere nature; bid them flatter thee (14: 222-232).

Having previously criticized Timon's copious spending, Apemantus now presents the other side of the argument, speaking out against Timon's newfound asceticism by alluding to those material comforts he has failed to appreciate – chamberlains, shirts, shelter, and companionship.

However, despite Apemantus' compelling argument, Timon stubbornly refuses to play along, and instead draws his would-be teacher into an energetic exchange of insults:

TIMON

Away, thou tedious rogue! I am sorry I shall lose
A stone by thee.

Throws a stone at him.

APEMANTUS

Beast!

TIMON

Slave!

APEMANTUS

Toad!

TIMON

Rogue, rogue, rogue! (14: 251-257)

Despite the churlish, even childish nature of their banter, this is perhaps the most honest conversation in the play, neither character being bound by the social niceties and secret ambitions which rule the rest of the cast. Both, after all, exist on the margins of their society. Despite setting himself up as the voice of sanity and common sense, Apemantus's attitude towards the world reflects Timon's own. His misanthropy in the early scenes is antisocial in the extreme, to the extent that when Timon later hurls rocks at his guests and flees into the wilderness, Apemantus accuses him of aping his style: 'Men report thou dost affect my manners' (14: 199-200). Their quarrel shows how much they have in common, while also bringing a few brief moments of levity to an otherwise repressively dark play. There is even a surprisingly touching moment when Apemantus offers Timon a minor gesture of concession. Timon, reaffirming his hatred for the civilization he has abandoned, proclaims as he devours a root, 'That the whole life of Athens were in this! / Thus would I eat it', to which Apemantus replies, 'Here; I will mend thy feast', and gives him another root (14: 285). For Apemantus, the root has up to this point been a way for him to tout his mental superiority as an ascetic philosopher. 'Oil and root' has been used as a marker of the superiority of one type of mind, a symbol of the mental stability and level-headed economic judgement that separates the clever, collected Apemantus from the emotional Timon. But Timon does not adhere to this interpretation of the root's symbolism. When he enters the wilderness, the root is not a badge of the philosopher's superior mind, nor is it a symbol of degradation as in medieval texts. Rather, it is a useful foodstuff that allows him to exist outside a toxic and abusive economic system. In light of this, Apemantus's offering of a root can be interpreted as a surrendering of his own initial interpretation of the root's symbolism – and possibly a grudging gesture of respect. If roots are indeed the philosopher's food, then his presenting one to Timon suggests

an acceptance of the madman as one of his own ilk. So the root, the supposedly worthless fare of medieval madmen who roam the wilderness, shows its true value once more, facilitating communication between the two outsiders and allowing Apemantus to demonstrate his willingness to engage with Timon on his own terms. It may come as no surprise that the humble root even plays a part in the destruction of Athens, the society that drove Timon mad, as a senator states that the general Alcibiades ‘like a boar too savage/ doth root up his country’s peace’ (14: 700-701).

Shakespeare’s willingness to find worth in the worthless root and meaning in the actions of a madman separates him from the majority of early modern playwrights. His depiction of a madman possessed of agency and interiority engaging in a heated verbal exchange with a like-minded companion separates him from the majority of writers in general. While the texts coming up in the next few chapters feature a diverse array of mad characters, it is only when we return to Shakespeare in order to examine his melancholic Jacques that we find one who measures up to the complexity and humanity displayed by Timon. That said, there are numerous other early modern writers who do at least strive to make their mad characters sympathetic, if not well-rounded, particularly in the case of child characters, as shall be shown in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

‘A foole to my heire’: Madness, families, and the household economy in medieval and early modern literature

In the previous chapters, I argued that medieval and early modern literature both connect madness to economic instability. In this chapter, I reinforce and refine this point by focusing on one specific aspect of the economy that literature routinely depicts mad people damaging or destroying: the family. While some mad characters exist in extreme isolation, such as Nebuchadnezzar, others, particularly in the early modern period, are part of complex familial and social networks in which they are expected to fulfill certain economic roles in order for the domestic realm to function properly. Their inevitable failure to do so results in the family’s destabilization, which goes on to destabilize society as a whole.

Families receive considerable attention from both disability theorists and medieval and early modern historians. Disability theorists argue that understanding family dynamics is vital to understanding the disabled person’s position in society and have offered extensive analysis on disability’s social and psychological impact on the domestic space (Burke 2008; Falvo 2005; Power 1980, 1988 & 2004; Rimmerman 2015; Talley & Crews 2012). Some focus on specific family-related medical issues brought to the fore by technological developments, such as ethical questions surrounding prenatal testing and abortion (Berube 2013; Hubbard 2013; Saxton 2013). In these discussions, the family is often recognized as being at once a resource that disabled people may need to draw on for their survival, security, comfort or empowerment, and at the same time a potential threat to those same goals. Tamar Heller and Lieke van Heumen contend that ‘families can be a significant agent in generating stereotypes about persons with disabilities by informally discouraging particular life choices such as marriage, parenthood, independent living arrangements, or educational opportunities’ (2013: 411). Andrew Solomon makes a similar point when he scrutinizes ‘horizontal identities’ –

marginalized identities which are not inherited from one's parents – and argues that disability is akin to queerness in the uneven, potentially dangerous power dynamics it brings to a parent's relationship with his/her child (2014: 2). Disabled and neurodiverse activists such as Lydia Brown highlight the way such dangers manifest; for example, the horrifyingly widespread phenomenon of abled parents murdering their disabled children and garnering disproportionate sympathy from the media (2013). However, despite the attention the family has received within the field of disability studies, the way economic issues influence the disabled person's status as a family member is a topic that has received less scrutiny than it deserves. In their study on inheritance and disability, Nora Ellen Groce, Jillian London and Michael Ashley Stein admit that so far, 'little attention has been directed to... the manner in which access to family and household assets affect individuals with disabilities over the course of their lifetimes' (2014: 1555). While I will not be able to tackle this huge and complex topic in its entirety here, I do plan to at least slightly widen the conversation surrounding how disability impacts the family as an economic unit.

Just as it is difficult to thoroughly analyze disability's place in today's society without at least considering the family, it is difficult to keep the family entirely separate from a substantive analysis of medieval and early modern society. This is despite the concept's fluidity: while noting that 'no element in social history is more pervasive than the family', Francis Gies also observes that basic ideas regarding the family's structure are constantly in flux and undergo seismic changes even in the relatively short amount of time making up the Middle Ages (1987: 1). Carol Neely highlights the importance of this period in history for formulating our modern understanding of what a family is:

Most researchers of medieval domestic life now hold that the family as we know it, a bi-generational household of blood relations close-knit by both economic necessity and emotional attachment, was a central product of the European Middle Ages, analogous in

importance to the territorial nations or market economics whose roots lie in the same period. (2004: 13)

The family's evolution throughout the period is a subject that has attracted considerable debate, bringing to light contentious issues such as the development of the nuclear family model, the emergence of the concept of childhood, patriarchal familial dynamics throughout the centuries, women's role in the household, and so forth (Ariès 1960; Gies 1987; Herlihy 1985; Howell 1986 and 1998; Laslett 1965; Stone 1977). In addition to the broad analyses of family dynamics offered by Lawrence Stone and others, in recent years numerous examinations of the family's economic life have been put forward. Albert Weale reminds us of the importance of considering the family in its capacity as a 'unit of production', as doing so 'underlines the extent to which there is no simple distinction to be made between the internal life of a family on one hand and the wider social structure on the other' (2013: 152). Richard Grassby reinforces this point, noting that in the seventeenth century 'the households of businessmen served as units of both production and consumption; the family was their principal instrument for protecting and transferring property and for social advancement' (1995: 302). Similarly, Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos examines the flow of capital through early modern kinship ties and the usefulness of relatives in smoothing the pathway for commerce: 'Letter books of merchants throughout the seventeenth century show an extensive use of kin and in-laws in overseas and provincial trade' (2000: 306). Others have also made valuable contributions to the field, such as Barbara Hanawalt's examination of the challenges facing medieval peasant families (1986) and Natasha Korda's discussion of the early modern domestic economy in relation to Shakespeare's works (2002).

Finally, historians have examined the disabled individual's place within the medieval and early modern family. This is often challenging; as Jane Hubert points out, 'it is difficult to identify the nature of relationships from the evidence of the past, even to determine the

existence and extent of social acceptance' (2013: 6). The historical lived experiences of disabled people are not extensively documented, much less the exact way they are treated by their relatives. What is known for certain is that, so far as disabled individuals' legal and economic status within the medieval family is concerned, they encounter much the same ableism that mad and disabled individuals encounter today, being routinely barred from their inheritance (Dobozsy 1999; Groce 1985; Metzler 2011; Turner 2010). Discussing the psychologically disabled prospective heir in particular, Wendy Turner observes that usually when it came time to inherit, 'the bulk of his property and the responsibilities inherent in those properties would transfer to another heir when possible', and after this point such heirs 'might perpetually be treated and legally regarded as children for their entire lives' (2010: 28).

Thus a great amount of work has been done to determine how medieval and early modern families functioned socially and economically and how disabled people's lives were and are affected by their families. However, none have looked closely at this chapter's main concern: the way medieval and early modern literature represents mad people's economic impact on the family. One reason for this might be that there are comparatively few texts that emphasize the mad person's role as a family member. In medieval literature in particular, isolated madmen like Nebuchadnezzar are more common. For this reason, I place the bulk of my attention on early modern literature. The period's distinctive city comedies in particular delight in exposing the chaos a mad relative can bring to a family's economic stability and advancement.

Medieval Herod: The childish child-killer

Medieval literature offers few examples of mad people who have or engage with their families. Stories about mad family members and how their madness impacts or is impacted by

the family become far more popular in later centuries, with the rise of characters like Shakespeare's King Lear and his disastrous paternal favoritism, or in literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason who prevents Rochester from marrying Jane Eyre, and *Psycho*'s Norman Bates who murders his mother with strychnine. Medieval mad characters tend to be solitary creatures who wander alone. That said, there are prominent medieval texts featuring families afflicted with one particular member who is in some way spectacularly abnormal. In such narratives, the conflict often derives from the family's attempt to remain structurally sound while also dealing with the individual's abnormality.

For example, Marie de France's twelfth-century Breton lai *Bisclavret* (cited by Huot 2003) tells the story of a baron who is secretly a werewolf. Much of the story revolves around the conflict this creates between the baron and his wife. When he reveals his secret, she finds herself sexually repulsed by him. From that moment on, their relationship deteriorates horrifically; she traps her husband in his wolf form and commits adultery, and when Bisclavret next encounters her, he bites off her nose. The dilemma is eventually solved with help from the king, who restores the baron to his human form and exiles his wife. Sylvia Huot has drawn out the tale's subtextual commentary on disability, arguing that 'Bisclavret's bodily mutations, and the questions raised thereby, are analogous to the mutations of the self in madness' (2003: 197). If read in this way, then the fact that the story's central dilemma is solved by removing the family member who discriminates against the abnormal individual makes it a surprisingly mad-positive tale – albeit a deeply sexist one, in which a woman is punished with mutilation for defying her husband. Jean d'Arras's fourteenth-century *Le Livre de Melusine* tells a similar story (cited in Huot 2003). Raymond proposes to Melusine, who agrees to marry him on the condition that he never visit her rooms on Saturday. Their marriage meets its first hurdle when he violates this agreement and sees her in the bath with the lower body of a serpent. While at first it seems that they will be able to move past this

incident, their domestic bliss ultimately ends when he insults her by referring to her serpent's tail during an argument, resulting in her leaving him.

While stories like *Bisclavret* and *Le Livre de Melusine* may be read as analogies for the mad person's domestic life, there is a text that deals with madness more directly. Its subject is not a mad family member, but rather a madman who victimises families, and in doing so creates socioeconomic chaos. When the Towneley mystery plays retell the scriptural *Massacre of the Innocents*, they present King Herod not only as a renowned sinner and enemy to Christ but also as a violent madman.

The biblical *Massacre of the Innocents* is the most notable attack on the family in scripture. In the Gospel of Matthew, Herod the Great learns about the birth of Jesus Christ from the magi. He orders the murder of every child younger than two years in and around Bethlehem, hoping to catch in his net the one prophesied to undermine his power. His heinous scheme proves to have been in vain when Mary and Joseph escape and Christ is born in safety. Nonetheless, although the most important family in scripture is spared, countless others see their youngest members slaughtered. A whole generation is effectively erased.

Victor Scherb claims that Herod's erasure of Bethlehem's children is a symbolic attack on the very concepts of family, kinship and society, as 'the savagery of the slaughter enacts the breakdown of the most basic social ties – between parent and child, man and woman, ruler and subject' (2001: 89). Sharon Betsworth observes that familial bonds are the most important thematic element in this tale, as indicated in the text by the genealogy with which Matthew opens his Gospel: Because 'the family was the fundamental social unit of the ancient world and the foundational institution of society', Herod's slaughter is not merely an atrocious crime against Bethlehem's children and a sin against God, but has the outcome of destabilizing the foundations of society itself (2015: 76).

The scriptural Herod may or may not be intended to be read as a madman; the information we receive about his motivations is very limited. However, Betsworth does draw

attention to the fact that he is the only character in the tale besides the magi who shows emotion at all, being

described as ‘troubled’ or ‘frightened’ when he hears that a child has been born ‘king of the Jews’. He becomes ‘exceedingly angry’ when he realizes he has been duped by the Magi... Herod’s reaction could be construed as child-like behavior. Women and children were supposed to be easily frightened, but this was not the case for men and certainly not a king. (2015: 81)

Likewise, Walter E. Pilgrim describes the scriptural Herod as ‘enraged by the failure of his scheme’ and ‘fearful of any rival to power’ (1999: 77). These interpretations suggest that readers are indeed meant to register Herod’s temperament as abnormal and his mind as potentially host to madness. In this way, the scriptural narrative offers later adaptors the material to spin a more dramatic tale, one that highlights Herod’s psychological instability.

If the scriptural story itself implies that Herod should be read as in some way psychologically abnormal, perhaps it is unsurprising that the character quickly becomes associated with disability. First-century historian Titus Flavius Josephus describes the king suffering fevers and various other painful conditions (Dent 1998). Such ‘physical ailments were considered punishments for his slaughter of the innocents’, argues Scott Colley, ‘and fit emblems of his violent personality and behavior’ (1986: 451-2). Medieval culture is equally willing to use disability to emphasize his sinfulness, as ‘a crippled Herod appears in a number of manuscript illuminations, stained glass windows and roof bosses that show the tyrant in twisted, contorted postures’ (Colley, 1986: 456). The end result is that by the time of the medieval mystery plays, Herod is already a well-established villain in the English literary canon and has an extensive history of being used to perpetuate a cultural connection between evil and disability.

Details regarding the mystery plays' genesis and their authors' identities are hard to obtain. As Lawrence M. Clopper notes, there are 'no decrees establishing a cycle of plays; in most cases, the initial references to civic drama tend to be casual ones embedded in a guild dispute or some other record' (2001: 143). What has been ascertained is that, in Kathlyn A. Breazeale's words, 'the text for conveying Christian ideals changed in the medieval period from written to dramatic' and that 'beginning in the thirteenth century, these dramas expanded from the altar to the street and developed into a cycle of plays performed in the vernacular by members of local guild crafts' (2008: 9). Although many of the plays retell the same stories, each does so in its own unique way, emphasizing or downplaying certain plot details, altering the story's tone and adding or removing various characters. Herod's character differs significantly from one iteration of *The Massacre of the Innocents* to the next. David Staines describes Herod's appearances in the mystery plays as 'the apex of his dramatic career', wherein this long-established tyrant is 'at times the comic braggart, at times the tragic ruler, at times a combination of comic and tragic hero' (1976: 29). Most commonly, however, Herod is rendered as a 'rude, vicious paranoiac, full of blustering threats against traitors and criminals, but also an idolator who, in the tradition of medieval blackguards, swears oaths by Mahomet and the devil' (Whaley, 2012: 26). Robert Sturges compares several medieval Herods from English, French, and Spanish literature, finding a common thread in that they all depict a man who murders children mainly out of concern for his own political power, a power which is 'confused and vacillating even in its most forceful manifestations; it is also duplicitous and subject to flattery' (2015: 70). He adds that 'plays in all linguistic traditions... portray a ranting, boastful Herod, though these characteristics are undoubtedly more fully developed in the English plays than the Continental ones' (2015: 71). So while some medieval Herods are more villainous than others, there is a critically acknowledged tendency for the character to have traits associated with stereotypical medieval and early modern literary madmen, most notably being emotionally excessive, sinful, and

prone to abnormal behavior that marks him out as unusual even within the confines of his own corrupt court.

I argue that in the Towneley cycle, Herod's propensity for emotional excess is taken to its utmost extreme, pushing him definitively into the realm of madness. By doing this, the play can use Herod to articulate anxieties over mad people's existence in society, particularly in positions of power, and the threat they pose to that all-important building block of the medieval world; the family unit. The Towneley cycle is one of the few large collections of medieval mystery plays to have survived, containing 'plays connected with Wakefield, together with several pieces partially or wholly borrowed from York, which may represent the Wakefield cycle' (Beadle & King, 1999: 1). As to their precise origin, Barbara D. Palmer observes that 'the Towneley manuscript's provenance and date have been controversial since it surfaced in the early nineteenth century' (1988: 319). Like other mystery cycles, the author is similarly obscure, A.C. Cawley attesting that 'very little is known about the authors of the miracle plays, although their familiarity with religious doctrine points to their clerical status' (1956b: xv). What is known is that the plays were popular and widely regarded as a 'communal activity affording doctrine and mirth to all classes of society' that continued into the sixteenth century until they were suppressed by 'Reformist zeal, reinforced by state opposition' (Cawley, 1956b: xv).

In the Towneley *Massacre of the Innocents*, Herod is both physically and emotionally violent, prone to extreme mood swings and outbursts that disturb even his devoted courtiers and servants. His motivations, chiefly pride and paranoia, are brought to the fore as he articulates his every passing thought to the audience in increasingly overwrought and manic tones. Characters who display emotional extremes are not uncommon in medieval mystery plays; John Coldeway describes the frequent 'extravagant outpourings of evil characters' and 'excesses emanating from idealized and sometimes allegorized characters aligned on the side of good' (1993: 5). However, even acknowledging this, the Towneley Herod is particularly

extravagant in his displays of overpowering emotions. News of Jesus Christ so enrages him that he feels he is losing his mind, crying, 'My witt away rafys' (234). With a lurid bloodthirstiness no other character comes close to matching, he declares that 'Had I that lad in hand/ As I am king in land/ I shuld with this steell brand/ Byrken all his bones' (105-8). Consumed with paranoia that Christ will bring about his downfall, he goes on to menace his courtiers, denouncing them as 'Losels and lyars!/ Lurdans ilkon!/ Tratoures and well wars!/ Knafys, bot knyghtys none!' (161-4). The audience itself does not escape his immoderate ire, as he vows that should anyone interrupt him while he is speaking, 'who that is so bold/ I brane hym thugh the hede' (91-2). When he rants about Jesus Christ, it becomes clear that this propensity towards emotional excess is the primary factor in his decision to order the slaughter:

HEROD

I anger;

I wote not what dewill me alys,

Thay teyn me so with talys,

That by gottys dere nalys,

I wyll peasse no langer.

What, dewill! me thynk I brast ffor anger and for teyn (113-8).

Twice in this extract, Herod references his own uncontrollable anger, which now seems to alarm even him, and twice does he liken it to a 'dewill' tormenting him, demonic possession being an acknowledged cause of madness in medieval society. He is obviously distressed, fearful that his body will 'brast' with excess emotion, a gruesome image that recurs later in the same scene when he claims that 'for anger/ My guttys will outt thryng/ Bot I this lad hyng' (239-240). In addition to the physical consequences he imagines his emotions might have on

his body, he seems to experience palpitations, stating mid-rant, 'O, my hart is risand now in a glope!' (264). As Herod presents it, murdering Christ is necessary not only for his political survival but also for his physical survival, such is the threat that his overpowering anger and fear pose to his own body. Herod's overwrought rhetoric is so bloody that it dulls the impact of the massacre that follows; the soldiers' gory deeds are, after all, mere enactments of the grotesque violence their king's imagination has already conjured up.

Perhaps most alarming to the audience is the fact that even his plan's successful realization does not normalize Herod's temperament. When his soldiers tell him that they have carried out his instructions, he simply moves from one extreme to another, from violent rage to manic joy, claiming that 'So light is my saull/ that all of sugar is my gall' (ll. 471-475). Michael Paull interprets the line as demonstrating that Herod 'takes sadistic delight in his brutality' and 'rules a material world in which the greatest good is the fulfillment of appetite', both of which show that Herod is 'the ideal follower of Mahomet' (1972: 195). While I agree with this reading, I would add that of equal importance is the fact that Herod's extreme ecstasy is as irrational as his earlier rage and paranoia, with the result that at no point in the entire play do we see Herod in a state of mind that is not either excessively happy or angry.

The economic ramifications of Herod's massacre have been partially unpacked by Clare Sponsler. The payment Herod offers his soldiers for carrying out the grisly task is, she argues, 'both parody and exposure of the normative system of wage labor', in which 'violence is seen as a form of work that must be fitting and must earn a just wage' (1997: 143). The mad king promises commensurate compensation for the slaughter of children, both 'material goods, as well as symbolic capital such as honor and prestige. What is set up is thus a system in which violence is one coin offered in the circulation of power' (1997: 143). Furthering her economic reading, Sponsler notes that the mothers whose children are taken from them treat the assault as a theft:

In the Towneley pageant, one mother laments ‘My comforth and my kyn/ my son thus al to-torn!’, suggesting in the word ‘comforth’ the child’s significance to her as an agent of economic well-being... one mother cries out against the murder of her child by reviling the soldier as a ‘Fals thef’. (1997: 144)

Sponsler’s convincing analysis supports a reading of the mad Herod as an agent of economic dysfunction. I would like to add two points to her argument. Firstly, to situate Herod firmly within the literary tradition of economically dysfunctional madmen, I note that he caters to the same medieval concerns about greed that characterize Gower’s Nebuchadnezzar. Deanne Williams observes that throughout the medieval period, ‘dramatic depictions of the downfall of Herod identify him with an emphatically worldly decadence: one that has always already been replaced by a new spiritual order’ (2004: 57). The second point I would add is that in showing the commercial exchange between Herod and his soldiers, the play does more than parody the medieval wage labor system. The soldiers request ‘both syluer and gold’ (441) as compensation for their labors upon their return. Herod happily provides ‘a hundreth thowsand pownde’ (442) and then also promises them ‘castels and towres/ Both to you and to yours/ ffor now and euer more’ (448-450). The reference made to the soldiers’ descendants is crucial. It reminds the audience of the most lasting economic consequences of Herod’s actions; namely, that the families whose children were murdered are now without the next step on the ladder of inheritance. Herod has effectively destroyed the mechanism by which capital flows from one generation to the next.

To fully comprehend the seriousness of the medieval Herod’s attack on the generational transfer of wealth and property, it is necessary to briefly discuss the medieval family.

Lawrence Stone was one of the first historians to promote the idea that the family underwent a structural evolution in this period (1977: 6-7). He sees three distinct family types develop: the

Open Lineage model was predominant from 1450 to 1630, the Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family model from 1550 to 1700, and finally the Closed Domestic Nuclear Family from 1620 to 1800 (1977: 6-7). The main difference between the Open Lineage and the Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family is the supplanting of a widely extended kinship group with a core nuclear family. Many of Stone's ideas have since been criticized (Hill 1978; MacFarlane 1979). However, the basic idea that the family's structure underwent radical alterations that ultimately resulted in the predominance of the nuclear model in the early modern period is one that historians generally endorse. The change that is of greatest relevance to my argument is the way medieval society thinks about inheritance and lineage from the eleventh century onwards. Noting that 'the kindred networks prevailing in the early Middle Ages were cognatic or bilineal, that is, they ran indifferently through males and females', David Herlihy points to the eleventh century as the moment when patrilineage comes to prominence in European society (1985: vi). The noble family is now

organized around the agnatic line of descent and becomes a kind of fellowship of males, stretching backwards and forwards over time... anchored in the past and in a fixed genealogy, the agnate lineage is encompassed by relatively stable boundaries and enjoys a rather clear sense of its own origins and history. (1985: 82)

Howard Bloch makes a similar observation, stating that at this period in history the 'kin group' is replaced by 'the notion of the blood group as a diachronic progression; the power of feudal princes, once established geographically, produced a corresponding sense of the family through time' (1986: 68-9). This has the effect of altering the noble family's shape from 'the spatialized "horizontal" clan to the more vertically and temporally conceived lineage', with the result that the noble family becomes increasingly aware of the importance of the 'biopolitical management of its own resources, both human and material' (1986: 75). Bloch sees evidence

of this in the rise of family insignias, a twelfth-century development and ‘an important expression of the continuity of lineage’ (1986: 77). By the fifteenth century, the ‘vertical’ clan model is so entrenched that, as Michael Hicks contends, ‘those remembered in the foundation deeds of chantries and wills are overwhelmingly the nuclear line or direct family: testator, parents, children’ (1998: 38).

This growing awareness of lineage as a key factor in the maintenance of the family’s identity imbues children with new and special importance. A child’s death or failure to play his/her part has disastrous consequences. As Christopher Dyer notes, ‘many families with an apparently stable holding of land in a village lost their connection with the place because sons moved away and did not claim their rights of inheritance’ (2012: 49). This lends relevance and urgency to performances of Herod’s crime. With heirs now playing such a vital role in the family unit and, by extension, the economic community that family is part of, infanticide is not only sinful but potentially engenders economic catastrophe. This is exacerbated by the fact that medieval children tend to play an important economic role in the middle and lower class household as a source of labor (Hanawalt 1986; Langdon 2011; Shahar 1990; Singman 1999). Judith Bennett observes that ‘as members of a rural family economy, children worked as soon as they were able’ (1987: 70). This work, described by Jeffrey Singman, may include agricultural labor such as removing stones from a field or herding livestock for boys, and ‘cooking, cleaning, and childcare’ for girls (1999: 23). So Herod’s massacre also means a dramatic reduction in the labor force.

In addition, madness threatening the inheritance system is a prospect that medieval law takes seriously. Wendy Turner’s research has revealed that the medieval period saw the rise of royal prerogative wardship, a practice by which ‘the crown took charge of all mentally disabled property holders’, although there remained areas in which ‘the older practice of families arranging for the care and custody of their mentally disabled relatives hung on into the fourteenth century’ (2010: 26). Turner emphasizes the lack of uniformity of practice;

some towns relied on ‘a combination of these ideas, continuing the older practice of family care and simultaneously protecting inheritance rights in any property or income to the extent that the mentally incompetent person was provided care’ (2010: 26). So around the same time the Towneley pageants are first performed, great attention was being paid to the question of how mad people might disrupt normative inheritance practices.

All of this means that, like Gower’s Nebuchadnezzar, the Towneley Herod exists in a literary tradition of madmen who tap into their culture’s socioeconomic anxieties; in this case, anxieties located specifically within the domestic space. To show the cultural resilience of these anxieties, we need only look to a later Herod, this one appearing in another set of medieval mystery plays. The sixteenth century Digby compilation features the text *Candlemas Day and the Kylling of the Children of Israelle*, in which Herod is once again clearly framed as a madman. Not only is he emotionally excessive in his every word and deed, the play goes the extra mile to erase any doubts regarding his madness in his final scene. His soldiers return from the slaughter and inform him that every mother in the country is cursing his name: ‘For kylling of ther children on you thei crie oute/ And thus goth your name alle the cuntre about!’(363-364). Herod’s reaction is explosive. He cries, ‘Oute! I am madde! My wyttes be ner goon!/ I am wo for the wrokyng of this werke wyld!’ (365-366), and then, a few lines later, expresses fears that his end is near:

HERODES

What! Out! Out! Allas! I wene I shall dey this day!

My hert tremelith and quakith for feere!

My robys I rende ato, for I am on a fray,

That my hert wille brest asundere evyn here! (381-384)

As predicted, he dies soon after. As in the Towneley play, inner emotional turmoil manifests

via physical symptoms and we find again the image of Herod's body exploding from within. Moreover, once again, the successful carrying out of his orders does nothing to curb his emotional excesses. Curiously, the emotion he experiences this time is not giddy joy but terror. The trigger seems to be the knowledge that the mothers whose children he has slain are cursing him – in other words, a reminder that these children were not simply potential political rivals but belonged to a family. This suggests that while the madman is the family's archenemy, he is also aware of its power, and the concept itself is able to drive him to his death.

Mystery plays wane in the sixteenth century. According to Harold C. Gardiner's analysis, this is on account of growing hostility from the Tudor government and the plays' being used as a tool in the period's religious conflicts (1946). John C. Coldewey observes that 'by the 1590s, the native tradition of guild sponsorship and performance was viewed as outmoded – not simply old-fashioned and passé, but completely obsolete in doctrine, dogma, ritual echo and satiric possibility' (1993: 6). However, the model for Herod created and refined in the Towneley and Digby plays survives well into the early modern period. Chris Hassell Jr. draws out the many similarities between the medieval Herod and Shakespeare's Macbeth, a mad king – suffering from both insomnia and violent hallucinations – who also tries to secure his own power through infanticide, murdering both Macduff's and Banquo's children (2001: 224). Scott Colley sees parallels between both the scriptural and medieval Herod and Shakespeare's Richard III; likewise, a mad king who kills children (1986: 458).

However, while Macbeth and Richard III are both mad kings who attack and destroy families, neither are ideal examples of the trend I am examining – madness being associated with economic instability in the domestic space. Little time is spent in either text delving into the economic impact of Macbeth or Richard III's crimes against the family. While they are both bad rulers and bad relatives, the main negative effects they have on the family and on society are not economic. Instead, I want to examine two early modern plays which

specifically focus on the economic destruction mad relatives can bring to the domestic space – albeit that they do so accidentally.

Mad children on the early modern stage

There are several early modern plays in which madness is toxic in its effects on the family, the household, and the successful and stable transfer of wealth from one generation to the next. As noted, Macbeth, beset by hallucinations and insomnia, makes himself into a new Herod, murdering children he fears might one day supplant him. Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare's most infamous madwoman, perverts motherhood by declaring her willingness to tear a baby from her breast and dash out its brains. King Lear does not go to such gory extremes; nonetheless, he does rip his own family apart through his cruelty to Cordelia, his only truly loyal daughter, which the disloyal Goneril attributes to 'the infirmity of his age' (1: 1: 300). The madman Ferdinand in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) has an equally corrosive influence on family bonds. At the start of the play, he is a man who is noted to have unbalanced humors and who is prone to violent outbursts. He strengthens his association with madness by bringing in a company of madmen to torment his sister, the duchess, and, by the end, he has been fully consumed by lycanthropic mania. He repeatedly makes himself an enemy of functional family dynamics, first coveting his widowed sister and forbidding her from remarrying, then breaking up the family she creates with Antonio by forcing her new husband to flee from her side, then finally ordering the duchess and her children murdered.

However, none of these tragedies delve very deeply into the economic implications of having a mad relative in the family. To see this topic brought the fore, I turn to two city comedies; John Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (1594) and Richard Brome's *The New Academy* (1636). Both these plays feature families contending with mad relatives – children in both

cases – and large swaths of their plots are devoted to examining how such individuals harm the domestic economy. In both plays, the specific type of madness which the children under scrutiny possess is foolishness. This is an appropriate moment to reiterate a point made in my introduction: In this dissertation, I use the word ‘mad’ as a blanket term covering all types of neurodiversity that result in an individual’s being socially marginalized. So although the medieval and early modern interpretations of the word ‘mad’ and the word ‘foolish’ are not synonymous – although both are extremely fluid terms and overlap in many ways – the foolish children in the plays to come do fall into the category ‘mad’ as I am using it.

The representation of mad relatives on the early modern stage needs to be considered in light of the general understanding that the early modern family is a core component of social stability and economic development. Keith Wrightson describes the household as early modern Europe’s most essential economic building block (2002: 30). Likewise, Stone notes that the family is ‘the basic unit for taxation’ and ‘a most valuable institution for social control at a village level’ (1977: 28). David Pennington concurs with this assessment:

Early modern writers and urban authorities assumed that the stable, economically autonomous patriarchal household was the foundation of the urban social order. They likened households to little commonwealths in which the male householder, his wife, children, servants, and apprentices all had their places with a hierarchy. (2015: 7)

Given this, the domestic destabilization a mad person can introduce has wide-ranging consequences for society as a whole. As noted in the previous chapter, the early modern period saw the development of new institutions for contending with mad and disabled people in society. However, the upcoming plays suggest that these measures are wholly inadequate when it comes to protecting the family from madness; instead, families which accidentally produce children with ‘undesirable’ minds suffer all manner of challenges and inconveniences

(the challenges mad children experience within the domestic space are given no attention whatsoever).

Before continuing, I must briefly establish how the early modern period viewed children, in order to show more clearly the ways in which a mad child falls short of or alternatively echoes societal anxieties around children in general. Children form part of the nuclear family core, which Hicks likens to ‘a cement that bound parents, children and siblings together in a common lifestyle and shared politics’ (1998: 45). Even though, as Krausman Ben-Amos notes, early modern families recognized the usefulness of kin outside the nuclear core, relying upon them when it was time to find apprenticeships for sons or else in times of crisis such as when children were orphaned, ‘coresidence or even near residence with kin was atypical; bequeaths in wills indicate a weak recognition of kin beyond the immediate ties with wives and children’ (2000: 305-306). The conditions children in the early modern family core endured has been a controversial subject. Phillipe Ariès (1962) promotes the argument, which prominent historians including Lawrence Stone (1977) and Lloyd DeMause (1976) endorse, that the entire notion of childhood is a product of the sixteenth century. Prior to this period, Ariès contends, no strong distinction between childhood and adulthood existed and parents did not form close emotional bonds to their offspring because of the high infant mortality rate (1962: 124). This account has received serious criticism, with the eventual consensus that it misrepresents medieval and early modern parents and the care they expressed for their children (Hanawalt 1993; Hill 1978; MacFarlane 1979; Montgomery 2009; Pollock 1983). In her study on illness in early modern children, Hannah Newton uses early modern medical texts to show that it is indeed clearly understood that, at least from a medical perspective, there are important differences between young children and adults. They are ‘distinguished fundamentally from adults in their physiology and medical treatment’ and ‘abounded in moist and warm humors, which rendered their bodies more tender and weak than those of their elders’ (2012: 2). The vulnerability Newton describes did not prevent parents from cherishing

their offspring. Rather, she finds numerous examples of those who ‘stayed up at night nursing their ill children, bestowing earnest prayers, administering remedies and trying desperately to prepare their offspring spiritually for death’ (2012: 4). Physically fragile, early modern children were also in a precarious position spiritually. Anna French characterizes them as existing at the nexus of multiple intersecting social and religious anxieties, occupying a

difficult and slippery spiritual status. They were sometimes viewed as spiritually innocent and close to God, due to their lack of actual or committed sin, and at other moments seen as tainted with evil and demonic influences, due to the sinful and bloody nature of their conception and their birth. (2016: 17)

All children, in other words, were at risk of being perceived as potential wellsprings of sin. This means that there is a notable similarity between the average child and the average madman, madness being, as shown, inexorably connected to sinfulness. This cultural closeness between childhood and madness is enhanced by the purported role of education. Merridee L. Bailey argues that in many early modern ‘educational treatises’, children are viewed as emotionally unstable, ‘prone to sudden outbursts of passion’ that make them ‘impressionable, inconstant and dangerous’ (2016: 99). Thankfully, ‘education could be a tool to quell these passions, ideally leading children to a more stable emotional state’ (2016: 100). In addition, just as children are not entirely unlike mad people, mad people are not unlike children. Paromita Chakravarti’s research on ‘fools’ notes that early modern culture depicts them as ‘trapped in some form of psychological and spiritual infancy which made them, like children, part of the human species, yet dissimilar in their capacities and manners’ (2011: 225). In light of this, it seems reasonable to say that all children are deemed by early modern society to be host to serious mental ‘defects’; consequently, in many ways mad children differ from normal children only in the scale of their ‘defectiveness’. To a certain

extent, the two plays I examine next do seem to be working from within the confines of this model; both feature mad and abled children who sow discord, often by succumbing to ‘sudden outbursts of passion’. However, there are very clear differences in the way mad children are dehumanized, robbed of agency, and ultimately cast aside so that the abled children may progress economically.

John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1594) concerns five families, each in the grip of its own crisis. Two are headed by the wealthy patriarchs Memphio and Stellio. Both have children at the right age for marriage – handsome Accius and beautiful Silena. But the children are ‘both “naturals”, in the old sense of a congenital idiot’ (Pincombe, 1996: 167). Because of this, they are deemed mentally inadequate to fulfill the role expected of them; forming profitable marriages. Such is the shame associated with their disabilities that both fathers have hidden them from the community, allowing others to see their attractive faces while never hearing them talk. Memphio and Stellio desperately want their children to be wed – without the prospective spouse’s parents’ being aware of the foolishness of the prospective spouse – and their servants promise to arrange this. Meanwhile, fathers Prisius and Sperantus are angered to learn that their clever and well-educated children Candius and Livia are in love with one another; each had desired a more profitable match for his child. Prisius and Sperantus conspire to divide them and wed them instead to Accius and Silena – unaware of their foolishness – and in turn ask for their own servants’ help in this regard. Lastly, the impoverished nurse Vicinia’s children Maestius and Serena are incestuously attracted to one another. After a lengthy series of tricks, arguments, costume-swaps and bouts of hard drinking, throughout which the wise woman Mother Bombie offers sage advice that is generally ignored, it is revealed that the fools Accius and Silena are not Memphio and Stellio’s true children. Instead, they were born to Vicinia, whose poverty drove her to secretly exchange them for Maestius and Serena, Memphio and Stellio’s actual children, in infancy. This brings the play to a more-or-less happy conclusion, as weddings are arranged

between Candius and Livia and Maestius and Serena. The fools are allowed to continue living in the households where they were raised; it seems unlikely they will ever marry.

The critical attention this play has received has been focused on the title character's social marginalization and the positive influence she exerts over her community. Jeanne Addison Roberts considers Mother Bombie's position in relation to the ways crones – broadly defined as 'a mature woman not characterized primarily as virgin, wife, sex object, or potential mother' – are depicted on the early modern stage (2003: 116). Diane Purkiss analyses Mother Bombie in her capacity as a wise woman; a popular trope on the early modern stage, such figures' 'brand of magic was associated with old wives' remedies and herbal lore, matchmaking, love potions, fortune-telling, midwifery, and natural cures for various ailments' (2013: 135). William Kerwin's reading runs along similar tracks, emphasizing Mother Bombie's healing powers and selflessness and describing her as a 'community architect' (2005: 101). She is understood to be a stabilizing force necessary to counteract widespread domestic disharmony, for insofar as this is a play about family, it is also a play about the specific kind of social chaos only dysfunctional families can generate. The younger generation scorns and ignores the older, while the patriarchs, as Michael Pincombe observes, 'can only complain about what they see as the profligacy, luxury and lack of respect the younger generation have for them' (1996: 165).

Few critics have closely studied the foolish children Accius and Silena. This may be in part because the play itself is uninterested in them, for all that their presence in it drives the conflict. All other characters are motivated by powerful desires – a desire for love on the part of the other four children, or money on the part of their fathers and the servants. By contrast, neither Accius nor Silena displays passionate investment in either love or money. Both show passing romantic interest when approached by a prospective partner his/her own age, but soon abandon the pursuit. By the play's conclusion, whatever ambitions the mad children might have had, be they romantic or economic,

have been pushed very firmly outside the realm of the audience's concern. Once it is established that they are not Memphio's or Stelio's real heirs, the question of what is to be done with them is dealt with in a cursory fashion. Both patriarchs hastily promise to allow them to remain in the houses where they have grown up, their attention preoccupied with arranging the marriages of their rediscovered children, Maestius and Sirena. Whether Accius or Silena will ever marry is a question left unanswered; it suffices that the economic threat they pose has been defused. Moreover, Accius and Silena are not distraught to learn of their true parentage, nor to see the obvious joy with which their erstwhile fathers greet the revelation. After a short indignant exclamation, both are placated by the assurance that they will continue to live in their homes. The impression given is of an emotional shallowness on the mad children's part that stands in sharp contrast to the complexities and contradictions that formulate the abled children's relationship to their parents. Candius and Livia push back against Prisius and Sperantus's authority while still respecting it enough to part from each other's company when ordered to do so. Maestius and Sirena struggle to reconcile their illicit desires with their understanding of the importance of social and familial norms and values. The four abled children have a depth which the foolish children are either assumed not to have or is assumed to be not worth investigating. While all the plotters maneuver around them, Accius and Silena's primary role is to remain oblivious while amusing the cast and onlookers with their foolishness.

Despite this, I argue that Accius and Silena are a key component of the play's discourse on families and the domestic economy. The play goes to great lengths to illustrate the economic disruptions a mad child's mere existence can bring to a family. The main problem is the way they disrupt the flow of inheritance. This is emphatically laid out in the play's first scene, wherein the patriarch Memphio discusses his son Accius with his servant Dromio:

MEMPHIO

Boy, there are three things that make my life miserable: a threadbare purse, a curst wife, and a foole to my heire.

DROMIO

Why then, sir, there are three medicines for these three maladies: a pike staffe to take a purse on the high way; a holly wand to brush cholera from my mistresse tongue; and a young wench for my young master; so that as your worship being wise begot a foole; so hee being a foole, may tread out a wise man (1: 1: 1-9).

Memphio is faced with three dilemmas. Two are financial; he has little money (although it will soon become apparent that he is the most affluent member of the cast) and the child who will inherit his property is a 'foole' (l. 2). While Dromio's solution to the first of these financial problems – that Memphio become a highwayman – is rejected out of hand, his solution to the second financial problem meets with a more positive response. Dromio suggests that Accius be forced to marry so that he will produce a son of his own who, hopefully, will be a more appropriate recipient of Memphio's lands and wealth. Memphio points out that this might well backfire, for if he allows his son to breed, his house might be infested with 'a litter of fooles' (l. 12). Dromio comically advises that Memphio 'let some wise man sit on your sonne, to hatch him a good wit; they say, if ravens sit on hens' egges, the chickens will be blacke, and so forth' (ll. 13-15). After this, the possibility that Accius's children might also be disabled is not brought up again and the plan to have him marry is implemented. Nonetheless, the threat of 'a litter of fooles' looms over the play from this point onwards. Even if the scheme to marry Accius off by hiding his disability succeeds, there is no guarantee that he will produce a suitable inheritor.

Through this comedic exchange between patriarch and servant, Lyly lays out the first

economic danger posed by mad children, namely the potential for them to appear at random in any household. Memphio is a wealthy man who sets considerable store by financial matters and his ability to manage money. Despite behaving in an economically sensible way and successfully following the normative reproductive pattern, Memphio has, through no apparent fault of his own, been given a son who threatens his economic situation. Memphio notes how unnatural and unfair this seems, declaring: 'I marvel that he is such an asse, he takes it not of his father' (1: 1: 21-2). When Dromio slyly suggests that perhaps Accius does, indeed, take after his father, Memphio angrily demands whether his servant thinks he is a fool. Dromio clarifies his meaning; he was not accusing Memphio himself of being a fool, but rather suggesting that Memphio is not the child's father. The implication that his wife has been unfaithful angers Memphio further, until Dromio clarifies once again that he was not making any such implication. Rather than being physically unfaithful, he says, Memphio's wife may have been 'fantasticall of her mind; and it may be, when this boy was begotten she thought of a foole, and so conceived a fool, yourselfe being very wise, and she surpassing honest' (ll. 29-32). This raises the horrifying possibility that foolishness may arise from a mere errant thought at the wrong moment. The mad child is thus presented as a problem that may enter the household through multiple unsavory avenues – infidelity, parental defects, or even an inappropriate thought. This ultimately serves to generate a sense of paranoia around the prospect of madness in the home that helps reinforce the omnipresent subtext that disabled people are a threat to the abled.

The second danger posed by the mad child in this exchange is that whichever unfortunate individual's household they are born into, they are, by nature, financially toxic. Ordinarily, a child should be an economic asset to their parents. Krausman Ben-Amos states that having children in a house offers, firstly, 'nonmaterial rewards'; for example, 'in a society in which parental authority was elevated, children automatically conferred prestige to their parents by placing them in their respective roles as household head and

mother' (2000: 303). There are also material rewards such as the child's labor, the child's hopefully caring for parents as they age and, in the case of children who move away, the prospect of having money sent back home (2000: 303-4). But it is clear from Memphio's concerns that he does not believe his son to be an asset in any way, either in terms of enhancing his authority and status or contributing economically. Accius cannot be expected to manage the property he will inherit from his father, for, as noted in the previous chapter, mad people are unable to identify valuable resources and use them competently. As a result, the only way a mad child might be of use to the household is through the ability to reproduce and potentially create more suitable heirs.

But even this hope is stymied by the third serious danger they pose; any potential suitable marriage partner will find them repulsive. The only way a matchmaker can marry them off successfully is by keeping their madness a secret for as long as possible. For this reason, Memphio imparts to Dromio the information that he has barred his son from any social interaction that might give him away: 'Thou knowest I have kept him close, so that my neighbours thinke him to be wise' (1: 1: 64-5). When giving Dromio permission to carry out his plan to wed Accius to Silena, Memphio reminds him to 'take heed that neither the father nor the maide speake to my son, for then his folly will marre all' (ll. 89-90). Memphio's concerns are shown to be justified in a later scene in which the clever young Candius encounters the foolish Silena.

Initially, he is drawn to her 'lovely countenance' so strongly that he considers casting aside his love for Livia. However, the conversation that ensues quickly alerts him to the fact that there is something amiss. Silena's mode of speech, which consists of mangled proverbs, prompts him to speculate aloud:

CANDIUS

(Aside) What? I think she is a lunatic, or foolish! Thou are a fool, Candius; so fair a face

cannot be the scabbard of a foolish mind! Mad she may be, for commonly in beauty so rare there falls passions extreme. Love and beauty disdain a mean, not therefore because beauty is not virtue but because it is happiness; and we scholars know that virtue is not to be praised, but honored. I will put on my best grace. (2: 3: 24-30)

Candius tries valiantly to supply himself with an explanation for Silena's behavior that would not disqualify her as a sexual partner, but when, in a few lines, it becomes inescapably clear that she is a fool, he loses all interest in her. The young man's quiet ruminations draw attention to the tenuous distinction between madness and foolishness; at first, Silena's strange way of speaking makes it equally plausible that she is 'a lunatic or foolish'. Then Candius reasons that such a beautiful woman cannot be foolish, although she might be mad, as extreme beauty gives rise to extreme passions. But the audience is aware that his logic is faulty – Silena's beauty does not preclude her foolishness – thereby erasing the one sharp dividing line between madness and foolishness that Candius draws. Either way, it is clear that Silena is not a viable prospect for marriage.

Lastly, beyond the economic obstacles the foolish children present to their fathers and their families, both Accius and Silena may be read as symbolizing their community's most dysfunctional aspects. Leah Scragg observes that 'the presumptuous nature of their folly associates them with that belief in their own wisdom common to the *dramatis personae* as a whole' (2010: 23). The mad children, who are verbally clumsy and given to misspoken proverbs, caricature the community around them that collapses into chaos because of its inability to communicate effectively; Memphio and Stellio's willingness to deceive, Sperantus and Prisius' unwillingness to listen, and Mother Bombie's visitors, all of whom fail to understand her prophecies and thus quickly ignore them.

Having established that mad children create multiple economic problems, it may be argued at this point that Accius and Silena are not the only children who create such

problems. The intelligent and well-educated Candius and Livia, the children of the poor Sperantus and Prisius, do too. In fact, it could be said that they create even greater problems, for they openly denounce their fathers' attempts to find success in the 'marriage market' by wedding them to richer suitors, namely Accius and Silena. Choosing their own infatuation with one another over their parents' economic plans is particularly hazardous in light of the fact that, as Richard Grassby observes, at this time in history 'matrimony was rationally appraised in economic and social terms, because the kinship group was remodeled and reinforced by marriage and a wrong choice could jeopardize the future of a whole family' (1995: 303). At first glance, it seems strange that the educated children present as great a challenge to Sperantus's and Prisius's plans as the fools Accius and Silena do to Memphio's and Stellio's plans. Anna French notes that the role of early modern childhood education is to tame their passionate impulses by inflicting a rigorous behavioral code upon the child, making them essentially 'a small adult... a Christian figure, who prayed, who read and who understood the word of God' (2016: 27). Candius's and Livia's willingness to rebel against their parents' economic plans seems unlike the behavior one might expect from an educated Christian child. However, ultimately the play endorses their rebellion, as it serves a greater purpose by curbing their parents' greed: At the end, it is revealed that, had the children not defied their fathers' economic plan, they both would have been married to illegitimate heirs, for Accius and Silena are revealed not to be their fathers' true children. The truth regarding the rightness of marrying for love or money is implied to lie somewhere between the children's wild disregard for monetary concerns in favor of love and the father's interest in nothing but money. Essentially, Candius and Livia do not represent an existential threat to a household's economic future, but instead simply one side of an argument. This is not the case for Accius and Silena, who are both mere problems to be solved for the good of the family.

As the play progresses, we see that the mad child's destructive economic influence is

not confined to their own household. The rot spreads through their community, destabilizing its foundations. This is most clearly seen – and most dangerous – in the ways the patriarchs alter their behavior for the worse to cope with their mad children. Anxiety over their inheritance causes Memphio and Stello to resort to secrecy and conspiracy to ensure their family's ongoing stability, as they try to foist unfit goods onto the marriage market in order to personally enrich themselves. Their servants follow them in an ethically downward trajectory, visiting taverns and drinking excessively as they advance their machinations. And the patriarchs' secret schemes tap into a specific range of early modern economic concerns, detailed by Martha Howell. Howell describes the process by which commerce – long denounced in medieval European culture as a source of sin – is redeemed to a certain extent in early modern rhetoric as merchants move away from the margins of society:

According to the redemptive narrative that gradually took shape, the problem with commerce was not so much the wealth it generated or even the social upset that came with new wealth and newly wealthy people. The problem was secrecy. Commerce too easily went underground, escaping the scrutiny that could prevent illegitimate gains and protect the populace from trickery and fraud. The cure, it followed, was to force trade into the open; if markets were made transparent, trade would automatically become socially beneficial and trades people themselves could be redeemed. (2010: 276)

Howell identifies openness and transparency as the main ways in which early modern society attempts to domesticate commerce. The mad child threatens this domestication, their defects forcing their wealthy fathers to operate in total secrecy. In generating such economically dishonest behavior, the mad child moves beyond threatening their personal domestic realms into threatening the wider economic community's stability.

The mad child undermines yet another crucial aspect of the project of domesticating

commerce through what their existence implies about the mother. Mothers are a core part of the domestication Howell outlines. Examining women's shifting economic position in the early modern period, Howell presents female domestication as a core part of the redemptive project that aims to make commerce ethically acceptable (2010: 289). Just as men needed to be 'responsible providers', women needed to be 'virtuous consumers' who internalized 'lessons imparted by the conduct books and housekeeping manuals of the period, which taught that a woman's job was to manage consumption in her husband's interests, carefully choosing and wisely using the treasures he brought home' (2010: 289-291). So despite having previously enjoyed a more active role in the marketplace, women are now reimagined as exclusively domestic beings, their level of virtue equated with their level of involvement in the household. Clearly, the mothers in *Mother Bombie* do not adhere to such guidelines. Of the five family units who appear in the play – two wealthy, two poor, and one extremely poor – only the last has a mother who makes an appearance on stage, and that is the impoverished Vicinia. We never learn what caused Vicinia's poverty nor the reason for her husband's own mysterious absence, opening the gateway to speculation; speculation that is likely to be negatively inclined, early modern audiences belonging to a culture in which poverty is increasingly demonized, as noted in the previous chapter. Although Vicinia is treated with some measure of sympathy, the fact remains that she is a stealer of children and directly responsible for all the problems that follow; first she gives birth to mad children, then she places them in the households of wealthy men where their presence will be most calamitous. The play's other mothers are no better. Stellio only mentions his wife when wondering if his foolish daughter inherited foolishness from her. Sperantus and Prisius, when arguing about their children, raise the possibility of wifely infidelity, Sperantus saying that Prisius's daughter has 'nor a better father than yourself, unless your wife borrowed a better to make her daughter a gentlewoman' (1: 3: 20-1). Memphio lists his wife as one of his three great challenges in the play's opening lines. Moreover, of these three problems – a mad heir, an

empty purse, and a sharp-tongued wife – his wife is the one that is never solved. Memphio's aligning his 'arrant scold' (1: 1: 53) of a wife alongside his worthless heir and his imagined financial troubles, the two foremost sources of conflict in the play, suggests that, despite her absence, she is every bit as serious a problem.

These mothers' evident disinterest in the various domestic goings-on is their most obvious failing. We do not know where any of the four husbands' wives are while their spouses are creating chaos in their desperation to deceive one another; we simply know they are not part of the proceedings in any way. This in itself is ominous – although arranging marriages in the early modern period is a task generally dominated by husbands, Keith Wrightson notes that wives are at least expected to participate:

We know all too little of how these matters were conducted on a day-to-day basis but it is certainly apparent that wives had a part to play in some of the most significant – and therefore most often recorded – decisions of the family cycle, they had a voice in the approval of prospective matches and the negotiation of their terms. (2002: 65)

Yet in *Mother Bombie*, Accius and Silena's mothers either do not use or are not allowed to use this voice. The same is true for Candius's and Livia's mothers. While the two intelligent children denounce parents in general when discussing the 'marriage market', only their fathers are ever shown to be guilty of the crime they accuse all parents of, namely treating their offspring as goods to be sold. Their mothers seemingly do not participate at all in pivotal family affairs, neither to support their husbands or guide their children. Every child save for Accius visits Mother Bombie for the advice they should receive from their mothers. It is she who must step into a maternal vacuum in order to contain the economic threat posed by the mad children, remove them from position where they can block the normal flow of inheritance and arrange economically advantageous marriages. She is neither foolish like

Stellio's wife nor a scold like Memphio's wife, nor economically unstable like Vicinia, somehow providing for herself despite never asking for or receiving any money for her prophecies. All these virtues help emphasize the failings of the play's real mothers. Sharp-tongued, absent, foolish, and possibly adulterous, these women are far from the stabilizing domestic force they should be. Rather, these are facilitators of madness and its negative socio-economic effects, both in their capacity as producers of mad children and in their allowing madness's corrosive social effects to spread unchecked. The mad child is, undeniably, economically disruptive, but in *Mother Bombie* the mad child is also a direct result of an economically incompetent mother.

But while it is possible to read the play as placing the bulk of blame for domestic dysfunction on the mother, fathers do not escape scrutiny. As noted, Memphio and Stellio do not live up to the early modern market's demands for transparency and honesty. Moreover, they do not live up to their role as fathers. Attention is drawn to this fact during a scene in which the assembled servants spy on Accius and Silena's first meeting. The oblivious children demonstrate their foolishness to their hidden audience through their verbal clumsiness, prompting the servants to return to the point raised earlier in Memphio and Dromio's conversation:

HALFPENNY

These two had wise men to their fathers.

LUCIO

Why?

HALFPENNY

Because when their bodies were at work about household stuff, their minds were busied

about commonwealth matters. (4: 2: 49-54)

As explained earlier, this is in accordance with the early modern idea that a parent's thoughts at the moment of conception affect the resulting child; Halfpenny is essentially suggesting that the fools' fathers were thinking about 'state business rather than connubial affairs' (Scragg, 2010: 148). Previously, Dromio raised the possibility that Memphio's wife failed in her duties during conception by thinking of someone other than her husband. Now, it is Memphio and Stellio who are accused of doing the same – except rather than thinking about women other than their wives, they are accused of thinking about business. There are similarities between their mistake and the accusations Candius and Livia level at Prisius and Sperantus when they discuss the 'marriage marketplace' they feel forced into. The educated children argue that, in treating their marital prospects as a purely commercial affair, Prisius and Sperantus fail to keep any distance between the domestic sphere and the commercial sphere, just as Memphio and Stellio may have contaminated the conjugal bed with commercial thoughts. The fathers, it is suggested, behave in the domestic space as they would in the commercial space, even during sex, when they should be most attentive to intimate family matters. The mad child results from this extreme mingling of the commercial with the domestic.

That the play constructs mad children as the outcome of mingling the commercial and the household too much may seem strange in light of Peter Laslett's argument regarding the father's place in the early modern household; namely, that there is 'no sharp distinction between his domestic and his economic functions' (1965: 2). If this is the case, why does the play imply that failure to compartmentalize these functions is a failure on the man's part?

Garret A. Sullivan Jr. offers one possible answer, claiming that there is a pervasive anxiety in early modern literature 'about the insinuation of commerce into all avenues of human endeavor' (1998: 26). Another potential answer may be found by returning to

Howell's analysis. As noted, Howell argues that the period sees gender roles rigidify as a means of taming commerce (2010: 295). For the wife, this means taking her place in the household as a consumer. As far as the father is concerned, his role is to be 'a trustworthy businessman and a responsible householder who was fully in control of his family and an active participant in the governance of his community' (2010: 295). In Howell's account, the father's domestic and economic functions do indeed go hand in hand – with the important addendum that the foundation on which the ideal father is built is control. A good father, husband and merchant exerts perfect control over his household and also over himself; he 'disciplined commerce through self-discipline' and 'governed himself in order to govern both the economy and the polity' (2010: 295). Applying this idea to the play, where Memphio and other fathers fall short is not in their willingness to connect the commercial world to the domestic; rather, it is in doing so in a way that shows a severe lack of self-control. Men who let their minds wander during sexual intercourse like Memphio and Stellio, and men who navigate the 'marriage marketplace' in a crude and self-serving way like Prisius and Sperantus, are failing to govern themselves.

Mother Bombie is a play in which mad children cause economic chaos because they are allowed to do so by their parents, who fail to abide by the gendered expectations placed upon them in the domestic space. In the previous chapter, mad characters such as Nebuchadnezzar, Yvain, Lancelot and Trouble-All are held up as symbols of economic transgressions – enormous greed, rigid austerity, and above all an inability to evaluate resources – in a way that makes each mad character a warning to the reader. In *Mother Bombie*, the mad children are the result of *others'* transgressions, and they themselves are treated more gently than their predecessors. Being essentially comedic, neither child is punished for their failings beyond losing their claim to their fathers' wealth. Their removal from the 'marriage marketplace' is not so terrible or unusual a fate. As Bucholz and Key note, roughly 'twenty percent of all Englishmen and women remained single for their entire lives and at any given time, over half

of all men and women were living in a single state' (2013: 172). However, this solution to the 'problem' of disability has obvious eugenicist undertones, which makes it all the more worrying when we see an identical scenario play out in Richard Brome's *The New Academy* (1636). This time, however, it is not the mother's absence that allows madness to contaminate the household economy, but instead an excess of maternal love.

The play opens with an inheritance crisis. The wealthy merchant Matchill is a cheerful widower, his deceased wife having been, by his account, an intolerable shrew. He is horrified to learn that his only son Phillip has died in a duel while in the care of a French merchant named Lafoy, whose daughter Gabriella is in Matchill's care. Grieving and furious, Matchill severs all ties to his close relations. He exiles his daughter Joyce from his house for her attempts to defend Gabriella from his wrath. He denounces his half-brother Strigood, who has designs on his wealth now that Matchill has no heir. He alienates his sister Lady Nestlecock by insulting her beloved son Nehemiah, a nineteen-year-old boy who still plays with toys and who Matchill claims to be 'fit t'inherit nothing but a place/ I' the Spittle-house, Fools' College, yond, at Knightsbridge' (1: 1: 105). Worst of all, he weds his servant Rachel, earning his family's derision, a move he soon regrets when she turns out to have greater strength of character than he had anticipated. Meanwhile, with Matchill having flatly refused to make Nehemiah his heir, Lady Nestlecock plans instead to marry her son to Blith, the niece of Lord Whimbly, who himself is enamored of Lady Nestlecock. Blith is repulsed by the prospect, even after Lady Nestlecock's servant Ephraim trains Nehemiah in how to be a proper husband and he adopts a semblance of maturity. The exiled Joyce and Gabriella are drawn to Strigood's newly opened academy, a money-making scheme that purports to teach manners and dance. Matchill and Lafoy's disguised sons Phillip and Francis also arrive at the academy, and all is eventually resolved when Matchill discovers that his son is alive. Four marriages take place at the end; Matchill's children wed Lafoy's children, Blith weds Erasmus, a level-headed young man acquainted with Matchill, and Lady Nestlecock weds

Valentine Askal, Erasmus's friend. Nehemiah is the only youth left unwed.

Critical reaction to the play has mainly focused on Strigood's academy. Matthew Steggle interprets the academy as satirizing the New Exchange (2004: 91) while Jean Howard contends that the academy facilitates the play's 'investigation of the destabilizing social consequences of making instruction in manners a commercial enterprise and of placing too high a value on purely material accomplishments' (2011: 189). However, as far as a mad-centric reading is concerned, Nehemiah provides the most fertile soil for analysis. Like Accius and Silena, he blocks the smooth flow of wealth and property from one generation to the next because he is unfit to inherit and it is firmly established that no desirable partner would ever want to marry him. From the moment he is introduced, he seems to have only the barest understanding of what marriage and sexual intercourse entail, as evidenced by his many innocent innuendos, such as his response to his mother's promise that he shall soon have a wife: 'But mother, f'sooth, when I have her/ Will she play with me at peg-top?' (2: 2: 327-8). When Nehemiah is introduced to Lord Whimbly's daughter Blith, she finds him laughable and abhorrent in equal measure, and bluntly informs Lady Nestlecock that the prospect of marrying him is untenable:

BLITH

Sweet Madam, what to do? Ha, ha, I shall be quickly weary with laughing at him. His fooling will soon be stale and tedious; and then to beat him would be as toilsome to me; and lastly, to be tied to nothing but to cuckold him is such a common town-trick that I scorn to follow the fashion. (2: 2: 391-2)

Blith makes no bones of the fact that Nehemiah's disability makes him an undesirable marriage partner. Her contempt does not end at cruel words; shortly after this, when he develops an infatuation for her and attempts a kiss, she spits at him.

Marrying off Nehemiah proves to be an intractable problem. Lady Nestlecock's servant Ephraim – who himself has hopes of wedding his employer – tutors Nehemiah in an attempt to make him a more appealing prospective partner. As noted, the ultimate goal of early modern education is to control children's emotional and behavioral excesses, converting them into 'small adults'. Ephraim's tutoring amounts to a stress test of the system. At first glance, it seems to have been effective. Nehemiah is persuaded to throw away his old toys and begins carrying around a sword and a book instead. When his mother attempts to dote on him, as is her wont, he holds up these items as proof of his manhood: 'Tell me of toys? I have a sword. Offer me ballads? I have a book' (4: 2: 773). Shortly afterward, he reflects on the toys he has thrown away:

NEHEMIAH

Yet I am half sorry, being towards a wife, that I did not keep 'em for my children: some money might have been saved by't. And that is a manly and a good husbandly consideration, I take it. (4: 2: 762-3)

Here, Nehemiah shows off his capacity for responsible fiscal planning for the family he will one day have. Given that madness is so often characterized by a lack of economic competence in literature, this seems to be a conclusive sign that Ephraim's tutoring has been successful in converting the mad child into a responsible adult.

However, it quickly becomes apparent that this is not the case and that simply owning appropriate property is not enough to eradicate Nehemiah's madness. Nehemiah has adopted the sword and book in place of his toys, but does not understand precisely why swords and books are more valuable than toys, beyond their connection to his nebulous ideas of 'manhood'. Despite having a sword, he does not put it to any useful purpose; despite owning a book, he does not become wise or erudite. His self-consciously stating that worrying about

providing for his children makes him a good prospective husband suggests that it is merely a façade he is adopting, in keeping with the play's fascination with social pretenses. The repetition of the phrase 'turning boy again' in Nehemiah's speech on his newfound manhood shows an awareness on his part of the very real risk of this happening (4: 2: 762). His ongoing state of madness is further signalled when he declares, 'Let me speak a good word for Ephraim/ I have a mind, f'sooth, because he has made me a man, to make him my father, f'sooth' (4: 2: 740). Even as Nehemiah asserts his maturation, he undermines his claim by displaying his faltering verbal skills, repeatedly stammering the word 'f'sooth'.

Further evidence that Ephraim's education has failed is found in comparing Nehemiah to Matchill's clever daughter Joyce, for while Joyce is appropriately ashamed by her father's decision to marry a servant, Nehemiah endorses Lady Nestlecock's marrying Ephraim. Later scenes confirm suspicions that Nehemiah has undergone no real internal change; he still utters accidental innuendo, still struggles to understand the nuances of the various quarrels going on around him, and is still an undesirable marriage partner, remaining unattached at the end of the play. His education at Ephraim's hands mirrors the equally insubstantial education Strigood offers at his academy, and the problem he poses is eventually solved not through education but by his mother's marrying again, with the implication that she will produce a replacement son.

As in *Mother Bombie*, the mad child threatens the family's economic future. However, *Mother Bombie* encourages speculation as to who is to blame for the mad child's existence; the mother or the father. In *The New Academy*, there is only one credible culprit, and that is Nehemiah's mother, the widow Lady Nestlecock. Unlike Memphio and Stellio, Lady Nestlecock not only does nothing to hide her child's disability from the world, but seems totally unaware of it herself. Her desire to restrict Nehemiah's movements is based not in shame but in an over-protectiveness resulting from his being 'her youngest son, and all that's left of seven' (2: 2: 447). This overprotectiveness has established a maternal bond that

Matchill implies is perversely excessive. He goes so far as to suggest through vulgar innuendo that her love for Nehemiah borders on the incestuous, noting that ‘till he was twelve years old/ She would dance him on her knee, and play with’s cock’ (2: 2: 449). Regardless of whether there is any truth to Matchill’s insinuations, there can be no doubt that Lady Nestlecock displays a bizarrely intense level of concern for her son. In the play’s first scene, Lady Nestlecock arrives at her brother’s house without Nehemiah in tow. The reason given is that one of the horses for her coach has fallen lame and although she herself was ‘constrained to come afoot’, she was unwilling to expose Nehemiah to the same hardship. As if this was not enough, she then expresses relief that Nehemiah has not come, for to encounter the newly-arrived Strigood ‘would fright him into sickness’ (1: 1: 58).

The play does not put every ounce of blame on the mother; other characters are implicated as accessories to her crime, encouraging her obsession with Nehemiah to further their own goals. This is the tactic adopted by the villainous Strigood; to win Lady Nestlecock’s favor, he encourages Matchill to bestow his land and property on ‘that hopeful gentleman, sweet Nehemiah’ (1: 1: 128), adding: ‘Had I a thousand yearly, I would leave it him’ (133). The melancholic Lord Whimbly does much the same when wooing her, exploiting her excessive love for her son by pretending to adore Nehemiah in equal measure: ‘My love to you’, he insists, ‘Springs from the joy/ I take in your sweet boy’ (2: 2: 364-366). The tactic proves wholly successful and she immediately agrees to marry him. Even Ephraim privately confesses to having previously played upon Lady Nestlecock’s love for Nehemiah by taking ‘government of him’, quite possibly deliberately hampering Nehemiah’s maturation in the process. The extent of his manipulation of both mother and son becomes apparent after Lady Nestlecock has learned of her brother’s plan to wed Rachel. Discussing Nehemiah’s future with her, Ephraim says that the boy adores him so much that ‘had you married me - which was as likely/ As that your brother would have ta’en his maid - / I think that Master Nehemiah would not/ Have run away in hatred of our match/ As Mistress Joyce, it seems,

hath done of theirs' (2: 2: 316). All the morally dubious men surrounding Lady Nestlecock seem to know that all they need do to win her favor is compliment her son.

But this does not acquit Lady Nestlecock. Even Ephraim recognizes that Nehemiah must be normalized if he is to marry, suggesting to his mother that they 'gently by degrees do take him off/ From childish exercise, indeed plain boy's play/ More manly would become him' (2: 2: 316). Lady Nestlecock reacts with horror at the mere notion, unable to countenance the risk to her son's safety such a sign of maturation would entail. And even this is not the most incriminating scene; nowhere is Lady Nestlecock's culpability in creating the mad child and the dangers of her allowing him into the marriage market made more clear than in the meeting between herself, Lord Whimbly, Nehemiah and Blith. In this scene, it seems as though there is a fleeting chance of establishing of a successful domestic partnership between Lady Nestlecock and Lord Whimbly. Then Blith openly mocks Nehemiah, leading her into conflict with Lady Nestlecock and putting Nestlecock's budding relationship with Whimbly at risk. What unfolds is a short, vicious confrontation that displays all the underlying fatal flaws beneath the façade of domestic harmony:

LADY NESTLECOCK

Is this the manners your mother left you?

BLITH

Speak not you of mothers, madam.

LADY NESTLECOCK

Sir Swithen, will you see my child abused so, ha?

WHIMBLY

I can but grieve for't, Madam.

NEHEMIAH

My mother is as good as your mother, so she is, for all she's dead.

LADY NESTLECOCK

Aye, well said, Neh.

BLITH

Yes, it appears in your good breeding.

Your fine qualities express her virtues sufficiently. (2: 2: 399-403)

No one comes off particularly well here. Lady Nestlecock tries to reprimand Blith for her rudeness by calling upon her maternal authority, but in vain; the clear evidence of her son's failed upbringing utterly undermines her. The young, unmarried Blith, who might be expected to treat her prospective mother-in-law with due respect, feels under no obligation to do so on account of her scorn for the child Lady Nestlecock has raised. Blith's belief that Lady Nestlecock is solely responsible for Nehemiah's inadequacies allows her to express contempt for her elder in the strongest terms. Lord Whimbly does not make an adequate attempt to control the situation by defending either woman from the other's onslaughts, contrary to his role as a father and a prospective husband. Nehemiah, too, fails to live up to his domestic role. When he doggedly tries to put himself forward as the man of the house by defending his mother, his verbal clumsiness leads to his accidentally confirming Blith's accusations; Lady Nestlecock does indeed seem as skilled at mothering as a dead woman. This scene illustrates the vicious cycle that Nehemiah's household has fallen into: Lady Nestlecock's over-mothering has rendered her son an undesirable product in the marriage

marketplace, and his undesirability undermines her own reentrance into the marriage marketplace.

In *Mother Bombie*, the economic problem of madness in the family is solved by removing the mad person from the line of inheritance; Accius and Silena are allowed to stay in their erstwhile fathers' homes, but will not inherit their adoptive fathers' wealth. In *The New Academy*, a more elegant solution is found; Lady Nestlecock defuses or at least lessens the threat her son poses to her household's stability by remarrying, opening up the possibility – however slim – that she will beget a proper heir. At the very least, it might be hoped that the excessive affection she showers upon Nehemiah will now have a more appropriate outlet. But the broader implication of this resolution is that it is the woman's responsibility to contain and conquer madness in the domestic realm by assuming her role as a wife.

This lesson is driven home in the play's secondary storyline; the merchant Matchill's marriage to his servant Rachel. Through the interactions between these two characters, we see how madness can grow in the domestic realm if left unchecked by female influence, and how a wife might eradicate it. Initially, Matchill seems Nehemiah's exact opposite. He is clever, eloquent, understands sex, marriage and their economic significance, and gives judicious thought to the issue of how to manage and distribute his wealth. In the wake of his son's death, he draws up plans first to venture to France and exact his revenge upon Lafoy, and then to marry his servant Rachel. He tells Cash, his right-hand man, to set his financial affairs in order: 'Look that you forthwith perfect my accounts/ And bring me all my books of debtor and creditor... I'll set all right and straight/ All statues, bonds, bills and sealed instruments' (1: 1: 80). Nevertheless, despite his financial intelligence, Matchill spends much of the play under the shadow of madness. In the opening scene, Cash informs all Matchill's visitors of his master's recent bereavement, telling Strigood that Matchill's grief has left him 'almost dead with sorrow' and warning him that 'the sight of you, that are his sole vexation,

will make him mad' (1: 1: 25). Lady Nestlecock is told that her brother has 'locked himself up, madam, and will suffer/ None to come at him, till his sorrowful fit be somewhat over' (51). It soon becomes clear that Cash is not exaggerating the danger; in his anger, Matchill breaks ties with Strigood and Lady Nestlecock and announces plans to wed his servant and exile his daughter. In reaction, Strigood claims: 'He's falling mad, stark staring mad' (137). Matchill's acquaintances concur with this assessment, Erasmus exclaiming: 'Was ever such a humor in a man, as this mad/ Merchant Matchill is possessed with/ To marry so, to spite his child and kindred?' (2: 1: 241). Moreover, we learn that this is part of a trend of emotionally excessive behavior and sudden mood swings on Matchill's part. Even when warning Erasmus and Valentine that Matchill is too grief-stricken to greet them, Cash adds: 'Pray be pleased to enter. I hope his passionate fit ere you have dined will be past over. He is not wont to suffer long under the hand of sorrow' (1: 1: 19). He is correct. After the initial throes of grief over the loss of his son, Matchill quickly discards grief in favor of wrath, proclaiming: 'Sorrow be gone/ And puling grief away, whilst I take in/ A nobler and more manly passion/ Anger, that may instruct me to revenge' (1: 1: 66-9). Matchill's claim to the nobility of his 'manly' anger quickly proves false; instead of doing him credit, his excessive emotion bestows on him shades of Herod as he wages war on the family and annihilates all positive domestic and social bonds around him. Moreover, his anger is eventually shown to be unwarranted given that his son is alive and well. A similar critique of 'manly' pretenses being used to conceal mental flaws is found in Nehemiah's storyline; following Nehemiah's adopting a thin guise of maturity, Ephraim warns Nehemiah not to return to childishness but to 'go forwards/ In manly actions' (4: 1: 759). Nehemiah, as noted, describes his own concern over the future financial welfare of his children as 'a manly and a good husbandly consideration' (762). What Matchill and Nehemiah term 'manly' behavior is evidently a desire for self-gratification in disguise; Matchill selfishly desires his unjust revenge and Nehemiah, we may suspect, simply wants an excuse to keep his toys for himself rather than pass them on to his

children. Both desires are toxic to the domestic realm.

Matchill's status as a madman whose lack of capacity for emotional moderation endangers the household is cemented when Valentine describes him as a 'humorous cockscomb that could never laugh/ In all his last wife's days; and since her death/ Could ne'er be sad' (2: 1: 297). This reported gaiety on Matchill's part in reaction to the death of a wife runs very much against the grain of husbandly propriety. By contrast, Lord Whimbly's widowhood drives him to melancholic grief for years. Both men's reactions are excessive, but Matchill's gaiety is shown to be more socially dangerous, for it is contagious. In Matchill's first interaction with Lord Whimbly, he is able to make the melancholic lord laugh uncontrollably by mocking Lady Nestlecock and Nehemiah. This mockery continues to erode the domestic bonds that Matchill should, as a patriarch, be working to repair and preserve.

Moreover, in making Lord Whimbly laugh at his erstwhile love interest, Matchill weakens the potential for a stable reproductive bond between the widower and the widow. Matchill's behavior – endangering his widowed sister's chances of marrying a wealthy lord, marrying a servant out of spite and exiling his daughter, thus propelling her towards Strigood's sham academy – all introduce instability into the domestic economy in a way that counteracts all the fiscal sense he has demonstrated.

In fact, the fact that Matchill's madness specifically targets his family makes it all the more economically toxic. In her examination of kinship ties in the early modern period, Krausman Ben-Amos argues that healthy relationships with one's relatives were a substantial fiscal asset:

In a society with no banks and few methods of insurance, where trade involved large amounts of wealth, where the reliability of suppliers, agents, and captains at sea was critical for the successful completion of transactions, and where the dependence on others

as safeguards against cheating, fraud, and incompetence was inescapable, kin networks provided a particularly valuable asset. At heart was the question of reputation and trust. Merchants relied on their reputations in order to build networks of trusted agents and dealers, but building a reputation was a lengthy and hazardous process: information traveled slowly, and using it required placing trust in the provider of the information. Kin ties and ties with in-laws enabled a merchant to bypass and circumvent the lengthy process of establishing a reputation. (2000: 307)

Taking this into account, Matchill's madness turns him into both a bad relative and a bad merchant – far more economically dangerous, particularly given aforementioned concerns noted by Martha Howell regarding the period's need to domesticate commerce.

However, as in the case of Lady Nestlecock, ultimately the problem of madness in the family comes down to women. It is heavily implied that what Matchill needs is a wife to moderate his excesses. When Strigood makes his observation that Matchill is 'stark staring mad', Lady Nestlecock replies, 'I would he had a wife, then, for nothing else can tame him' (1: 1: 138). Indeed, the greater part of Matchill's story is devoted to his new wife's 'taming' him via the threat of cuckoldry. By the play's end, Matchill has a stable marriage and seems to have lost his propensity towards explosive outbursts and emotional excess.

We are left with two early modern plays in which madness in the household is curtailed by women. Mother Bombie reveals Accius and Silena's true origin, after which they can no longer pose a threat to economic stability in their households or their community. Rachel controls Matchill's emotional excesses by becoming a good wife with whom he might have a stable union, hopefully begetting another heir so that the terrible threat raised in the first scene – that the mad child Nehemiah might inherit his wealth – will never come to pass. The emphasis placed on the early modern woman's responsibility to tame madness resonates with what we know of her responsibility to tame commerce. Howell observes that the average

early modern woman is expected to be a stabilizing socioeconomic force, able to ‘manage consumption in her husband’s interests’ (2010: 289-291). In fact, if the respectable domestic female is synonymous with the virtuous consumer, then such a person must clearly be an expert evaluator, highly skilled at assessing what things are worth. As mad people are so often characterized in literature as unable to assess value, it makes sense that both plays imply that women can and must be called upon to remove madness from the household. Neither Rachel nor Mother Bombie perfectly embody the ideal housewife as depicted in Howell’s conduct manuals, but both can slip into the role when they need to.

To conclude, one notes that *Mother Bombie* and *The New Academy* depict in detail the economic chaos mad relatives bring to the domestic space while, at the same time, going some way towards exonerating the mad relative. The children Accius, Silena, and Nehemiah are all the result of pre-existing domestic dysfunction, most notably their parents’ failure to understand and accept their proper roles in the household. They have little control over their own lives and are not given enough agency for it to seem fair that they be blamed for the problems they cause. Likewise, the mad merchant Matchill suffers a shrewish wife, a brace of dysfunctional relatives and a dead son; he is as much a product of a broken household as its cause. But this willingness to reduce the mad person’s culpability has a darker side. In the end, all the mad relatives featured serve one role in the plot and that is to be an obstacle to domestic economic stability and thereby test their abled relatives’ mettle. The abled family’s moral duty in these plays is not to offer a mad relative support and succor. Rather, the family’s duty is to contain or correct their problematic relative, or at least arrange matters so that the impact this relative has on the family and the community is lessened. The question mad relatives provoke is not how to allow them fuller participation in their communities but instead how their communities may navigate around them. This is why it is not inappropriate to place the bloodthirsty child-killer Herod in the same general category as the silly, inoffensive youth Accius. Their respective texts treat them both not as complex characters but

one-dimensional threats that the abled must overcome, their disabilities only explored so far as they advance abled characters' stories.

Chapter 5

‘Chapel of ease/ For all men’s wearied miseries’: Old age, madness, and money

Old people are a nuisance, an embarrassment to their children, a waste of economic resources, and need to be carefully monitored lest they run amok and disgrace themselves. Old people are also precious, wise, a valuable social resource, the bedrock of civilized society and worthy of respect and care. Demonization and glorification of the elderly occurs throughout medieval and early modern literature in equal measure, and often texts place these two extreme viewpoints in opposition to one another, with one ultimately winning the day and serving as the story’s moral. When age-related disability is thrown into the mix, the moral will usually bend towards former viewpoint; it is rare to find a text that does not cast those who are both elderly and psychologically disabled in a very poor light.

Before continuing, it needs to be noted that the category ‘old’ is an unstable one. Historian Shulamith Shahar observes both the ubiquity and the fluidity of age as a mechanism for social categorization throughout human history:

It is known that age serves as a basic organizing principle in only a small number of societies... However, grading people by age and distinguishing between the different generations seems to be a universal form of social categorization, though the status of the old-age group is not the same in all societies. (2004: 2)

Today, variations in life expectancies from one demographic and geographic location to the next complicate the question of who has truly reached ‘old age’ and how such a status may be quantified. Emerging technologies such as anti-ageing medication will undoubtedly muddy the waters even further. Questions such as whether one’s ‘age’ should be considered as the number of years one’s ongoing consciousness has existed, or a measure of the body’s rate of

decay, or a measure of one's accumulated life experiences, will soon have serious implications for how we live our lives. The question of what constitutes old age in the medieval and early modern period is no less intimidating or complex, and has invited much debate (Shahar 1993). Deborah Youngs points out that throughout much of the medieval period, very few rigorous records were kept as to exact birthdates, but adds that 'during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries... chronological age was mattering more. Growing bureaucracies and the accompanying amassing of written records provided more reasons to be aware one's age and birth date' (2006: 17). Complicating the matter further is the fact that life expectancies throughout the medieval and early modern period fluctuate constantly, affected by various factors, including famine and the plague. Perhaps most pertinent factor of all is the infant mortality rate, which was often so high that, as Shahar notes, 'the child was nearer to death than the young man, since anyone who achieved young adulthood had a better chance of reaching old age than did the child' (2004: 5). Along similar lines, Daniel Schafer claims that 'from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, a newborn had a nearly constant life expectancy of only about thirty years' (2015: 8). However, Schafer adds that if children survived past the age of ten, 'average life expectancy rose to nearly fifty years, which meant that quite a few people reached an age that even by today's standards would be deemed old' (2015: 8). Similarly, David Crouch contends that 'if a child could reach adulthood, he might reach the age of sixty or seventy, which was not uncommon' (2017: 274).

It seems that medieval life spans for those who made it out of childhood may not have been radically different from those of today. Another thing that we know for certain has remained unchanged is the association of old age with disability. Today, disability in the elderly is a rapidly developing field of research. Studies by Sheila Riddell and Nick Watson have revealed our collective social tendency to employ 'physical or cognitive function as a determinant of both old age and disability', such that our estimation of a person's age is contingent upon how disabled that person appears to be (2014: 59). Consequently, the

elderly face social and cultural discrimination similar to that which the disabled endure, a phenomenon unpacked by Todd D. Nelson (2004; 2005; 2016). Those who come into disability prior to reaching old age find that ageing often effects the quantity and quality of the ableism they encounter, as Tamar Heller and Lieke van Heumen find in their comprehensive overview of how old age, disability, and identity issues intersect. They claim that the disabled often experience ‘an accumulation of restricted opportunities and major inequalities throughout their life courses that affects their aging process in ways different from their nondisabled peers’ (2013: 419). In addition to this important research, attention has also been paid to specific disabilities, impairments and illnesses that occur more commonly in the elderly. For example, Clive Baldwin scrutinizes the bioethical dimension of emerging medical technologies for people with dementia (2005). Some research has also been dedicated to examining how old age and disability are rendered culturally, such as Sally Chivers’s exploration of elderly representation in cinema (2011).

Economic issues, when brought into discussion of age, invariably revolve around retirement, pensions, unemployment, welfare and the labor force (Bowling 2005; De Vroom & Overbye 2017; Goods & Millstead 2016; Taylor 2008; Zaidi 2008). Mark Priestly makes a particularly salient point regarding the extent to which economics determine the parameters of both old age and disability:

Old age may be viewed as a structural or administrative category deployed to control adult labor supply, and maintained through discourses of ‘ability to work’. In this way, old age has been produced and regulated in very similar ways to the category of disability in modern societies. Both have involved categorical exemption from competitive adult markets, resulting in the enforced dependency of both older and disabled people on adult labor. (2005: 92)

Those who have examined ageing in the medieval and early modern period have recognized disability as a foremost aspect of old age (Charney 2010; Classen 2007; Ellis 2009; Laslett & Kertzer 1995; Shahar 2004; Stone 1977; Thomas 1976; Toulalan 2016; Youngs 2006). As Maurice Charney aptly observes, ‘although the time when old age sets in may differ in the twenty-first century... the infirmities remain pretty much the same as they were four hundred years ago’ (2010: 3). In light of this, it is unsurprising that medieval and early modern literature present a general consensus that the older one becomes, the more one’s physical and psychological frailties develop; consequently, an analysis of age in medieval and early modern literature is, unavoidably, also an analysis of disability. That said, it is difficult to argue whether or not the disabled elderly may be considered to have been marginalized in medieval and early modern society in the same way they are today in Western society. Shahar warns against the dangers of making blanket statements regarding the lives of medieval old people, noting that ‘as to their status and participation, these varied according to gender, social stratum, economic resources, function within the community and personality, as well as the era and region explored’ (2004: xi). However, she also acknowledges that the connection between age and disability has a measurable impact on the elderly’s social and legal power, observing that the medieval legal system grouped them with women and children as being ‘mentally feeble’ (2004: 3).

Certainly, from an economic standpoint, the elderly were particularly vulnerable in medieval and early modern society (Classen 2007; Ellis 2009; Epstein 1984; Herlihy 1990; Shahar 2004; Thomas 1976). As Anthony Ellis notes, the aged were disproportionately represented in England’s indigent population (2009: 86). Indeed, so notable is the economic disempowerment of the elderly in these periods that Albrecht Classen sees an evolution in the financial aid offered to the elderly – in the forms of retirement plans and pensions – as ‘the only truly remarkable difference in approach to old age in the Middle Ages versus the modern times’ (2007: 223). Deborah Youngs illustrates the double-edged

nature of growing old in an era without a fixed age for retirement. On the one hand, she notes, ‘in peasant communities, security in old age relied on laboring late in life... for good or ill, there was no sense that the able-bodied old were exempt from working’ (2006: 171). On the other hand, a long life ‘could bring men to the pinnacle of their careers’, giving them time to hone their skills, grow their wealth and solidify their businesses (2006: 171). Later in this chapter, when I turn to Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1610), I show that this is itself a double-edged sword when one takes age-related psychological disability into account. Characters like Jonson’s Epicure Mammon, ageing and wealthy, are all the more dangerous because of the fact that they become susceptible to madness just at the point when they have amassed enough wealth to do real harm to society in choosing to misspend it.

While the tenuous economic situation of the elderly has been closely examined by researchers, what has received far less critical attention is the literary portrayal of the elderly as generators of economic disorder – specifically as a result of their tendency towards psychological disability. In this chapter, what I hope to add to the conversation is an extension of the argument I have been building in the previous two chapters; that madness is presented in medieval and early modern literature as being implicated in the creation of economic instability, a paradigm which inevitably leads to increased stigmatization and ableism. Consequently, I bring under scrutiny texts that feature not simply a link between age and madness but that portray the aged as economically unstable specifically because of the mental ‘defects’ their respective texts imbue them with. The elderly characters I examine in this chapter may be divided into two groups; those whose age-related disability is a foregrounded element of the plot, and those whose lack of disability is given equal weight and attention. It is far from the case that all ageing characters in medieval and early modern literature have disabilities, but almost always in those cases where they do not, much is made of that fact and their health and abledness is

used to prove a point regarding the ongoing usefulness of old people to the community – with, naturally, the unspoken assumption that abledness and usefulness go hand in hand.

However, an important addendum to my overall argument is that this trend is complicated by the way these texts portray younger people and their relationship with their elders as a collective. Bias against the elderly appears not simply as a result of their assumed susceptibility to disability; it often results from concerns about susceptibility to disability on the part of youths. An equivalence between the psychological vulnerability of the old and the young has been noted by previous critics such as Wanchen Tai, who states that ‘the two age groups – the senescent and the infantile – respectively occupying the two extremes of the spectrum of human life, are commonly assimilated to each other in terms of low intellectual capacity and high physical demands’ (2015: 667). However, my argument does not concern the lower range of youth – infants – so much as it does people in their teens and young adults. In the texts I examine, young people on the cusp of adulthood are shown to be prone to varying degrees of mental instability, violent emotional excesses, lovesickness, even bloodthirsty sociopathy. It is implied or stated outright by these texts that it is the elderly’s role to steer the youth away from such pitfalls. This, in fact, is what makes disability in old age so intolerable; it impedes the elderly’s capacity to guide the young. Previous critics have drawn similar conclusions, with Anouk Janssen observing the literary tendency to present the aged as ‘advisors or admonishers of the immature and fickle youths who have not yet learnt moderation’ (2007: 452). Likewise, when analyzing encounters between the young and the old in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Perceval*, Jean Jost focuses on the flattering depiction of the elderly hermit. Perceval’s salvation at the hands of the hermit implies that the role of the aged is to supply ‘wise words to direct the young and inexperienced. A purifying confession and acceptance of penance... ensure the young man’s spiritual salvation, again at the hands of a wise, kindly elderly man with knowledge and wisdom...’ (2007: 276). In the texts I examine in this chapter, this ideal dynamic between age and youth is undermined when the elderly

suffer disabilities that undercut their role as guides and sages. Inevitably, this is shown to have wider repercussions for the economic realm.

In the previous two chapters, I noted that certain strains of thought in medieval and early modern literature regarding mad people's relationship to the economic realm can be traced back to scripture; specifically, I have looked at the impoverished Nebuchadnezzar and the homicidal Herod. Once again, I believe that the trend I describe regarding representations of old people has roots in the Bible. Anthony Ellis observes that scripture explains age and age-related disability in general as 'a consequence of the first humans' rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden. Age became pathological as soon as we started sinning' (2009: 138).

However, the specific literary connection between age, psychological disability and economic instability that I examine has its own scriptural precedent; the story of Noah's life after the floodwaters recede in the Book of Genesis:

And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:

And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant (Genesis, 9: 20-25).

Scholars have failed to reach a conclusive explanation for why exactly Noah curses his son's son. In John Sietze Bergsma and Scott Walker Hahn's words, 'the terseness of the account, with its inexplicable features and subtle hints of sexual transgression, has left generations of readers and scholars feeling that there is more to the story than the narrator has made explicit' (2001: 25). Common explanations are that Ham sinned merely by observing his father's naked body, that he sexually assaulted him, or that he castrated him (Basset 1971; Baumgarten 1975; Blenkinsopp 1992; Cassuto 1964; Gagnon 2001; Graves & Patai 1964; Hamilton 1990; Hirsch 1974; Matthews 1996; Nissinen 1998; Ross 1980; Wenham 1987; Westermann 1984). For the purposes of this chapter, however, my main concern is not the nature of the crime but the nature of the victim.

Noah's age is one of his most notable features as a character. He lives to be nine hundred years old, comparable to Methuselah, and he is five hundred years old when he begins work on the ark, the patriarch of a family whose other members will live to similarly impressive ages. Those he brings aboard the ark – his wife, his three sons and their wives – are all younger than he, making him the oldest man in the world after the floodwaters recede and everyone else has drowned. So far as can be ascertained from the text, Noah does not suffer anything in the way of age-related disability throughout the construction of the ark or the flood itself. This, perhaps, is what makes his drunkenness so shocking. It is the first time we see Noah in a state of less than perfect health. In fact, Noah's impaired mental capacity, when considered alongside his age, make it entirely possible to read this episode as a metaphor for the onset of psychological disability in the elderly. Moreover, Noah's story carries the same economic ramifications as Nebuchadnezzar's; both men lose or discard their property while in a psychologically vulnerable state.

However, if we interpret Noah's drunkenness as a cautionary story about a mad old man's economically foolish behavior, there is another thing to consider. The story is equally concerned with the behavior of the youth. Noah's mental lapse not only results in his own

loss of property and reputation, but, worse yet, has a negative impact on the younger generation. Rather than playing the role of the patriarch who guides his children away from sin, Noah becomes a conduit for encouraging disrespect towards one's elders. In addition, this disrespect has the effect of poisoning all those generations yet to come, making mental frailty in the old the progenitor of any manner of social ills depending on how the Curse of Ham is interpreted.

Noah's tale and the subtext contained within it regarding age and disability precede several early modern texts dealing with similar themes and presenting a similar message. However, so far as medieval literature is concerned, the story's genetic material appears most prominently in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1380) – incidentally, in a tale also containing lurid sexual elements.

Old John, young Nicholas: Madness and economics in 'The Miller's Tale'

Ageing and the aged do not have a prodigious reputation in the medieval period. Deborah Youngs brings medieval scientific texts under the spotlight and concludes that 'the words used to describe ageing were laden with negatives. Its initial stage saw the advancement of physical frailty, followed later by mental incapacity as the memory failed and senility set in' (2006: 165). This unpleasant process is seen as an inevitable result of man's original sin. Medieval England in particular had a perfect and highly visible example of the potentially disastrous consequences of disability in old age – particularly the economic consequences. Having reigned since 1327, Edward III began to show signs of psychological disability towards the final years of his life, possibly resulting from or exacerbated by a stroke (Mortimer 2006; Waugh 1991). At about the same time, he took to showering expensive gifts on his lover, Alice Perrers. The court ultimately found itself embedded in a scandal in which Perrers was accused of fomenting corruption alongside William Latimer, Edward

III's chamberlain, and a banker named Richard Lyon.

Unsurprisingly, the representation of the elderly in medieval literature is not universally positive. It has, however, received a reasonable amount of attention from critics. For example, Daniel F. Pigg examines ageing in *Piers Plowman* (2007), while Wanchen Tai discusses the one-hundred-year-old King of Constantinople in the medieval chivalric romance *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and the tale's ageist portrayal of his pursuit of a younger bride (2015). Insofar as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are concerned, the section that critics have most often mined for its focus on old age is the Reeve's Prologue (Everest 1996; Forehand 1954; Maclaine 1962). In the account given by the Reeve, ageing is a process of degeneration; the whitening of hair, sexual impotence, the loss of body heat as 'cold and dryness dominate the elderly constitution because of the natural dissolution of the vital warmth' (Everest 1996: 102). However, the Reeve focuses on physical degeneration, whereas my concern is on the psychological disability in the elderly. This is a subject that is more the focus of the *Miller's Tale*.

In *The Miller's Tale*, John, a carpenter, has married a much younger woman, Alisoun. His tenant Nicholas, a young and clever scholar, covets John's wife and devises a scheme to sleep with her. He convinces John that Noah's flood is about to be unleashed upon the world once again. Accordingly, all three of them must climb into tubs at night, suspended from the ceiling, so that they will not drown. John swallows the story and climbs into his tub; at night, Nicholas and Alisoun climb out of their tubs and have sex in John's bed. When the clerk Absolon, Alisoun's second suitor, comes by and stands outside the window asking Alisoun for a kiss, the lovers play a trick on him, as a result of which Absolon kisses her backside and Nicholas has a hot poker applied to his own by Absolon. His screams wake up John, who cuts the rope suspending his tub and falls to the floor. Alerted by the commotion, his neighbors come by and mock him.

To understand how this story uses disability, it is necessary to first unpack its attitude

towards age. The story is one in which youth and age go head-to-head and neither comes out the better for it. John is, from the outset, represented as an older man if not an ancient one. Moreover, he is an older man who fails to behave as the text implies an older man should; much is made of the fact that he has foolishly married a younger woman. We are told her youth causes him much anxiety, she being ‘wylde and yong, and he was old/ And demed himself been like a cokewold’ (3225-6). The narrator testifies to the folly of their union, as ‘Men sholde wedden after hire estaat/ For youthe and elde is often at debaat’ (3227-8). The cheeky jibes John receives for marrying a younger woman need to be understood as part of a more serious subtextual critique of those who do not behave in accordance with what is expected of their age group. Youngs points out that this is a particular preoccupation for medieval philosophy, wherein ‘to behave in ways suitable for an age group other than one’s own was considered a deviation that was treated suspiciously and often harshly’ (2006: 21). Wanchen Tai describes *The Miller’s Tale* as promoting the ‘binary of sexually active and attractive youth versus sexually inactive and unattractive old age’, and notes that ‘the medieval theory of four humors discourages the aged from being involved in any activities of love and sexuality due to their decreasing bodily heat and failing ability to procreate’ (2015: 661-663). Likewise, Geoffrey Cooper describes John as ‘a typical fabliau cuckold, a rich old man who, against all good sense, has recently married a young woman whose sexual appetites are bound to be the greater’ (1980: 7). Lee Patterson goes so far as to characterize the marriage as a ‘violation of the natural law’ (1990: 259).

So John’s age, from the outset, is presented as a problem. The problem is compounded in John’s interactions with Nicholas, for despite the fact that John clearly lacks the wisdom of Chrétien’s hermits, he nonetheless believes himself to be playing the role of the wise older man whose duty it is to guide the younger. Perhaps we cannot fault him for that; it is one of an extremely limited number of socially acceptable roles for old men to play. Nonetheless, John’s belief that his age makes him innately more wise than Nicholas is the primary cause

of his downfall, for it leads him into complacency and gullibility. We can see this when Nicholas implements the first stage of his plan, locking himself away in his room for several days. John begins to worry for his wellbeing, saying to himself: 'I am adrad, by Seint Thomas/ It stondeth nat aright with Nicholas. God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!/ This world is now ful tikel, sikerly. I saugh today a cors yborn to chirche/ That now, on Monday last, I saugh hym wirche' (3425-3429). These words, again, draw attention to John's own age; it seems reasonable to assume that he is closer to death than Nicholas, but in his foolishness he chooses to ignore the unlikeliness of a healthy young man's having dropped dead for no reason. When he hears from a servant that Nicholas is behaving strangely, John doubles down on his role as the wise elderly guardian:

This carpenter to blessen hym bigan,
And seyde, 'Help us, Seinte Frydeswyde!
A man woot litel what hym shal bityde.
This man is falle, with his astromye,
In some woodnesse or in som agonye.
I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!
Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.
Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man
That nocht but oonly his bileve kan!' (3448-3456)

In this extract, we see how heavily Nicholas's plan depends on John's ability to delude himself. Unprompted, John constructs a narrative in his mind that satisfies his deep vanity. He paints a picture of the stark contrast between himself and Nicholas; the simple godly man who references two saints by name and accepts that there are aspects of God's plan men were not meant to know, and the clever, reckless youth who has delved too deep into his modern

scientific pursuits and is now reaping the consequences. These lines allow us to see exactly why John fails to live up to the standard set by Chaucer's hermits, who never boast of their own wisdom. It is clear that he is less interested in Nicholas's plight than in using that plight to reassure himself of his superiority. Nicholas's suffering becomes a useful tool to enhance John's own inflated self-image. This will only become more apparent in the scenes that follow, when John enters Nicholas's room and dramatically attempts to aid him, advising him to 'think on Cristes passioun', blessing him against evil spirits, and calling once again on the saints to intervene (3478).

Most relevant to my argument, however, is the fact that John intensifies the contrast between himself and Nicholas by implying that Nicholas has succumbed to 'woodnesse', or madness (3452). The irony, of course, is that by the end of the tale it is John who will be implicated in madness. When Nicholas's plan ultimately results in John's being found in a tub by his nosy neighbors, John's attempts to justify his actions are in vain:

The folk gan laughen at his fantasye
Into the roof they kiken and they cape
And turned al his harm unto a jape.
For what so that this carpenter answered,
It was for noght; no man his reson herde,
With othes grete he was so sworn adoun
That he was holde wood in al the toun;
For every clerk anonright heeld with oother.
They seyde, 'The man is wood, my leeve brother'. (3841-49)

John's attempts to explain his behavior are ignored by a community that can see no explanation besides madness. It seems likely that, even if they were to hear his explanation, it

would do little to convince them otherwise.

I argue that John's being deemed to be a madman by the village is merely the culmination of an idea that germinates throughout the story; namely, that John's age has already brought madness in its wake. This is a line of argument other critics have touched on in the past. For example, noting that John is repeatedly called 'sely' in the text, Cooper breaks down the multiple meanings of this term, one of which is 'poor' but another of which is 'feeble' (1980: 7). Cooper claims that 'the compassion superficially suggested by calling the carpenter a "poor" man is modified by the secondary senses of "sely" – he is indeed "poor" but in a manner that calls forth contempt rather than pity' (1980: 8). David Williams sees all three main male characters as being gripped by a type of madness; John is 'foolish and superstitious', while Nicholas and Absalom are guilty of 'the ignorance of indiscrimination... in their simultaneous pursuit of a learned profession and a libidinous Alison' (1981: 229). All three, Williams claims, share the madness of 'sensuality', which 'leads to an irrational reconstruction of the world to suit insane fantasy' (1981: 230).

Acknowledging this, I nonetheless contend that the story is mainly preoccupied with the potential for madness to take root in the elderly and the dire consequences of such an occurrence. From the beginning of the tale to its conclusion, John's connection to reality grows increasingly tenuous. First, he ventures into the realm of folly by marrying a wife so likely to cuckold him. Second, he listens to and believes Nicholas's fantastical story – a particularly remarkable error, given that nothing in *The Miller's Tale* is actually fantastical, unlike some of the other *Canterbury Tales*. Despite the tale's absurdity and vulgarity, every event that takes place belongs to solid, albeit sordid reality. Thirdly, John actually goes along with Nicholas's plan – a plan that even a moment's introspection would reveal to be unfeasible. For even if John may be excused a measure of irrationality on the grounds that Nicholas roots his fantasy in scripture, what cannot pass unnoticed is John's ridiculous conviction that he may survive the floodwaters by floating in a tub. This, after all, is farther

than even scripture was willing to go; Noah's ark was a massive edifice stocked with provisions and animals, and took an extraordinary length of time to construct. It seems clear that at some point, the success of Nicholas's trick is less the result of the younger man's cleverness and more the result of the old man's failing capacity for basic reasoning.

Madness accompanies age in *The Miller's Tale*; with that established, can it also be said that economic instability accompanies madness, as it has in so many of the previous texts? I believe so. At the beginning of the story, it seems as though young Nicholas, the 'poure scholar', is the more financially fragile. Critics have noted the glaring disparity between John and Nicholas's economic situations – Dawn Simmons Walts observes:

John is wealthy enough to afford a servant for himself and a maid for his wife. In terms of property, he has enough space in his home to let out a room... The tale does not disclose whether John's wealth is the result of his skill as a carpenter or his position as a landlord, and perhaps it is a combination of the two. What is clear from the outset of the tale is the monetized relationship that exists between John and Nicholas. (2009: 401)

However, while Nicholas may not be in the same income bracket as John, Simmons Walts notes that he does not seem to be the victim of truly dire financial straits, given that he possesses a 'rare and costly' astrolabe (2009: 402). So Nicholas's financial position does not seem poised to evoke the sort of anxieties over poverty we see evoked in previously examined medieval texts such as Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Chrétien's chivalric romance. Instead, the economic anxieties *The Miller's Tale* provokes are located squarely in old John's quarter. A man of status in his community, John is described as a 'riche gnof that gestes heeld to bord/ And of his craft he was a carpenter' (3188-3189). John has two reliable sources of income; he is a carpenter and a landlord. But despite his seemingly inviolable financial security, by the end of the tale he is reduced to a raving madman in a tub. Not only does his wealth not prevent

him from falling prey to Nicholas's trick, it makes him more vulnerable; after all, it is John's money that pays for the tubs that are suspended from the ceiling, and for the food that Nicholas says must be contained within them if they are to outlast the floodwaters. Simply by exploiting the madness of old age, Nicholas is able to turn John's financial security against him.

Then there are the wider socioeconomic implications of old John's madness. Beneath the ribald sexual imagery and vulgar humor, this is a story in which one of a village's wealthiest and leading members goes mad. As noted in my reading of Chrétien's *The Knight of the Lion*, madness suddenly appearing in those who are wealthy is a far more worrying prospect than madness appearing in those who are poor; peasants in medieval literature are assumed to be economically unstable and in closer proximity to madness to begin with. A wealthy person going mad suggests a serious disruption to the natural order. Finally, there is the fact that John's madness allows the economic instability of youth to flourish. Nicholas is a 'poure scoler', reliant on 'his freendes fyndyng' to support his studies (3220). John, an older and richer man, should be the one to have a stabilizing influence on Nicholas; instead, it is Nicholas who tricks him into madness and undermines his authority.

Supporting this disabled-centric reading of *The Miller's Tale's* economic undertones is the fact that Chaucer has Nicholas use the story of Noah as part of his scheme. Obviously, his prophesied apocalypse is a hoax and does not come to pass. But what does come to pass is a sequence of events very much like the scriptural episode of Noah's drunkenness. John and Noah are both old men who succumb to a type of madness. Both men are taken advantage of by younger men. Both lose valuable assets as a result. Just as Noah loses his clothing as a result of his drunkenness, John loses his wife and his reputation in the village.

Chaucer is not the only medieval writer interested the perils of madness in the elderly. Returning to Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (1494), we find a section specifically dedicated to age-related disability. While denouncing 'inprofytable and vayne prayers',

the narrator attacks those who wish for long life and prolonged old age:

Alas mad fole why prayest thou for age
Syns it so greuous is and ymportable
Unstable and full of dolour and damage
Odyous to youth and intollerable
Say follys she man whiche art of mynde vnstable
Is it nat great foly to any creature
To pray for that thyng, whiche he can nat endure
Peleus, and Nestor and many other mo
As Itackes and laertes, sore haue complayned
For to longe age, euer full of payne and wo
Wherwith theyr bodyes sore haue ben constrayned
And with great sorowes and dyuers often payned:
And to conclude brefly in one sentence
Oft to age falleth moche inconuenyence. (52-65)

Disability is the primary reason given as to why no one should wish to live a very long time. The narrator does not delve into any specific types of disability or the ways in which they might make living untenable, but rather paints a vague picture of chronic pain, instability, unhappiness, and ongoing, inexorable decay. Notably, the narrator focuses on such personal discomforts rather than other factors that might make age arduous, such as systemic ageism. This extract brings to mind a term from contemporary parlance, found most commonly in online communities centered around discussion of disability and disabled rights – ‘concern trolling’. Particularly widespread in debates surrounding weight perceived to be excessive, this practice is described by Hanne Blank as occurring when

someone appears to be concerned for your health and welfare, but only until they catch you with your guard down so they can go after you about your weight, size, or whatever they presume is true about your fitness levels and general health. This is the old “I’m just worried about your health” trick. (2012: 57)

The tactic Blank identifies as being deployed to subtly degrade those with atypical bodies seems very similar to the tactic used here by Brant (and by later writers whom I shall address shortly) to degrade the aged. Brant’s narrator frames his concern for the aged in terms of the suffering they must endure, for which reason it would be better if they had died before they reached such a stage.

It becomes clear that Brant’s true concern has less to do with old people’s suffering and more to do with his innate disdain for the aged as a group in the chapter ‘Of old folys that is to say the longer they lyve the more they ar gyuen to foly’. Here, Brant’s attention turns from those who merely wish for extended old age to those who have achieved extended old age. Now writing from the perspective of such an individual, he paints a very different picture. Rather than elderly people’s unhappiness and pain, it is now the socioeconomic threats posed by the aged that are the main focus of his critique. Indeed, the elderly character who narrates this section does not seem unhappy at all, but rather devilishly gleeful. Moreover, while physical disability is still very much a part of old age in this section, it is now psychological disability that is clearly the real threat. The old fool states outright that with every year that has passed, his madness and propensity towards sin has increased. He references the medieval notion of old age as a ‘second childhood’ when he says that ‘I am a childe and yet lyvyd have I/ An hundred winter, encresynge my foly’, reinforcing the point by claiming that ‘The madnes of my youthe rotyd in my age’ (8-13). He makes no bones about the fact that death will soon be upon him, noting that ‘I stoup and fast decline/ Dayly to my graue and

sepulture'; nonetheless, he declares, 'siyll remayne I and endure' and has no inclination to amend his ways at this late stage of his life (1-7). He proudly declares that 'I am a fole and glad am of that name', and then goes on to describe the sins he has indulged in, including 'murder flattery debate/ Covetyse bacbytyne theft and lechery' (28-33). Despite the enormity of his sinfulness, he is 'voyde of drede/Of heuen or hell' and insists that 'my mynde is nat to mende my iniquity/ But rather I sorrow that my lyfe is wore/ That I can nat do as I have done before' (35-40). The old fool is practically cartoonish in his foulness, bragging of his madness and his misdeeds in a manner that makes it difficult to take him seriously, and risks becoming an endearingly eccentric curmudgeon who invites laughter more than dread.

However, his monologue takes on a distinctly ominous tone when it is revealed that he has children, and describes how he has encouraged his son to follow in his footsteps:

But besy I am and fully set my thought
To gyue example to children to mysdo
By my lewde doctrine bryngyne them to nought
And whan they ar onys into my daunce brought
I teche them my foly wysdome set aside
My selfe example, beginner, and theyr gyde.
My lewde lyfe, my foly and my selfwyllyd mynde
Whiche I haue styll kept hitherto in this lyfe
In my testament I leue wryten behynde
Bequethyng parte both to man childe and wife
The foly of my youth and the inconuenyence
In age I practyse, techynge by experience
I shall infourme and teche my sone and heyre
To folowe his fader, and lerne this way of me

The way is large, god wot glad shall he be
Lernynge my lore with affeccion and desyre
And folowe the steppys of his vnthryfty syre (15-31).

Just like Noah and Chaucer's John, the ageing madman is at his worst when he is negatively influencing the younger generation. His eagerness to contaminate his son with his madness is effectively a nihilistic desire to undermine all of society, for he imagines his son going on to hold a position of authority where he might be better placed to wreak havoc. His son might become 'scrybe to a Cardynall or Pope' or a 'fals extorcjoner/ Fasyng and bostynge to scratche and to kepe' (40-42). Ultimately, he hopes his son will 'to some great offyce crepe/ So that if he can onys plede a case/ He may be made Juge of the comon place/ Thus shall he lyue as I haue all his dayes' (45-50). It seems that no sphere of power and influence will be safe from the youth who inherits his father's madness.

Chaucer and Brant are not restrained in their mockery of ageing madmen. Chaucer depicts the elderly as rife with folly, gullible, prone to delusions, selfish, and overall unworthy of the wealth and authority that a lifetime's labor has bestowed. Brant depicts the elderly as vindictive, bitter about their approaching death, and willfully ignorant of the peril in which they have placed their immortal soul. The common denominator in both cases is psychological decline which leads to a loss of the inhibitions that might otherwise prevent the elderly from making disastrous and irrational personal choices that have far-reaching socioeconomic consequences. Early modern writers take the anxieties these texts play into regarding age, disability and money, and either exploit them or deconstruct them – or, occasionally, attempt to do both at once.

Senescence, seniority and senility on the early modern stage

Ideas around ageing underwent dramatic evolutions in the early modern period. One of the most notable, in the words of Allison P. Coudert, was that ‘old age ceased to be thought of primarily as a personal or religious problem and became far more of a medical issue’ (2005: 536). This, unfortunately, did not automatically translate into heightened respect or better treatment for the elderly, as Anthony Ellis notes:

It seems, frankly, that many of the early modern English perceived the nations’ older population as an economic burden. The institution of a new Poor Law in 1603, which provided marginal support to the indigent old and the unemployed, sparked considerable resistance, as documentary evidence indicates the unwillingness of many communities to provide more than the bare minimum to Poor Law beneficiaries. (2009: 10)

Ellis sheds light on the economic side of early modern ageism: old people in financial need were at high risk of being cast aside by a society that has no further use for them. There are early modern texts that express such attitudes, depicting the elderly as passive consumers who can in no way contribute to their family or their community – for example, Thomas Dekker’s *Old Fortunatus* (1599), which I shall turn to shortly. However, in some early modern texts that deal with age-related disability, it is possible to find a more nuanced view of the complex relationship between the elderly and the economic world, one that is not characterized by cold-blooded disdain for those whose age and disabilities impact their economic value.

Consider this extract from Michel de Montaigne’s essay on old age, written in 1570:

Sometimes the body first submits to age, sometimes the mind; and I have seen enough who have got a weakness in their brains before either in their legs or stomach; and by how much the more it is a disease of no great pain to the sufferer, and of obscure symptoms, so much greater is the danger. For this reason it is that I complain of our laws, not that they

keep us too long to our work, but that they set us to work too late. For the frailty of life considered, and to how many ordinary and natural rocks it is exposed, one ought not to give up so large a portion of it to childhood, idleness, and apprenticeship. (Chapter LVII, par. 6)

In Montaigne's account, disability is the foremost defining characteristic of old age. While this is far from a novel viewpoint, what makes his argument notable so far as this dissertation is concerned is the emphasis he places on psychological disability. Psychological disability, he argues, is far more dangerous than physical disability due to its insidious nature; it causes no pain and thus may go unnoticed by the elderly person in question. Expanding on this point, he contends that, taking into account the effect madness in old age has on an individual's economic productivity, it would be logical to lower the age at which young people are able to work and hold positions of influence, thus increasing their years of productivity. The speed with which Montaigne jumps from the personal struggles an ageing individual may suffer to a much broader argument concerning society's economic structure is yet another illustration of the conjoined nature of disability and economy in early modern thought.

But unlike Brant before him, Montaigne does not accuse the elderly of willfully undermining socioeconomic harmony. Even while noting a link between increasing age and decreasing ability to contribute to economic growth, Montaigne veers away from the caustic ageism of Brant's narrator, and not only in the tonal difference between his intellectual essay and Brant's witty satire. Brant recommends that the elderly adjust their behavior, repenting their sins and turning their thoughts towards their approaching death. By contrast, Montaigne's proposed solution to the economic problem of old age is not to demand that the elderly alter themselves and repent their sins in preparation for death, but instead that the youth accept a heavier workload. So even though he accepts a connection between old age and disability, Montaigne does not suggest that the economic problems caused by disability

can be solved simply by ‘fixing’ elderly mad people at an individual level. It seems fair to say that Montaigne offers a more humane take on the issue. He accepts as simple fact that the elderly are prone to disability and that they might generate economic instability as a result, and does so without condemning them for either.

Not all the early modern plays I examine next are so restrained. However, even in those that do condemn the elderly for causing economic chaos, it is often the case that the true villain of the piece is a young person, frequently emotionally unstable or showing some other sign of madness, who is facilitating or profiting from the economic chaos being created. As in the story of Noah, bad or mad behavior on the part of the youth seems to invite more concern than it does on the part of the elderly.

One of the most prominent early modern plays featuring economically disruptive madness on the part of the elderly is Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1610). The wealthy Lovewit elects to leave town during an outbreak of the plague. He entrusts his house and all his possessions to his loyal servant, young Jeremy – inadvisably, as it turns out. Recruiting a prostitute named Doll and a conman named Subtle, Jeremy – now calling himself Face – embarks on an ambitious money-making scheme. He has Subtle assume the guise of a masterly alchemist with the ability to perform extraordinary supernatural feats, and then invites as many gullible fools as can be found into his master’s house to pay for Subtle’s services. Jeremy’s victims include the tobacconist Drugger, the clerk and gambler Draper, the priest Annanias, the garrulous nobleman Kastril, and the wealthy Sir Epicure Mammon. For a while, all goes well, as the con artists play upon each customer’s particular psychological quirks and vulnerabilities to extract as much money from them as possible. Eventually, however, matters get out of hand, and the trio are forced to improvise more and more to keep the illusion going. Finally, Jeremy’s master Lovewit returns and Jeremy confesses everything, escaping punishment by procuring for Lovewit a young wife – sister to Kastril – and backstabbing his erstwhile accomplices, informing them that if they do not leave the

premises they will be arrested.

Numerous analysts have looked at the play's treatment of money and the early modern economy, Elizabeth Rivlin claiming that it 'balances an emergent capitalist fantasy with an entrenched narrative in which the conventions and strictures of hierarchically organized labor renew their claims on the rogue characters' (2011: 116). Jonathan Haynes investigates Jonson's depiction of 'an underworld no longer structured on the guild model, but on a capitalist one', and argues that so far as social commentary is concerned, the play suggests that 'the fundamental problem is not the appearance of a new criminal profession, nor the perversion of the estates, but a new economy, working through both society and the underworld' (1989: 109). Jonson's use of sickness has also been analyzed; for example, Cheryl Lynn Ross considers the framing device of the plague and concludes that 'the city is sick, and the play's swindlers are the parasites who prey on it in its weakened condition' (1988: 151). William Kerwin combines his examination of sickness in the play with an economic reading:

The play protests the way new economics were defining medicine... illnesses and remedies run through the play, as characters boisterously mix traditional and innovative practices and discourses as they try to recreate themselves. There is a simultaneously medical and economic world. (2005: 53)

However, none have noted the way *The Alchemist* perpetuates the trend observed throughout this dissertation; madness facilitating the spread of economic instability. Each of the con artists' victims has some eccentricity that, when tapped into, allows the con artists to not only generate economic instability themselves but to make their victims into generators of same as their madness compels them to make foolish investments. Dapper is a compulsive gambler driven by greed so intense he becomes capable of the most extraordinary self-delusions. The

aristocratic Kastril is hypersensitive, quick to take offense and inclined towards violence, approaching Subtle in the hopes that he might ‘learn to quarrel... as gallants do’ (2: 6: 60-64). The Anabaptist Ananias is a manic zealot, fanatically promoting his cause in defiance of the law, morality, and basic common sense.

But the maddest of all is undoubtedly Sir Epicure Mammon – whose very name is suggestive of monetary greed. No other character is capable of such extravagant and economically dangerous flights of fantasy. The others, as noted, are eccentric and willing to believe the absurd, but while the help they seek from Face and Subtle is fantastical, for the most part their goals are not. Abel Drugger is starting a business and merely wishes it ‘to thrive’ (1: 3: 13). Ananias hopes to empower his church. Kastril wants to make a name for himself as a gallant. Dapper wants to win more money when he gambles; his belief that he is related to the fairy queen and his desire to earn her favor so that she will support him throughout his life only flourishes after Face and Subtle had spent much time and energy coaxing his delusions along. Mammon, by contrast, not only harbors the most wild, unchecked ambitions, he requires the least amount of coaxing. When he first appears on stage, he has already been thoroughly taken in by Face and Subtle’s promises and is consumed by fantastical dreams of what he will do with his new wealth. He dallies with madness in his vivid orations to his long-suffering companion, the level-headed Pertinax Surly, until eventually the metaphorical dalliance becomes an actual romantic fascination with a wealthy madwoman presented to him by the con artists – who is, herself, not actually mad, but merely another part of the con. Mammon’s exceptional eccentricity has been observed by critics. While noting that ‘what the gulls share in common is their capacity for self-deception’, Arthur F. Kinney also comments that Mammon stands out in that his ‘fantasy and lust are so great and so unfettered as to be self-delusive’ (1999: 73-77). Moreover, Kerwin sees Mammon as remarkable not only in his imaginative capacities, but also in the extent to which he taps into the play’s preoccupation with greed and economic corruption,

claiming that ‘more robustly than anyone else who takes the stage, Mammon looks to the drug culture to produce new wealth. He provides the most extreme combination of alchemy’s two aspects; ancient mystical rhetoric and economic individualism’ (2005: 57- 58).

I argue that an equally salient aspect of Mammon’s character is his age. We do not know precisely how old he is, nor whether he is the oldest member of the cast. However, he is almost certainly the oldest of the gulls. While characters such as Drugger and Kastril pursue the goals of young men – an entrepreneurial venture and aptitude as a fighter – Mammon plans to eradicate disease and reverse age, ambitions that speak more to the priorities of an older man. Mammon’s physical condition also hints at advanced years; he is described as ‘fat’, implying not only a tendency towards self-indulgence but also a fairly lengthy timespan spent acquiring said corpulence (5: 3: 41). Most importantly, Mammon has lived long enough to accrue the significant wealth he pours into Face’s scheme, and is the only character to be accompanied by an employee – his secretary Surly. If we accept that age is an important aspect of the character, then the fact that he is the most susceptible to delusion of all the con artists’ victims is very noteworthy indeed. It means that, as in the case of Chaucer’s old John, we might speculate about the prospect of age-related disability playing a role in his many misguided actions. Jonson seems to be prompting us towards this interpretation in moments such as when Mammon is boasting of the philosopher’s stone’s magical properties to Surly:

SIR EPICURE MAMMON

Do you think I fable you? I assure you,

He that has once the flower of the sun,

The perfect ruby, which we call elixir,

Not only can do that, but by its virtue

Can confer honor, love, respect, long life;

Give safety, valor, yea, and victory,
To whom he will. In eight and twenty days,
I'll make an old man of fourscore a child.

SURLY

No doubt; he's that already. (2: 1: 44-53)

Surly's sly reference to second childhood is a deliberate misinterpretation of Mammon's meaning – that he will restore youth to the aged – but serves a secondary purpose in the narrative by planting the possibility of Mammon's own senility in the audience's mind.

Beyond the lavish fantasies of luxury and wealth, there looms a more sinister side to Mammon's madness. Like all the other victims, he inadvertently finances criminality, pouring huge amounts of money into Face's scheme. Moreover, it quickly becomes clear that his particular dreams for the future pose a greater threat to socioeconomic stability than any of Face's other victims with their comparatively milquetoast ambitions. Mammon plans, after converting every metal he owns to gold, to 'send to all the plumbers and the pewterers, and buy their tin and lead up; and to Lothbury, for all the copper' (2: 1: 31-33). This intent to deprive England of crucial resources to enrich himself with frivolous goods would be troubling enough; what is worse is that much of what he plans to purchase are foreign luxury goods which will do nothing to boost the local economy. A further danger becomes apparent when he promises repeatedly to enrich and elevate his friend Surly, promising that he will 'start up young Viceroy's' (2: 1: 22). This seeming moment of genuine generosity and goodwill is in fact ominous foreshadowing; in later monologues, Mammon outlines his plans to distribute his wealth in ways that will also seriously threaten the social hierarchy. His cook, he announces, will be a knight; his footboy shall eat pheasant; 'eloquent burgesses' shall be his 'mere fools'; Lungs, who has been blowing the bellows for Mammon and who is

in fact Face in disguise, will be 'master of the seraglio' (2: 2: 80-86).

It is clear that dire consequences lie in wait if the mad old man is given access to more economic power than he currently wields. However, the threat Mammon poses is enlarged tenfold after he encounters Doll in the guise of a madwoman. Face tells Mammon that she is a nobleman's sister, and has been sent to him 'to be cur'd' after too much reading drove her mad (2: 3: 109). On the one hand, Mammon's instant lust for the madwoman is problematic insofar as all sexual desire expressed by the elderly is potentially problematic on the early modern stage, as Toulalan explains:

Ageing was understood to cause deterioration of the sexual and reproductive parts of the body so that the old were thought to be both infertile and physically unfit for sexual activity. Expressions of elderly sexuality were thus overwhelmingly negatively construed and represented. (2016: 333)

However, at the same time, there is an even more serious problem in the relationship between Mammon and Doll than Mammon's inappropriate sexual attraction. In the previous chapter, I concluded that one of the reasons mad people are depicted as undesirable romantic partners in early modern theatre is that madness is presented as being transmittable; marrying a mad person allows madness to enter the domestic realm and spread through reproduction. Here, Face addresses that very issue:

FACE

She is a most rare scholar,

And is gone mad with studying Broughton's works.

If you but name a word touching the Hebrew,

She falls into her fit, and will discourse So learnedly of genealogies

As you would run mad too, to hear her, sir (2: 3: 237-242).

This dire warning does not deter Mammon, nor does Face's insistence that Doll's keeper would 'run mad' if he were to learn of Mammon's wooing her, after which the 'whole house' would go mad (2: 3: 258). Face presents Doll's madness as equally contagious as the plague currently afflicting London, and yet still Mammon insists on pursuing her, unable to moderate his desire for Doll just as he is unable to moderate his desire for wealth. Mammon's madness opens the domestic realm up to Doll's madness, and in doing so shows once again how madness undermines the elderly's role as guardian and guide. In addition to Mammon's status as a generator of economic disorder through his dealings with Face and Subtle, there is now also the horrifying possibility that he might form a union with a madwoman and pass madness on to the next generation.

Thankfully, Mammon's reproductive prospects are as illusory as his foreseen bounteous wealth; Doll's madness is no more real than the philosopher's stone itself. In the end, the economic chaos Mammon threatens to engender does not come to pass, and the only one who is really made to suffer economically is Mammon himself. When the con collapses in on itself and Face's master Lovewit returns home, Mammon laments that the con artists have 'pick'd my purse/of eight score and ten pounds within these five weeks', but also states his relief that 'my goods/that lie in the cellar, which I am glad they have left, I may have home yet' (5: 5: 70-75). Mammon's hope of recuperating even a percentage of his losses is dashed when Lovewit informs him that he cannot hand his possessions over without proof that they truly belong to Mammon. Slyly, Lovewit requests a 'certificate that you were gull'd of them' (5: 5: 80). Unable to bear the public humiliation of pursuing his possessions through legal means, Mammon decides he would rather surrender them – one final economic error on the part of the foolish old man. Despite the play's generally unflattering depiction of old age, the same arguments made regarding Chaucer's John apply here too. Like John, Mammon's

downfall is ultimately the fault of the youthful Face and Doll. Their encouraging madness in the old man is a perversion of what should be the natural order in which old men guide and correct the youth, an order which is in part restored in the play's conclusion wherein the older Lovewit curtails Face's con and puts him back in his rightful place. Even after the dangers of elderly madness have been graphically illustrated, at the end of the day the play puts its faith in the elderly's ability to serve as a pillar of sanity and restore socioeconomic order.

Such a comforting conclusion is not to be found in Thomas Dekker's *The Pleasant Comedy of Old Fortunatus* (1599); here, madness in old age is so corrosive and contagious that it destroys its host, decimates a family, sees the younger generation executed, and undermines not one but two monarchies. The elderly and impoverished Fortunatus encounters the goddess Fortune and her entourage – among whom number the goddesses Virtue and Vice – in the woods. Fortune offers him one of six gifts; health, beauty, strength, longevity, wisdom or wealth. He chooses wealth and is given a magic purse from which he may take ten gold coins every time he reaches into it. Delighted, Fortunatus shares the news with his sons, the good Ampedo and the greedy Andelocio, and gives them and their servant Shadow ten pieces. He then travels the world spending lavishly, eventually arriving at the Babylonian court where the Babylonian king shows him his greatest treasure; an enchanted hat which can transport its wearer anywhere in the world. Fortunatus steals the hat and returns to his sons to tell them of his adventures, only to die of exhaustion as soon as he reaches them. Andelocio, the greedy son, takes the magic purse and visits King Athelstan's court in England, where the purse is swiftly stolen by the king's daughter. The plot thereafter concerns Andelocio's rampage through the court as he attempts to steal it back and have his revenge. Along the way, he kidnaps the princess, grows horns after eating forbidden apples, disguises himself repeatedly, repents his sins before immediately going back on his repentance, ignores his brother Ampedo's advice to mend his ways and generally brings chaos to the English court. Eventually, as a result of Andelocio's unchecked greed and wrath, both the good brother and

the bad die in the stocks.

The most in-depth analysis of old age in Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* to date comes from Anthony Ellis, who compares the play to Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Ellis aptly observes that 'by making old men pivotal characters, Jonson and Dekker associate the social corruption that is their principal comic target with embodiments of physical decline' (2009: 142). I fully concur with this argument, though my interest lies more in Dekker's portrayal of old Fortunatus's psychological decline. In his introductory scene, we find the elderly wanderer participating in a strange, rambling conversation with his voice's echo. The dialogue is so prolonged as to make one suspect that if he has not yet become mad, he is well on the way. Indeed, he himself draws attention to the very real risk of this occurring:

OLD FORTUNATUS

This wilderness is world without end. To see how travel can transform: my teeth are turned into nutcrackers, a thousand to one I break out shortly, for I am full of nothing but waxen kernels, my tongue speaks no language but an almond for a parrot, and crack me this nut. If I hop three days more up and down this cage of cuckoos' nests, I shall turn wild man sure, and be hired to throw squibs among the commonalty upon some terrible day (1: 1: 43-49).

Once again, we encounter the shadow of Nebuchadnezzar in a man wandering lost in the wilderness with no human company and at risk of losing his command of speech. In fact, Fortunatus's fear that he will become a 'wild man' is one of the few moments of serious self-reflection he displays.

Having established Fortunatus's fragile mental state, Dekker establishes with equal speed his poverty. A beggar, Fortunatus wanders the wilderness lamenting to himself that he is 'very poor and very patient' and that he has 'fasted long' (1: 1: 11, 15). We do not know

precisely how Fortunatus came to be so poor; however, Ellis points out that the audience is probably supposed to view Fortunatus's advanced age as contributing to his advanced poverty, given how often the two states go hand-in-hand in early modern Europe. Examining the considerable overlap between early modern Europe's elderly population and its impoverished population, Ellis observes that among vagrants in particular, 'the aged appear to have been represented disproportionately' (2009: 86). It seems, then, that all the threads required to perpetuate the established paradigm are in place; Fortunatus is old, either mad or nearly mad, and economically unstable in a way that speaks to a specific set of early modern anxieties.

All that is required is a scene showing how these three facets of his character reinforce one another. The scene we are looking for is his very first encounter with Fortune, where she gives him the chance to choose between the aforementioned gifts. To his credit, he spends some time reflecting upon each one's worth rather than selecting one impulsively. But the judicious discernment this might suggest is undermined by the fact that wisdom is the treasure whose value he dismisses first.

OLD FORTUNATUS

Shall I contract myself to wisdom's love?

Then I lose riches: and a wise man poor,

Is like a sacred book that's never read –

To himself he lives, and to all else seems dead.

This age thinks better of a gilded fool,

Than of a threadbare saint in wisdom's school (1: 1: 259-263).

Throughout his monologue, Fortunatus proves how much he is in need of the very quality he rejects first, for the grounds on which he rejects strength, long life, and beauty are all deeply

unwise. Having already lowered the bar by rejecting wisdom due to his disdain for a life of saintly asceticism, he goes on to reject strength, because ‘greatest strength expires with loss of breath/ the mightiest in one minute stoop to death’ (267-8). Longevity does not appeal either, as he ‘might grow ugly, and that tedious scroll/ of months and years, much misery may enroll’ (270-271). Beauty, lastly, is spurned because ‘that fairest cheek hath oftentimes a soul/ leprous as sin itself’ (273-274). Having eliminated the other contenders – save for health, which he either forgets about or ignores – he selects wealth as his prize. The obvious point that Fortunatus overlooks is that wealth will address none of the problems for reason of which he ruled out strength, long life and beauty; death, unhappiness, physical degeneration and sinfulness all remain potential pitfalls, as is made clear when Fortunatus unexpectedly dies halfway through the story. So though Fortunatus pretends to rationally review his options until wealth seems the only sensible choice, it is obvious that he is motivated by wholly irrational greed. Further proof of his irrationality comes when he makes the claim that wealth is not simply superior to wisdom; in fact, wealth *is* wisdom, for ‘the rich are wise/ He that upon his back rich garments wears/ Is wise, though on his head grow Midas’ ears’ (282-283). In addition to foreshadowing the horns that will later grow on Andelocio’s head, the fact that Fortunatus can make such a claim regarding wealth even while he demonstrates familiarity with a fable illustrating the perils of greed testifies once again to his own extraordinary foolishness.

Like *The Alchemist*, Dekker’s play offers a harsh critique of the aged, but takes care to place equal scrutiny upon the younger generation. It cannot be overlooked that that the madness of Fortunatus is easily matched, and at times surpassed, by the madness of Andelocio. His first appearance onstage involves a prolonged conversation with his servant Shadow, a mirror of Fortunatus’s conversation with Echo in that both participants bemoan their poverty. While Fortunatus merely notes the possibility of his becoming a ‘wild man’, Andelocio welcomes the possibility of madness outright: when Shadow declares that hunger

is driving him to madness, and 'I am out of my wits, to see fat gluttons feed/ all day long, whilst I that am lean fast every day', Andelocio replies: 'Why now, Shadow, I see thou hast a substance: I am glad to see thee thus mad' (1: 2: 91-102). His sensible brother Ampedo reproaches them both, entreating Andelocio to 'hate this madness/ Turn your eyes inward, and behold your soul/ That wants more than your body' (107-109). His wise words go unheeded. Later, after Andelocio has squandered all the wealth his father bestowed upon him, Shadow notes: 'It's happy I have a lean wit: but, master, you have none; for/ when your money tripped away, that went after it, and ever since you have been mad' (2: 2: 12-14). Fortunatus's death does nothing to change his son's ways. On the contrary, Andelocio's behavior becomes progressively erratic and extreme, the socioeconomic instability he creates increasing in proportion to his madness. The culmination of his story comes when he grows horns after eating from a tree planted by Vice and turns into the 'wild man' his father feared becoming in the first scene. All in all, it is the younger man's madness that is the more disruptive force, for Andelocio undermines the stability of the entire English court, while Fortunatus harms only himself and the king of a foreign country who is of negligible importance to an English audience. Given this, it seems that the play is ultimately more concerned about young people who lack a rational elder's guidance than about irrational old people per se.

John Fletcher and Phillip Massinger's *The Little French Lawyer* (1647) perpetuates this trend, offering a story about disability in the elderly that is in fact primarily a critique of young people. The ageing soldier Champernell is to wed the beautiful Lamira, but Dinant, a boisterous gallant in love with Lamira, and his friend Cleremont disrupt the wedding and mock Champernell. They claim that his wealth is the result of plundering and that his disabilities and age make him unable to sexually satisfy his younger bride. A duel is called for. As Champernell lost both a leg and an arm in service to his country, Lamira's brother takes his place. To further skew the odds in Champernell's favor, Lamira tricks Dinant into

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missing the duel, leaving Cleremont to fight alone. In urgent need of a second, Cleremont seizes a timid lawyer named La Writ and gives him a sword. Cleremont is then amazed when La Writ actually wins the battle and thereafter develops an insatiable appetite for combat. The bulk of the plot concerns Lamira's enacting another trick upon Dinant and Cleremont, humiliating them as they humiliated her husband, while concomitantly La Writ neglects his legal work in favor of brawling. At the end, Champernell comes upon La Writ in the woods and beats him into submission, demanding to know why he has abandoned his former quiet life for that of a fighter. 'I was possest', La Writ replies, making the case for his bloodlust to be recognized as a type of madness, and Champernell returns, 'I'le dispossess you' (4: 1: 483-484). After a vicious beating returns the maddened lawyer to his original state of mild-mannered sanity, and after the two gallants have been punished, Champernell resumes marital bliss with his loyal wife.

At first, it seems as though *The Little French Lawyer* will reproduce the moral of *The Miller's Tale*, condemning an older person for presuming to court and wed a younger one. Champernell's age and disability appear to facilitate domestic destabilization, for they give Dinant cause to challenge his marriage to Lamira and make it impossible for Champernell to defend the affronts to his honor. The problems created by Champernell's body eventually spill over into the wider community when they result in a lawyer's becoming a lawless rogue and abandoning his cases, so it may be said that once again disability has negatively impacted the socioeconomic realm. However, the play quickly shuts down any line of interpretation that denigrates the elderly by building up Champernell's disabilities as laudable proofs of his value and his valor. Even when he collapses to the ground in his fruitless pursuit of Dinant at the ruined wedding, Champernell maintains his disabilities' worthiness while bemoaning his predicament:

CHAMPERNELL

That noble wounds
Should hinder just revenge!
D'ye jear me too?
I got these, not as you do, your diseases
In brothels, or with riotous abuse
Of wine in taverns; I have one leg shot,
One arm disabled, and am honour'd more,
By losing them, as I did, in the face
Of a brave enemy, than if they were
As when I put to Sea (1: 1: 317-325).

In this extract, Champernell compares a veteran's honorable disabilities to the disgraceful 'diseases' acquired in brothels by the sinful, self-indulgent youth. The audience is encouraged to take his part by the shocking cruelty in Dinant and Cleremont's verbal abuse, which reaches its nadir when they mockingly imagine tasks Lamira might perform as wife to a disabled husband, including hiring a surgeon 'to teach her to roul up your broken limbs' and 'to make a poultess and endure the scent of oils and nasty plasters' (1: 1: 336-340). In light of this, and the tears that their mockery provoke in the old soldier, it is difficult not to sympathize with Champernell above all other characters.

Moreover, as the play progresses Champernell repeatedly proves himself to be a powerful force for social and domestic stability. He is perhaps the play's most exemplary citizen. Despite the taunts directed his way by Dinant regarding how much older he is than his wife, he chooses not to be possessive but instead to maintain domestic harmony while still retaining his authority as husband, shunning the emotional and behavioral excesses that he claims characterize foreigners and madmen alike: 'I am no Italian/ To lock her up; nor would I be a Dutchman/ To have my Wife, my sovereign, to command me' (3: 1: 135-137).

The result is that Lamira and Champernell have a highly successful marriage. He vows never to be jealous and swears that she may ‘Discourse with whom thou wilt, ride where thou wilt/ Feast whom thou wilt, as often as thou wilt/ For I will have no other guards upon thee/ Than thine own thoughts’ (1: 1: 397-400). She responds by vowing to ‘use this liberty/ With moderation, Sir’ (1: 1: 401-2). In texts such as *The Miller’s Tale*, *The New Academy*, and *Mother Bombie*, dysfunctional marriages inevitably result in dysfunctional family units and open up the floodgates to madness and socioeconomic instability. Here, by contrast, is the ideal, functional family unit, which does not enable the spread of madness but instead defeats it – which is precisely what Champernell does in the play’s climax. Symbolically and literally conquering madness by besting the mad lawyer La Writ in combat, Champernell reaffirms the elderly’s role as maintainers of socioeconomic stability and the glue that holds society together through their power to curb the emotional excesses of society’s volatile members.

The most volatile of all are the youth - while the elderly Champernell’s disabilities are valorized, the young La Writ’s disabilities are demonized repeatedly. When La Writ develops a taste for combat after experiencing his first duel, he rapidly undergoes a complete personality shift that bewilders his acquaintances. ‘How he is metamorphos’d!’ remarks Cleremont, adding, ‘Nothing of the Lawyer left, not a bit of buckram/ No soliciting face now’ (3: 1: 270-272). La Writ’s madness has a particularly destructive effect on the economic world. As he becomes more and more fixated on fighting and pays less attention to his legal practice, his clients lament: ‘His fighting has neglected all our business/ We are undone, our causes cast away’ (3:1: 209-210). When challenged, La Writ makes clear that he is aware of the harm he is doing to his career:

LA WRIT

You may wonder to see me thus; but that’s all one,

Time shall declare; 'tis true I was a lawyer,
But I have mew'd that coat, I hate a lawyer;
I talk'd much in the court, now I hate talking. (3: 1: 277-280)

La Writ's denouncement of his career drives home the message regarding how economically corrosive madness can be. A gainfully employed professional is willfully and without justification endangering his own livelihood and the livelihoods of his clients, and in doing so calling into question the reliability of venerated social institutions. If even a lawyer can advocate discarding reasoned debate in favor of immediate vengeance and the fleeting emotional gratification offered by brawling, what aspect of society can be relied upon?

The answer, it seems, is the elderly. Champernell does what no one else has been able to, beating La Writ at his own game. By having Champernell restore the mad lawyer to normalcy, the play establishes age as the antidote to youthful madness. The scene in which Champernell punishes La Writ is extremely violent – onlookers express fear that the older man will actually kill the younger – but it serves a key purpose. It allows the previously denigrated Champernell to prove that despite his disabilities he is still able to fulfil his role as a maintainer of socioeconomic stability fully; indeed, such is Champernell's physical power over La Writ in this scene that even the disabilities that prevented him from punishing Dinant in the opening scene seem to have no presence here at all, strangely enough. In addition to being honorable and praiseworthy, the veteran's patriotic physical disabilities can helpfully vanish when necessity calls for it, while the psychological disabilities of the youth can only be cured by a violent beating. The verbal admonishment that accompanies the beating reinforces the fact that the real risk of La Writ's madness is the socioeconomic threat it poses, as Champernell repeatedly accuses La Writ of having neglected his business, forcing him to admit to having been a lawyer before declaring: 'Nay never look, your Lawyer's pate is broken/ And your litigious blood about your ears sirra' (4: 1: 480-481). Further, he asks La

Writ, 'Why sirra, why do you leave your trade, your trade of living?' (4: 1: 496), before forcing La Writ to thank him for the beating. In response to an onlooker's plea that Champernell desist, he replies that the brutality he displays is necessary; he must 'beat him into his business again, he will be lost else' (4: 1: 489). Once La Writ is defeated, Champernell asks him, 'Do you promise me/ To fall close to your trade again?' (4: 1: 504-505). While there are many potential dangerous consequences of La Writ's madness, the foremost concern throughout the corrective process is the lawyer's abandoning his proper role in the socioeconomic sphere. When La Writ informs his friends of his return to sanity, he too speaks as though the most important aspect of his recovery are the implications for his career: 'I find I am wiser than a Justice of Peace now', he says, suggesting that the beating has even opened up new opportunities for career advancement (5: 1: 420). When encouraging his companions to learn from his example, he speaks in defense of economic prudence and moderation in consumption, saying to one: 'Take Mony of the men thou mean'st to Cousin/ Drink Wine, and eat good meat, and live discreetly' (415-416). On the whole, it seems the lesson La Writ takes away from his brief engagement with disability is that a man who 'neglects his living is an Asse' (429).

The Little French Lawyer's valorization of the elderly comes at the expense of denigrating the disabled; in essence, the play tries to transfer the problem of disability and the economic instability it creates onto the young. This is exactly the tactic deployed by Thomas Middleton, William Rowley and Thomas Heywood's *The Old Law or A New Way to Please You* (1656). Few other theatrical works from the period immerse themselves so thoroughly in the socioeconomic ramifications of old age. Unlike the three plays examined thus far, the text features not one or two old people, but deals with them as a sizeable demographic, giving four or five elderly people starring roles. It treats its elderly characters as valuable, complex individuals whose needs must be accommodated by society and who have a vital role to play in maintaining socioeconomic harmony. Ellis goes so far as to describe the play as 'early

modern comedy's most original defense of old age, a searing indictment of the mistreatment and undervaluation of the aged that can occur within materialistically inclined societies' (2009: 164). So far as disability is concerned, *The Old Law* operates in much the same way as *The Little French Lawyer*. That is to say, its defense of the elderly does not entail a defense of psychological disability. The story does not promote the argument that it is alright for an old person to be psychologically disabled, that any old person of any level of disability is equally worthy of respect, and that disability does not automatically entail economic disorder. Rather, it defends the elderly by implying that young people are more susceptible to psychological disability and more likely to generate economic instability because of it, and that while psychological disability can occur in the elderly, it can be corrected by a swift application of shame and condemnation.

The story is set in Athens, some years after a law has come into effect decreeing that, as a lawyer explains, 'every man living to/ Fourscore years, and women to threescore, shall then/ Be cut off as fruitless to the republic/ And law shall finish what nature lingered at' (1: 1: 109-112). Much of the action centers around two sons and their parents; Cleanthes, who is horrified at the fate awaiting his aged father Leonides, and Simonides, who is delighted at the prospect of his father Creon's death because it hastens the moment of his inheritance. Many throughout Athens concur with Simonides' viewpoint – although not, as it turns out, the prince, as the law is eventually revealed to be a hoax to flush out the greedy and cruel, with all the supposedly executed old men and women being alive and well by the play's end. Nonetheless, the fake law and its justifications are lent authenticity by being fully fleshed out, the exact nature of the good removing the aged shall do to the republic explained to Cleanthes by another lawyer:

SECOND LAWYER

That these men, being past their bearing arms to aid and defend their country, past their

manhood and livelihood to propagate any further issue to their posterity, and, as well, past their counsels (which overgrown gravity is now run into dotage) to assist their country; to whom, in common reason, nothing should be so wearisome as their own lives; as, it may be supposed, is tedious to their successive heirs, whose times are spent in the good of their country, yet wanting the means to maintain it, are like to grow old before their inheritance born to them come to their necessary use. For the women, for that they were never defense to their country, never by counsel admitted to the assist of government of their country, only necessary to the propagation of posterity, and now, at the age of threescore, be past that good and all their goodness (1: 1: 139-155).

Examining this monologue, Jeffrey Masten observes that ‘it is largely impossible to differentiate between deliberately labyrinthine prose that parodies legal language and errors in the text... The point or effect of the speech may have been that the ‘old law’ does not (within either a grammatical or a certain moral paradigm) make complete sense’ (2007: 1338). That said, the lawyer does manage to convey the core justifications for state-sanctioned murder of the elderly. One is the notion that the elderly’s extended lives are unpleasant to them and to their children – another instance of concern trolling, albeit now pushed to the point of maximum absurdity so as to serve the purposes of satire. Beneath this obviously perverse pretense towards compassion lies the true, icily mercantile logic underlying the law’s existence; the economic problems created by old age. Old people, it is reasoned, cannot produce value for their community, either in terms of labor or children, nor can they bear arms in defense of their country. As a result, the only effect of their ongoing existence is to obstruct the economically beneficial flow of inheritance.

At the heart of this perception of the aged as economically unproductive is the association of age with disability. Later in the text, when Prince Evander himself speaks in defense of his law, disability becomes the most important reason why the aged should be

disposed of. The cut-off date of eighty years is chosen ‘because we judge/ Dotage complete then’ (2: 1: 14-15). That said, Evander adds that if a son can offer proof of his father’s disability ‘though he want five/ Or ten years of his number’ then ‘his defect makes him fourscore’ and he shall be executed (2: 1: 19-22). The amendment is an acknowledgement by the prince of the fact that disability does not arrive at a fixed date and further muddies the waters around the question of what dotage exactly is by stating a need for gathering proof of it without going into detail about what sort of proof might be required. The categorical murkiness of disability clearly makes the law even more dangerous and corrosive to natural family bonds, giving sons reasons to seek out ‘defects’ in their sires and putting many who have not yet even reached ‘old age’ at risk of being categorized as such.

The law being so clearly illogical and dangerous from the start, there can be no question that those who support it are villains whose worldview is to be disdained. The young Simonides is eager to come into his inheritance, and quickly snatches up the rhetoric regarding old people’s economic uselessness that the prince has put into circulation. He builds upon the prince’s economic rationale for geronticide, laying out specific examples of instances in which aged men disrupt the socioeconomic sphere’s harmony:

SIMONIDES

Are there not fellows that lie bedrid in their offices

That younger men would walk lustily in?

Churchmen that even the second infancy

Hath silenced yet hath spun out their lives so long

That many pregnant and ingenious spirits

Have languished in their hoped reversions,

And died upon the thought (1: 1: 31-37).

In Simonides' estimation, removing old men from office will open up employment opportunities for young men. Moreover, being in the grip of 'second infancy', the old men to be removed are less productive than the young men who might rise to fill their places. The fact that Simonides' own proud father Creon does not adhere to this portrait of old age and strongly criticizes the law does not deter the ambitious youth, lending weight to the suspicion that Simonides is aware that the ageist rhetoric he espouses is misleading and is operating out of pure self-interest.

Having laid out the arguments underpinning the law, the play works to refute them, building towards a conclusion in which the aged are vindicated. It does so partially through revelations regarding Simonides' character flaws, partially by illuminating the important economic role the elderly play in society, and partially through the humanizing portrayal of the old men and women we encounter over the course of the play. Most have likeable if not always laudable personalities and are valued in some way by either their family members, servants, or social network. Moreover, hardly any have a significant level of physical or psychological disability, and not one is in the grip of 'second infancy'; all live apparently independent lives and are financially secure.

The fallacious nature of the law's economic benefits becomes apparent as soon as Simonides believes himself to be on the verge of coming into his inheritance. Acting in anticipation of his father's death, Simonides takes a series of actions that prove to be economically disastrous for the wider community. When his father's servants come to him, noting that they have 'long served' his household, he shortsightedly dismisses most of them immediately, ignoring the butler, cook, bailiff, and tailor's desperate attempts to justify their employment to him. Only his footman and coachman are retained, the former because he can, as Simonides notes, 'win me wagers... in running races', and the latter because he can 'hurry me to my whore' (2: 1: 256-260). The social rot this generates spreads quickly, as the unemployed butler and the cook both see no alternative but to secure themselves financially

by callously marrying widows close to the age when the law says they must be killed. What early modern audiences would see as the natural relationship between husband and wife, wherein the husband is the provider and protector, is jeopardized as the desire to capitalize on the wealth of the murdered is normalized. When the law is shown to be a farce at the play's end, one of Creon's first actions is to assert his economic authority by immediately reinstating his servants, remarking to Simonides, 'How headlong, villain, wert thou in thy ruin!' (5: 1: 45). So in its defense of the elderly, the play does not dismiss the importance of economic stability. Rather, it makes the case that old people are an economy's bedrock in their capacity as employers and their desire to retain loyal servants who will contribute to the wellbeing of an entire household, in stark contrast to the selfish youth who follows his own fleeting whims and lets the household fall to ruin. Retaining loyal servants then works towards the greater socioeconomic good, as men with gainful employment are less likely to fall prey to sexual immorality and the construction of unstable households built on greed.

That said, while the play works hard to defend the aged, it is less vigorous in its defense of the disabled. It dissociates old age from madness but does not disassociate madness from economic instability. Madness is instead shown to be the purview of self-indulgent, immoral youth like Simonides, who are consequently punished at the end of the play:

CLEANTHES

"It is decreed by the grave and learned council of Epire, that no son and heir shall be held capable of his inheritance at the age of one-and-twenty unless he be at that time as mature in obedience, manners, and goodness."

SIMONIDES

Sure I shall never be at full age then, though I live to an hundred years, and that's nearer by twenty than the last statute allowed (5: 1: 292-299).

Now that the old law, which blamed the aged for the country's economic failings, has been set aside, a new blame figure is put forward; the mentally unfit old person is replaced with the mentally unfit youth. Much like the mad children in John Lyly's *Mother Bombie* and Richard Brome's *The New Academy*, it is implied in this extract that Simonides will never truly mature into an adult. George Rowe argues that Simonides is 'an extreme example of a character we often find in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama: a young gallant who bristles at his parents' frugality... what separates Simonides from other New Comedy protagonists is the extremity of his actions' (1975: 192). The 'extremity' identified by Rowe as characterizing Simonides' actions also characterizes Simonides's personality, consumed by extremes of greed, lust and excitement, while his virtuous opponent Cleanthes is temperamentally more mild and judicious. This youthful madness on Simonides's part is the play's true antagonist.

As further proof of the play's unwillingness to defend disability in the same way it defends age, we need only look to Cleanthes's uncle, Lisander; an elderly character who exhibits signs of disability and is sternly chastised for doing so. Lisander is drawing near to the hour of execution but refuses to submit quietly to his fate. Instead, he sets out to prove that he still has as much vim and vigor as he did in his youth, and does so through profligate spending and attempts at self-alteration, hiring a dancing instructor, trimming his beard, and seeking out quarrels while Simonides and his cohorts laugh his exploits. Coming upon them, Cleanthes is horrified to see his uncle's antics. He berates him publicly, first demanding, 'Are your wits perfect?' and then claiming that he would have preferred it had they not been so:

CLEANTHES

I like it ten times worse; for it had been safer

Now to be mad, and more excusable!

I hear you dance again, and do strange follies.

...

And yet you are not mad? Pray, say not so;

Give me that comfort of you that you are mad,

That I may think you are at worst. For, if

You are not mad, I then must guess you have

The first of some disease was never heard of,

Which may be worse than madness, and more fearful,

You'd weep to see yourself else, and your care

To pray would quickly turn you white again (3: 2: 231-254).

Given the frothy humor of mere moments ago, when Lisander was cavorting about on stage attempting to dance, this sudden harsh rebuke comes like a slap to the face. The text's tone changes abruptly, as for the first time we see a protagonist, with whose perspective the audience is expected to agree, furiously reprimanding one of his elders. The scene echoes *The Miller's Tale* in its disdain for those who fail to act their age; Cleanthes states that the best he might hope for is that his uncle is mad; otherwise, he must have fallen prey to a disease still worse than madness. He goes on to accuse Lisander of grievous sin and transgressing against all natural law:

CLEANTHES

For what is age

But the holy place of life, chapel of ease

For all men's wearied miseries? And to rob

That of her ornament, it is accursed,

As from a priest to steal a holy vestment;

Ay, and convert it to a sinful covering (3: 2: 254-260).

These lines make it clear that it is not, in fact, the aged as a demographic that the text has spent so much time defending, but rather an idealized vision of what old age should be. Rowe reads this scene in light of the play's embrace of 'purity', as indicated by the many polarized dichotomies of good and evil it presents for us, and notes that Lisander's antics make him 'a strange hybrid of age and youthful action... He must reject the grotesque dichotomies of his disguise and again become 'purely,' that is 'completely' old' (1975: 197). While this is an accurate assessment, of greater interest to my argument is that the terms in which Cleanthes scolds his uncle leaves no doubt that psychological disability is as loathed a prospect here as in any of the previous texts. While Cleanthes and, by extension, the audience sympathize with Lisander's position, it is made clear in this extract that his attempts to defy the natural order are intolerable. Age is a 'holy place' and the aged have a place in the economy, as has been made clear by Simonides's disastrous financial choices. But in order to properly occupy this place, the aged must adopt a very specific role and posture; staid and steady guardian, curtailer of the youths' wild impulses, and economic stronghold. When the aged begin behaving like young people, who are most at risk of madness, they too might be tarred with that same brush. Indeed, even outrage at the abhorrent law is implied to be excessively emotional; as Masten notes, 'all of the characters of the older generation whom the play constructs as worthy go willingly, almost cheerfully, off to death' (2007: 1332).

Both *The Old Law* and *The Little French Lawyer* have antagonist figures who posit that old people are more likely to be disabled and thus to create socioeconomic instability. Likewise, both plays wholeheartedly refute this argument by minimizing the association between age and disability and by attributing socioeconomic instability instead to the actions of emotionally unstable youth, who can only be cured by the intervention of the elderly.

Compared to the way old age is portrayed by Brant, both plays paint a flattering picture of the elderly; they serve a vital role in their communities and treating them with a lack of respect is a sure indication of an inferior moral character. However, at the same time, both plays establish a set of inviolate parameters within which old people's behavior must be corralled. The elderly must be stoical and moderate in word and deed, not given to lust, quarrels or excess. They should not spend wildly on frivolous goods but should rather copy Simonides's father in offering employment to their community. Failure to live up to these rigorous standards might put them, like Lisander, at risk of madness.

Chapter 6

‘A melancholy of mine own’: The cost of healing and the bad patient

Before and after her diagnosis, Maggie expresses contempt for other disabled patients and exhibits ‘bad patient’ behavior, constantly undermining medical authority and resisting rehabilitation. Her inability to ‘get well’, the story tells viewers, stems from her selfish inability to identify as sick and submit to the care and management of her body by male doctors and her blossoming love interest, Bobby. (Passanante Elman 2017: 50)

Julie Passanante Elman is talking about the 1980 television show *After School Specials*’ portrayal of figure skater Maggie McDonald, whose career was disrupted by juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. She sees the show as constructing a particular narrative around McDonald’s experience of disability, one that is dominated by an abled-centric paternalism that condemns McDonald for refusing to recover in ‘the right way’. While it is disheartening that even Olympic athletes are not immune to ableism of this nature, it is fascinating to see the ‘bad patient’ narrative still at work in the twentieth century, given that it seems to have journey from the medieval period – perhaps even further back – largely unaltered. Passanante Elman might well be talking about any number of medieval or early modern mad literary characters who challenge abled authority through noncompliance with corrective procedures. Thomas Malory’s Lancelot, John Webster’s Ferdinand, and Shakespeare’s Timon are three that this dissertation has already scrutinized. All three ‘bad patients’ are entirely different characters with different roles in their respective texts – a hero, a villain, and an anti-hero respectively – but all have similar confrontations with abled healer figures. Lancelot resists those who attempt to cure his madness and must eventually be physically restrained; Ferdinand viciously attacks the doctor his courtiers summon to examine him; Timon verbally abuses everyone who comes near him, particularly those who would restore him to his former

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self. The act of resisting rehabilitation is generally always negatively portrayed; it signifies how far Lancelot has fallen from his previously courteous knightly self, how bestial Ferdinand has become through his sinful lifestyle, and how much contempt Timon has accumulated for Athens and all its people. Timon's resistance to being 'cured' is presented as the most justifiable, but it is nonetheless a tragedy, and ultimately results in his death.

In this chapter, I want to look at an exception to this trend, a 'bad patient' whose resistance to undesired intervention from the abled is depicted as neither tragic nor horrifying. In order to do so, though, I first need to scrutinize healing. In the last three chapters spent examining how individuals and communities react to disability's economic aspects in literature, I have examined mad people's relatives, victims, and enemies. The group that has received less attention than it should are those who make it their business to correct disability – the healers. Healing is a core element of what Mitchell and Snyder lay out as the blueprint for the average story of disability in the Western canon, beginning with the identification of deviance in the disabled mind or body and ending when someone or something 'rehabilitates or fixes the deviance' (2000: 54). This 'may involve an obliteration of the difference through a 'cure', the rescue of the despised object from social censure, the extermination of the deviant as a purification of the social body, or the revaluation of an alternative mode of being' (2000: 54). Abled healers are figures who may evoke concern in any disability-positive discourse, bringing with them the risk that through their gaze – which is so often the gaze granted most authority – a person's disability will be reduced to a mere defect to be corrected. That said, it should be noted that while holy healing is often read in a negative light by scholars concerned with disability, Sharon Betcher postulates an alternative interpretation. She notes evidence that in the ancient Middle East, many of the disabilities which are commonly subject to holy healing – blindness in particular – result from the way 'debt slaves were humiliated and prisoners of war were prevented from fleeing their captors' (2006: par. 41). Miraculous healing in scripture might be tied to 'the destabilization and

levelling of empire' (2006: par. 42)

One infrequently examined aspect of healer characters is the economic power they wield. This dissertation establishes that there is a clear trend in medieval and early modern literature of connecting psychological disability to economic instability. What has also been made clear is that, just as madmen are depicted as bringers of economic chaos, those who heal madness are held up as restorers of economic harmony. The hermits encountered by Chrétien's Yvain, Malory's Lancelot and Middleton's Champernell restore madmen to sanity in ways that also restore the proper economic order. The hermits reeducate the fallen knights as to the difference between high-quality and low-quality food and teach them how to trade and barter, and Champernell returns the mad lawyer La Writ to his former position and his clients. In all three stories, curing madness also reestablishes the socioeconomic status quo; knights return to their proper place at the top of the social hierarchy, the lawyer returns to his practice. This pattern is unsurprising, for if madness and economic instability go hand in hand, it stands to reason that healing a dysfunctional mind will help to stabilize a dysfunctional economy.

With this in mind, in this final chapter I want to compare and contrast three stories of healers and madmen. The first two – Christ's encounter with Legion in the Book of Mark and Merlin's encounter with a nameless mad knight in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* or *The Life of Merlin* (c. 1150) – abide by the anticipated paradigm; the healer cures the madman and thereby fixes the economic rupture they represent. The third – Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1603) – conjures up the paradigm only to subvert it, turning the audience's expectations on their head. In doing so, Shakespeare undermines assumptions regarding the benevolence of the healer figure, the autonomy of the madman, and the dynamics that govern their relationship.

In the Book of Mark, Christ and his followers come upon a bizarre figure wandering about the mountains 'howling and bruising himself with stones' (5: 5). Attempts have been

made in the past to restrain this man and his ‘unclean spirit’ with chains, but his inhuman strength has enabled him to break free. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, he has not been driven into such a state by divine punishment; instead, his madness is the result of demonic possession, as Jesus discovers when he approaches the man:

And he asked him, What is thy name?: and he answered saying, My name is Legion, for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Christ gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled, and it was told in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Christ and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid (Mark 5: 9-16).

Following the exorcism, the cured demoniac begs to be allowed to follow Christ, but is told to return to his community and spread the word of God by recounting his miraculous recovery. The tale of Legion has a lasting impact on the lives of mad and disabled people. It reinforces the perceived connection between madness and sinfulness; as Catharine Arnold notes, ‘the biblical precedent of Legion made exorcism a common response to insanity’ (28). Such exorcisms often amounted to little short of torture, despite the inconvenient fact that Christ does not actually harm the possessed man in any way.

That said, my primary interest in the story is the dynamic between the madman and the healer – specifically, the economic dimension of that dynamic. Practically nothing is known about the madman’s past, identity, or socioeconomic standing. Like Nebuchadnezzar,

Lancelot and Yvain, he roams the wilderness in poverty, estranged from civilization and moving about with neither memory nor purpose. He is voiceless – Christ converses with the demons, not the man they are inhabiting – and bestial, described as ‘howling’ in the manner of a wolf. He lives in extreme poverty with no property whatsoever, which contributes to his overall lack of identity; as he has no clothes nor possessions, those who meet him can infer nothing about where he comes from or what his profession was, if he ever had one.

Regarding his initial response to Christ – ‘My name is Legion’ – a footnote in the Norton Critical Edition notes that ‘the alternation between singular and plural pronouns dramatizes the drowning of the man’s identity into the demonic horde’ (91).

All of this places him in stark contrast to Christ. In his capacity as a healer, Christ has several key traits worth noting. Firstly and most basically, he is the madman’s opposite. He speaks lucidly, travels with purpose instead of wandering aimlessly, and lacks material possessions out of choice rather than an inability to assess their value. Christ is also infallible. Even though he himself is currently imbued with abledness and has never experienced the ailment afflicting the man, he understands exactly what needs to be done and swiftly implements a cure that is one hundred percent effective. As in his many other encounters with disabled people in the Book of Mark, it is never posited that Christ might struggle to identify those who desire healing, or heal them improperly, or fail. Such is the purview of physicians, who, as Irina Metzler notes, are ‘barely mentioned in the Bible, and where they are, their powers and skills are seen as quite inferior to divine healing, such as in the story of king Asa (2 Chronicles 16:12-13), who died aged ninety-three after seeking help unsuccessfully from his doctors and not from God’ (2006: 313). Thirdly, Christ is unquestionable. Although he deems to speak to the demons, he does not need to engage in a dialogue with the man to understand how the way he is differs from the way he wants to be. The lack of communication between healer and healed is not treated as a problem, and, as such, there is a lack of regard for the patient’s consent in the story. While his eventual crucifixion shows that

Christ's body is vulnerable to disability, when interacting with disabled people in his capacity as a healer he does not engage with them as a member of the same subordinated group.

Instead, the obvious differences between Christ and those he heals serve to enforce a dichotomy between abled healer and disabled sufferer that props up the healer's authority.

Mitchell and Snyder observe the power dynamics in tales of Christ's healing miracles, noting that Christ's relationship with those he heals is hierarchical despite his benevolence towards them: 'Christ heals the infirm, deformed, and possessed, and opens up the temples to them. Nonetheless, the cure of cripples still predicates their inclusion upon the erasure of their physical differences prior to their admittance to the new religious order' (2000: 183).

However, an equally salient though less remarked-upon aspect of Christ the healer is his financial acumen. In the story of Legion, Christ must take on the role of not only a psychologist but also a financial manager, demonstrating sound economic judgement to resolve the madman's intertwined poverty and madness. Curing the demoniac is a financial process: in order to restore the demoniac to abledness, Christ must organize and implement a transaction of valuable goods. The demons are willing to abandon the prime real estate they have laid claim to in exchange for alternative and presumably roomier lodgings, transferring themselves from a single shared man into two thousand swine. These animals are the most appropriate vessels into which the demons may be placed; Leviticus and Deuteronomy both state that swine are unclean. Unclean or not, the livestock are implied to be someone's property, given the presence of the swineherds, and therefore are a valuable asset whose total destruction is probably greeted with dismay by their unmentioned and uncompensated owners. Curing madness, it seems, comes with a hefty price tag. The demoniac himself incurs a proportion of Christ's medical bill, being obliged to provide Christ with free advertising once he has been returned to abledness. Christ does not give exact instructions as to how much time the erstwhile demoniac should dedicate to recounting the story of his miraculous recovery, which makes it difficult to ascertain whether the healing miracle's price

is commensurate with the task's apparent ease.

Holy healing is, then, a commercial act, in which salvation and abledness are both valuable commodities that can be purchased in exchange for other valuable commodities. Taking its cue from scripture, medieval society is comfortable with seeing the financial in the miraculous. Richard Allen Shoaf observes that medieval Christianity 'emphasized the element of 'purchase' in the Redemption', noting in particular Dante Alighieri's likening faith to money (1983: 214). Berndt Hamm, examining how the church reacts to the newly commercialized European economy, contends that there is a distinct trend in medieval religious literature to 'describe the relationship of humanity to divine grace and the heavenly Hereafter in terms of commercial exchange and financial transactions' (2014: 236). Giles Gasper claims that medieval clerical writers 'make reference to coin so frequently as for it to be a fundamental aspect of their worldview. The coin becomes a way in which to describe money and economic transaction, but, equally powerfully, becomes a metaphor for spiritual health' (2016: 10). The medieval mystic Margery Kempe, a businesswoman before embarking on her quest for sainthood, goes about dedicating herself to God in ways that Sarah Salih have noted as distinctly mercantile; Kempe's

engagement in the spiritual marketplace enables her to profit from her original investment in asceticism. After she has fasted for many years, Christ and the Virgin instruct her to eat normally again. Ending the fast is more valuable than prolonging it, because ending it enables Margery to concentrate on other forms of piety. She needs to eat meat in order to have the bodily strength to 'belyn hir gostly laowys'. Changing her long-standing practice exposes her to 'many a scorne and meche reprefe', which are more valuable spiritual commodities than fasting. The fast is negotiable currency, and by trading it in Margery makes a shrewd exchange. (2004: 170)

Such a logic of exchange only underscores how mercantile actions – the purchase of goods— shapes religious belief and practice, including the notion of healing. In light of this, it is to be expected that medieval stories of holy healing often come with economic undertones. For example, consider Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* or *The Life of Merlin* (c. 1150), in which Merlin sits in the company of friends in his forest dwelling when a madman comes upon them:

A certain madman came to them, either by accident or led there by fate; he filled the grove and the air with a terrific clamour and like a wild boar he foamed at the mouth and threatened to attack them. They quickly captured him and made him sit down by them that his remarks might move them to laughter and jokes. When the prophet looked at him more attentively he recollected who he was and groaned from the bottom of his heart, saying, 'This is not the way he used to look when we were in the bloom of our youth, for at that time he was a fair, strong knight and one distinguished by his nobility and his royal race' (par. 51).

Merlin explains to his companions how the knight became mad: a woman whose affections Merlin had spurned intended to poison him, but the apples into which the poison was placed were instead given to Merlin's friends, one of whom was the unfortunate knight. Merlin's friends 'quickly lost their reason and like dogs bit and tore each other, and foamed at the mouth and rolled on the ground in a demented state' (par. 51). Unlike Christ, Merlin himself has extensive first-hand experience of madness, for earlier in the tale he too lived feral in the wilderness after being driven mad by the deaths of his three brothers in battle. He also differs from Christ-like behaviour in that his initial reaction to the madman is not to heal him but instead to see how much mirth may be mined from his presence. It is only once he recognises the madman for a former friend and fallen knight that he elects to intervene.

However unlike Christ he is in his diminished capacity for compassion, Merlin is nonetheless an equally effective healer. He tells his companions to ‘make this man drink of the healthful waters of this new fountain so that, if by chance he get back his health, he may know himself and may, while his life lasts, labour with me in these glades in service to God’ (par. 52). The cure works, and as soon as the madman’s sanity is restored, Merlin informs him that he ‘must now go on in the service of God who restored you... stay with me that you may strive to make up in service to God for the days that the force of madness took from you’ (par. 52). As in the encounter between Christ and Legion, healing does not come without a price; Christ had Legion pay for his cure by spreading the word of God, while Merlin has his erstwhile friend settle the bill by staying with him and serving God. In both stories, healers of madness are economically savvy and make sure to get their money’s worth.

The hagiographies popular throughout the medieval period also depict healers who have a firm grasp on the economics of their role. Take, for example, Jacobus Voragine’s account of the life of Saint Jerome in *De Legenda Aurea* or *The Golden Legend* (c. 1260). A lion enters the monastery where Jerome sits amongst the other monks, and upon approaching it, Jerome finds that its foot has a thorn lodged in it. After Jerome has extracted the thorn and treated the paw, it becomes apparent that once again, healing comes with a cost. Jerome uses the lion as a source of labor, having it guard the monastery’s donkey, after which ‘the beast cared for the ass as a shepherd for his sheep, constantly accompanying it to pasture, guarding it on all sides as it fed in the fields, and bringing it home at the same hour daily, when its work was done and it had fed’ (589). This is not to suggest that Jerome healed the lion with purely mercenary motives in mind; rather, it suggests that the ideal healer is not simply one who restores the body or mind to health, but one who, in doing so, also restores or improves upon the economic sphere.

Christ's encounter with Legion has not been among the many religious influences and references critics have identified in *As You Like It* (1603). Instead, critics who have approached the play from a religious viewpoint have examined aspects such as the prominence of a character named Adam, the sudden appearance of a lion – a creature imbued with deep religious meaning – and the main villain's abrupt departure for a religious life in the play's conclusion. Some have connected aspects of the plot to the religious upheaval of the period, particularly with regard to Orlando's quarrel with his brother and subsequent exile. Carol Enos observes that prior to the play's production, many English Catholics 'sought refuge abroad', and that while the exiles in *As You Like It* are not forced to reside in Arden on account of their religion, 'the play would never have made it to the boards with religious exile as the overt basis of the conflict between the brothers' (2003: 132). Karen Nelson expands upon this, claiming that Shakespeare 'takes the story from Thomas Lodge's *Rosalind* and removes from it many of the elements that carry the loudest resonances regarding church-state debates' while retaining Lodge's play's interest in exile and disenfranchisement (2013: 153). On the other hand, Daniel Swift presents the Book of Common Prayer – the 'devotional centerpiece' of early modern England – as one of the most powerful religious influences on Shakespeare's work (2012: 23). He examines the 'logic and vocabulary of the marriage rite' as deployed by *Rosalind* (2012: 89) and the way 'characters appropriate the script of the rite and in it find realization of their own desires' (2012: 91). Maurice Hunt examines the text's intermingling of Judeo-Christian virtues and Classical virtues in the character Orlando, whose 'charitable deeds' save the ailing Adam when the desired manna from heaven does not (2008: 33).

However, although the scriptural meeting between a divine healer and a monstrous madman has not often been incorporated into analyses of *As You Like It*, I believe that it and the many tales of holy healing it inspires throughout the medieval period are crucial to any reader interested in cultural depictions of madness. In otherworldly Arden, where so many

social conventions are subverted or toyed with, Christ takes the form of a clever young woman while Legion manifests as an erudite melancholic. A healing is attempted, and fails miserably, for the healer is not supremely competent and the madman refuses to be a passive recipient of her care. However, before examining why exactly the scriptural parable falls apart so dramatically in this story, one must first examine the participants more closely.

Firstly, our Legion, Jaques, a prominent member of the Duke Senior's court. He first enters the text when one of the duke's lords describes the sight of him weeping by a stream in typically melancholy fashion, in reaction to witnessing a deer wounded by a hunter's arrow. The lord's recounting reveals that Jaques has many of the traits particular to the archetypal economically disruptive madmen who has been the focus of this dissertation, and, indeed, a few traits in common with Legion. He chooses isolation over human company and has the same dangerous affinity with animals shared with Nebuchadnezzar, Lancelot and Timon; that is to say, he regards them as his equals, putting pressure on the vital division between man and beast upon which medieval and early modern culture and society is founded. Moreover, in the way he expresses his feelings towards the local wildlife, he reveals himself to be prone to the same powerful heights of turbulent emotion that characterize the aforementioned madmen:

FIRST LORD

The melancholy Jaques,
Stood on the extremest verge of the swift brook,
Augmenting it with tears.
'Poor deer,' quoth he, 'thou makest a testament
As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
To that which had too much:' then, being there alone,
Left and abandon'd of his velvet friends,

'Tis right:' quoth he; 'thus misery doth part
The flux of company:' anon a careless herd,
Full of the pasture, jumps along by him
And never stays to greet him; 'Ay' quoth Jaques,
'Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens;
'Tis just the fashion: wherefore do you look
Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?'
Thus most invectively he pierceth through
The body of the country, city, court,
Yea, and of this our life, swearing that we
Are mere usurpers, tyrants and what's worse,
To fright the animals and to kill them up
In their assign'd and native dwelling-place' (2: 1: 48-66).

Analyzing this monologue, Karen Nelson turns to John Calvin's critique of monasticism, suggesting that Jaques's commentary may be interpreted as a reference to 'the indignation at the exploitation of local citizens that Calvin aims at monastic residents' (2013: 156). While this interpretation is compelling, I posit that the scene's true purpose is to provide a glimpse into the melancholic man's position within his community. Having the monologue recounted to us second-hand suggests that it is not simply Jaques's peculiarities that are of interest here, but also his companions' reaction to those peculiarities. Though much of the lord's monologue is comprised of direct quotations from Jaques, it is sprinkled with hints of his personal opinion on the man he is describing. The Jaques portrayed here is a man of excesses, standing on the 'extremest' edge of the river and speaking 'most invectively'. Perhaps most notably, the lord claims that Jaques condemns 'this *our* life' and swears that '*we* are mere usurpers', his phrasing implying that Jaques is not a real member of the duke's court. Whether or not this

was Jaques's true meaning is never revealed. What we do soon learn is that the Jaques described by the lord and the Jaques who appears on stage are quite different people, the latter never once seen weeping uncontrollably or cursing his friends.

In the eyes of the court, Jaques's lamentation for the deer indicates a dangerous closeness to Arden's wildlife. He may not be as far gone as Legion and Nebuchadnezzar, who are so bestial as to lose the power of speech, but his friends are clearly worried about the prospect: when the duke is searching fruitlessly for Jaques in the woods, he sighs: 'I think he be transform'd into a beast/ For I can nowhere find him like a man' (2: 7: 1-2). The episode with the deer also gives insight into Jaques's somewhat skewed economic worldview. His condemnation of hunting comes shortly after the value of any form of nourishment in the wilderness has been graphically demonstrated by the elderly Adam's near-starvation. Deer meat is not only the highest quality fare available in Arden, but also the food upon which the duke's exiled court relies. Even Chrétien's Yvain, notes Dorothy Yamamoto, 'his madness notwithstanding, is a practical opportunist, taking from the forest whatever he needs to survive, and using animals in exactly the way they were meant to be used, as supports for human life' (2000: 183). The fact that Jaques does not seem capable of even the threadbare economic acumen displayed by the mad Yvain explains why the court is concerned for his wellbeing. In addition, Jaques expresses sentiments that might well trouble anyone invested in the maintenance of the socioeconomic order. When the duke expresses passing regret at the necessity of intruding on the deer's natural habitat and hunting them for food, his lord reports that Jaques also 'grieves at that/ And, in that kind, swears you do more usurp/ Than doth your brother that hath banish'd you' (27-29). To accuse the rightful duke of committing treason equal to that which has been committed against him is a serious transgression, albeit one that the duke good-naturedly brushes aside. Jaques once again demonstrates this tendency towards undermining socioeconomic norms when he decides that he wants to surrender his current status as a member of court and instead follow in Touchstone's

footsteps and become a clown, critiquing the follies and excesses of modern society. The duke points out the hypocrisy in this, given that Jaques has himself been ‘a libertine/ As sensual as the brutish sting itself’, conjuring up images of greedy madmen like Nebuchadnezzar and Herod (2: 7: 66-67).

But although Jaques has some traits in common with the aforementioned madmen, much like Timon he distinguishes himself through the depth and complexity of his character. He has a high level of self-awareness and even a willingness to make jokes at his own expense; when his friend Amiens warns that playing another song will encourage his melancholy, Jaques wryly agrees, noting, ‘I can suck melancholy out of a song/ as a weasel sucks eggs’ (2: 5: 12-13). While more run-of-the-mill literary madmen frighten or disgust those around them, Jaques has a network of complicated relationships of varying levels of amiability. The duke describes him as his friend, Orlando finds him a nuisance, and to Touchstone he serves as councillor on the subject of marriage. In addition, despite his aversion to hunting, there are areas in which Jaques seems to possess a certain amount of economic insight. For example, he offers a frank analysis of the material excesses of women in cities:

JAQUES

What woman in the city do I name,

When that I say the city-woman bears

The cost of princes on unworthy shoulders?

Who can come in and say that I mean her,

When such a one as she such is her neighbour? (2: 7: 75-79)

Whether or not one agrees with his critique and its implicit sexism, these lines nonetheless show that Jaques can formulate coherent economic opinions. If he was, as the duke says, a reckless libertine at one point in his life, he seems to have abandoned his former lifestyle

entirely, indicating a capacity for growth and self-alteration that other literary madmen are incapable of.

Given all this, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Jaques subverts the tropes and stereotypes that have accumulated around madmen over the centuries. Like Timon, Jaques has just enough in common with famous literary madmen to remind us that these tropes exist, but his every moment on stage exposes their hollowness and failure to reflect the nuances of living with disability. For the disability theorist, especially fascinating is the way Jaques embraces the ‘social model’ in his analysis of the deer’s predicament. His lament rejects the impairment-centric medical/tragedy model, which would draw attention to the severity of the deer’s injuries or the nearness of its death, by instead focusing on the deer’s ‘velvet friends’, the healthy and ‘careless’ herd who ‘never stay to greet him’. The deer’s isolation and the herd’s indifference serve as a metaphorical critique of the abled society in which Jaques himself exists. What is more interesting still is that this embrace of the social model extends to his feelings towards his own disability, as I shall show shortly.

Having reviewed our Legion, it is now time to review our Christ; none other than Rosalind, the play’s protagonist. This character is not commonly read as a healer archetype. Barbara Howard Traister argues that ‘doctors and healers play few major roles in the drama of Shakespeare... only Helena, in *All’s Well That Ends Well* – a completely unorthodox healer – has a leading role in a Shakespeare play’ (2004: 43). But while Rosalind, unlike Helena, is not a doctor’s daughter and does not try to cure physical ailments, I argue that her healing powers are nonetheless central to her role in the plot. In the guise of Ganymede, she presents herself to the world as a dispenser of ‘physic’ (3: 2: 358). She works to cure Orlando of his lovesickness, and is successful. She also plies her trade with the infatuated shepherd Silvius and his love Phoebe. In the play’s conclusion, her healing powers become almost miraculous; she makes a series of seemingly mutually contradictory promises to Phoebe, Silvius, and Orlando, all of which are fulfilled. In doing so, she resolves most of the story’s

central conflicts and brings order to lawless Arden. Her powers are such that, in accordance with the need to create four perfect couples, Phoebe instantly transfers her love from Ganymede to Silvius upon learning that Ganymede is a woman, despite having previously expressed only contempt for the shepherd. Moreover, much like the literary healers who have preceded her, Rosalind's skills are rooted in good fiscal sense; when dispensing advice to Silvius and Phoebe, she tells the latter to 'Sell when you can: you are not for all markets' (61).

But just as Jaques cannot fit comfortably into the role of Legion, Rosalind, despite her nigh-miraculous abilities, is no Christ. For one thing, she brings to the act of healing a distinct callousness, made most evident in an offhand comment to Orlando:

ROSALIND

Love is merely a madness and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do, and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love, too. (3: 2: 331-334)

The sudden allusion to Bethlem Asylum disrupts the scene's previously light-hearted tone. Ganymede and Orlando's discussion of lovers and their folly does not seem the place for the sudden, violent imagery of a 'dark house and a whip'. Moreover, Rosalind's describing a medical treatment as a punishment reveals that she harbors a medieval mentality wherein disability and sinfulness are inseparable.

It is in her eventual meeting with Jaques that Rosalind's failings as a healer are made most apparent:

ROSALIND

They say you are a melancholy fellow.

JAQUES

I am so; I do love it better than laughing.

ROSALIND

Those that are in extremity of either are abominable
fellows and betray themselves to every modern
censure worse than drunkards.

JAQUES

Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing.

ROSALIND

Why then, 'tis good to be a post (4: 1: 3-9).

Analyzing this scene, Richard Hornby contends that Rosalind condemns Jaques for his excesses as a melancholic in the same way she condemns Orlando's excesses as a lover, and that this is in keeping with her character as 'both moderate and moderator' (1986: 142).

While I agree with Hornby's assessment, what is more striking is how crudely Rosalind wields her authority as a self-appointed healer. Her first words to Jaques are not any form of socially acceptable greeting, but the application of a diagnostic label. This label, it should be noted, is not applied after conversation with Jaques and a meaningful attempt to understand his character, but rather is based on evidence she has collected from the surrounding abled community. If this were not enough, she goes on to denigrate those the label applies to; those who are melancholy, like those who laugh too often, are 'abominable', socially unacceptable and comparable to 'drunkards', a comparison that draws on the association between madness

and wasteful expenditure. Then, in response to Jaques's glib reply that 'tis good to be sad and say nothing', she responds with another comparison, this time to an inanimate object – a 'post' – rounding out her insults with dehumanization.

Rosalind's treatment plan is to first apply the diagnosis to her patient and then inform the patient that he has failed morally by attaining that diagnosis. Despite her good intentions, the would-be healer does not come off well in this scene, which, at best, illustrates a basic incompatibility between paternalistic medical model Rosalind champions and the mad person's right to dignity and self-empowerment. Both are rights that Jaques clings to throughout this scene. He accepts her diagnostic label, but does so in a way that personalizes it. By saying 'I do love it better than laughing', Jaques centralizes his own experiences of his madness and dislodges the abled gaze from its pride of place. He then unleashes a lengthy oration to counteract Rosalind's pursuit of neat categories by drawing attention to melancholy's many and varied subtypes:

JAQUES

I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation, nor the musician's, which is fantastical, nor the courtier's, which is proud, nor the soldier's, which is ambitious, nor the lawyer's, which is politic, nor the lady's, which is nice, nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry's contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness (4: 1: 3-19).

In trying to explain his disability to her, he utilizes a process of elimination that emphasizes the uniqueness of his experiences. She has tried to reduce him to a single, comprehensible category – a 'melancholy fellow' – and he responds by illustrating the richness of disability, which affects scholars, musicians, courtiers, soldiers, ladies and lovers all differently. His

own particular melancholy is unlike any of these, and indeed unlike anyone's, being influenced by his own travels and ruminations and, ultimately, a part of himself rather than a defect for Rosalind to fix. Having failed to shame him for his disability, Rosalind then follows in the footsteps of Christ, Chrétien's hermit, and Jonson's Overdo; she treats the problem of disability as an economic one. Christ solved disability by enabling an equitable transfer of real estate. The hermit taught the madman how to evaluate resources. Overdo simply offered the madman money. Rosalind tries her best to find an economic angle to further criticize his madness, but is stymied by the fact that she simply does not know him very well. As noted, the most economically dubious actions Jaques takes are his professed aversion to hunting deer. If she were aware of this, Rosalind could perhaps build her case, as Chrétien's hermit does, by showing him the importance of meat as a foodstuff when resources are limited. But as she knows nothing about Jaques, she instead tries to extrapolate previous economic failings from what little he has told her:

ROSALIND

A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad: I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's; then, to have seen much and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands (4: 1: 20-24).

Imagining a history for her patient, she accuses him of making the sort of economic error to which madmen are prone – selling his own lands to see other lands, leaving him with no money or property of his own. Still she fails, as Jaques points out that he has nonetheless profited from his travels, saying 'I have gained my experience' (25). She tries to make a case for the low value of his experiences if they have made him sad, and says that she would rather have invested in a clown to give her joy than in travel to bring her sorrow. But it is clear at this point that it is over. Jaques simply will not be dragged from his melancholy by

aggressive categorisation, insults, shame, or economic common sense. From Rosalind's point of view, Jaques is what disability writers refer to as a 'bad patient', a category Susan Baglieri and Arthur Shapiro unpack:

One feature of medicalisation is the exaltation of the role of the doctor or professional in matters of diagnosis and treatment. When a person with a disability refuses to behave like a good patient, the behaviours are often viewed as 'symptoms of maladjustment'.

In fact, refusal to cooperate actively with the source of help to achieve recovery leads to the individual's loss of personal rights and dignity. (2012: 24)

Bad patients are met with frustration and even anger because they fail to recognise the healer's authority and superior wisdom. When we see Jacques so adamantly refusing to cooperate with Rosalind, we may well fear that he will suffer the same loss of rights and dignity described above. After all, in other early modern plays such as Richard Brome's *The Antipodes* (1640), we find mad people forced to endure monstrous violations and affronts to their self-determination at the hands of those who seek to cure them. The same occurs even in some of Shakespeare's works; consider the fate of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (1601), locked away and tormented for his assumed madness. And Rosalind has already made clear her endorsement of the 'dark house and a whip'. If the play subjected Jacques to any of these horrors, we might assume that it is taking Rosalind's side in the quarrel. But instead Jacques is permitted to walk away free from his encounter with the would-be healer.

Shakespeare's deconstruction of the scriptural dynamic between healers and madmen is not limited to simply having the healer fail to alter the madmen. He shows how easily the categories in which they exist can be muddled. Rosalind, who denounces lovers as madmen, falls madly in love with Orlando and suffers lovesickness that leaves her vulnerable to the immoderate extremes of emotion that she criticises in others. Nowhere is this more apparent

than when she excitedly asks after Orlando's wellbeing, abandoning her typically witty speech patterns in favour of frantic babbling:

ROSALIND

Alas the day! what shall I do with my doublet and hose? What did he when thou sawest him? What said he? How looked he? Wherein went he? What makes him here? Did he ask for me? Where remains he? How parted he with thee? And when shalt thou see him again? Answer me in one word (3: 2: 219-224).

Likewise, Jaques takes a turn in Rosalind's role as healer. The fool Touchstone plans to marry the country maiden Audrey, and engages curate Sir Oliver Martext to conduct a wedding ceremony in the forest. Jaques, after spending some time observing the proceedings, brings the wedding to a halt when he insists that the couple seek out a proper church and a proper priest, claiming that Martext 'will but join you together as they join wainscot; then one of you will prove a shrunk panel and, like green timber, warp, warp' (3: 3: 75 – 80). He even scolds Touchstone for acting outside of his economic station by getting married 'under a bush, like a beggar', despite his own previous willingness to abandon his economic station in pursuit of Touchstone's career (3: 3: 67). What is more, Jaques is successful: Dismayed, Touchstone nonetheless acquiesces and abandons the wedding, after which, at the end of the play, Touchstone's and Audrey's are among the four marriages arranged by Rosalind.

Both healer and madman display an ability to fulfill multiple roles and reveal unexpected sides to their characters. Even so, Jaques is never 'cured' of his disability. He remains a melancholic up to the play's conclusion – which is not to say that he remains in stasis while everyone else moves on with their lives. While the rest of the cast is getting married, Jaques hears that the villainous duke 'hath put on a religious life/ And thrown into neglect the pompous court' (5: 4: 174-175). He immediately announces his intention to seek

him out, claiming that 'out of these convertites/ There is much matter to be heard and learn'd' (178-179). Jaques's words echo an earlier line of dialogue; when the duke heard that Jaques was in a melancholy mood, he declared, 'I love to cope him in these sullen fits, for then he's full of matter' (2: 1: 70). Perhaps the implication is that there are similarities between the 'matter' of new converts and the 'matter' of madmen, and that Jaques may finally have a chance of finding likeminded company. Either way, after the lonely suicide of Timon, Shakespeare's other bad patient, it is heartening that Shakespeare allows Jaques to escape from the wilderness of Arden and even enjoy the hope of companionship, beyond the reach of pathologisation and the whip.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The cultural association of madness with economic instability does not taper off after the early modern period. In *The Rake's Progress* (1732-33), William Hogarth portrays in a series of eight paintings the downfall of a young man who inherits a large fortune, spends his money carelessly, and eventually succumbs to gambling and bankruptcy, echoing the prodigal son found in scripture. The seventh painting depicts him incarcerated in debtor's jail, while the eighth shows him driven to insanity in Bethlem Asylum. William's Blake's painting *Nebuchadnezzar* (1795) brings the mad king's poverty back into the spotlight, depicting him crawling through the wilderness with no clothes on. Theodore Gericault produced *Les Monomanes*, a series of paintings from 1820 to 1824 depicting people who fit into the psychiatric categorization system of the period, two of which feature diagnoses based on the subject's interaction with money: *Woman with Gambling Mania* (1819) and *Portrait of a Kleptomaniac* (1822). Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861) conjures up the infamous madwoman Miss Havisham, whose enormous wealth is matched only by her willingness to misuse it to abuse others. Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) ties mental illness to a vicious critique of consumerism in the form of Patrick Bateman, wealthy Wall Street businessman and monstrous serial murderer. Occasionally, some have chosen the opposite route; rather than using mad people to symbolize a dysfunctional economic system or to show how madness damages the economy, they depict the negative effects a brutal and unaccommodating economy can have on mad people. Such is the case in Herman Melville's short story *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* (1853), often read as one of the foremost examples of psychological disability in fiction (Nixon 2014; Pinchevski 2011; Milder 2009). The lawyer who initially employs Bartleby is satisfied with the quality of his work, until Bartleby succumbs to depression and is unable

to do his job, communicate, and, eventually, eat. Much of the tension in the story derives from the dilemma faced by Bartleby's employer, who wants to help the scrivener but is equally concerned with the threat to his business's welfare.

Ato Quayson warns against confusing the representation of disability in literature with the lived realities of the disabled:

There is no doubt that literary representation of disability somewhat subtends real-life treatment of disabled people in a variety of ways. However, I also want to note that the aesthetic nervousness of the literary-aesthetic domain cannot by any means be said to be equivalent to the responses to disabled people in reality. To say that the literary model provides an analogue to reality does not mean that it is the same as that reality.

(2012: 30)

I bear this in mind as I review the evidence assembled in this dissertation of an entrenched economically-inflected ableism in medieval and early modern literature. Many of the stories examined here might not have been representative of the overall realities of mad and disabled life in these time periods, although, given the breadth, complexity and occasional sheer weirdness of the mad/disabled experience, it seems fair to say that they probably represented *someone's* reality. There would have been mad people who were taken advantage of by con artists; mad people who chose poverty in the wilderness over civilization; mad people with families who regarded them as obstacles to domestic financial stability; mad people who clung to dignity and self-definition, as Jaques does, in the face of a world all too eager to categorize and demean. Occasionally, one finds historical artefacts that render the link between ableism in storytelling and actual abuse of the disabled painfully clear. When gazing upon such objects, the measurable, material impact of Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, Legion and all the rest is driven home, reminding one that the

stories analyzed were produced by a society in which real mad people existed, and the attitudes expressed in those stories had real effects on their lives. For me, no objects are more effective in this regard than two particular statues. From 1676 to 1815, two statues sprawl above the entrance to London's Bethlem Royal Hospital. Titled *Raving Madness* and *Melancholy* and created by Danish artist Caius Gabriel Cibber, the statues depict two men lying on straw mats with their upper bodies propped up on their elbows, in the grips of their titular conditions. Both are in a state of undress; *Raving Madness* has no clothes, only chains to restrain him, while *Melancholy's* genitals are concealed only by a cloth. Given Bethlem's prominent place in mad people's history, even an analysis that aims to destabilize the medical model of disability may find it worthwhile to consider the placement of these statues. Regardless of Bethlem's controversial reputation in mainstream discourse – a discourse that remains dominated by the voices of those who are abled and neurotypical – Europe's most well-known institution is a source of ongoing pain to many members of the mad community on account of the acts of torture and neglect that have been visited upon mad people's bodies within its walls. The enduring power of Bethlem as a symbol of oppression is best illustrated by the Reclaim Bedlam protest of 1997, in which a group of psychiatric survivors condemned a planned celebration of the institution's seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary.

Cibber's statues express an attitude towards disabled poverty that situates the sane individuals upon whose charity Bethlem relied as humane saviours, while situating those for whom their charity was intended as empty vessels whose tragedy and grotesquery accentuated their benefactor's benevolence. Although both statues are positioned so that their faces and bodies are turned towards the viewer, neither one looks directly at the viewer, nor at his neighbor. Instead, both stare slightly upwards, either with a contorted snarl or with a blank expression. The artist has not attempted to forge a connection between the figures and the audience, or between each other. They are there to be looked

at; whatever they themselves are looking at is of little importance. Similarly, their nudity not only implies suffering and deprivation, but also contributes to their overall lack of interiority. Clothing in art is a signifier of rank, gender, wealth, age, origin, and personality. While its absence may imply sensuality or classical heroism, it is clear that neither is intended here. Instead, the nakedness of Cibber's statues suggests a dearth of identity, along with agency and purpose.

Considering the statues from the perspective of disability studies, they might be subjected to the same critique that Paul Longmore applies to the telethons designed to promote charity for disabled young people in the late twentieth century. At a glance, the statues present Bethlem's *raison d'être*: to alleviate the suffering of the mad by appealing to the pity of the abled. The telethons and the statues both represent a desire to improve the situation of disabled people, as well as that desire's foundation in a bedrock of ableism, unexamined power dynamics, and a type of good will that is contingent on the assumed supremacy of the abled. Using the critical framework provided by Longmore to engage with Cibber's statues and the cultural landscape from which they arose also allows us to see the role money plays in the subordination of those who are mad and disabled. Both the telethons and the statues render mad or disabled bodies as symbolic representations of economic crises. The specific nature of the 'beneficence' Longmore describes the telethons as attempting to encourage is financial. The medical model with its attendant emphasis on biology and impairment is the scaffolding which the telethons use to lend power to their appeals, but the central dilemma facing the disabled child is presented as a lack of money, and the best solution is a charitable donation from the abled viewer. Likewise, the most obvious struggle facing the mad person as depicted by Cibber is that they have no possessions at all, no money, no clothes, no furniture to lie on, nothing but whatever the kindly benefactor might give them. An analysis of the statues grounded in mad studies produces another interpretation of their symbolic meaning. Viewed in the

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contemporary moment, they symbolize the two foremost challenges facing mad and disabled people: the assumed foulness, helplessness, and irrationality of the mad or disabled, and the assumed benevolence, enlightenment, and competence of the abled, especially those who have assigned themselves the role of our helpers. Both sets of assumptions are closely linked to a third, less overt assumption that mad and disabled people are economic problems whose flawed brains and bodies present challenges to an otherwise functional capitalist system, appearing to more wealth than those people can generate themselves.

Cibber's statues are a point at which we can see clearly the link between the artistic misrepresentation of marginalized populations and the abuse such art attempts to justify. In 1814, one year before the statues were removed, Edward Wakefield produced his infamous report on conditions in Bethlem to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Madhouses in England, in which he detailed the specific nature of said abuse:

We first proceeded to visit the women's galleries. One of the side rooms contained about ten patients, each chained by one arm or leg to the wall, the chain allowing them merely to stand up by the bench or form fixed to the wall, or to sit down on it. The nakedness of each patient was covered by a blanket gown only... In the men's wing in the side room six patients were chained close to the wall, five handcuffed, and one locked to the wall by the right arm as well as by the right leg; he was very noisy; all were naked, except as to the blanket gown or a small rug on the shoulders... the patients in this room, except the noisy one and the poor lad with the cold feet, who was lucid when we saw him, were dreadful idiots; their nakedness and their mode of confine gave this room the complete appearance of a dog kennel... On Wednesday, the 7th of June, when we again visited Bethlem, we discovered that all the male patients, who were then naked and chained to their beds in their cells, were in that situation by

way of punishment for misbehavior. (1837: 508-509)

Wakefield's report on Bethlem's dehumanization of mad people prompts us to speculate as to whether those responsible for the abuses he describes might not have hesitated to treat human beings in this way had not Cibber's statues served as a reassuring reminder of what a psychologically disabled person was supposed to look like. That is to say, Cibber's statues contribute to a social imaginary in which mad people are so degraded and dehumanized that abusive treatment is not only justifiable but also warranted.

Recent events in South Africa and England – namely, the success of the #Rhodes Must Fall student movement in removing Cecil John Rhodes's monument from the University of Cape Town campus, and the failure to remove another statue of Rhodes at Oxford – have drawn attention to the enduring power such symbols have to hurt individuals and to reinforce oppressive structures. Though Cibber's statues were removed in 1815, the attitudes and assumptions they speak to still form the basis of contemporary attitudes towards mad people. For an example of how easily representations of mad bodies still dip into caricature – even with the best intentions in the world – one need look no further than Robert Gordon University in Scotland. In early 2015, the university received criticism for its nursing training programme. It was revealed that the program had been using cartoonishly frightening Halloween masks with which to represent patients with varying psychological disabilities and thus allow prospective nurses to engage in role-play. But masks can be thrown out and statues can be taken down. What is far harder to amend is the socially ingrained ableism that associates disability with economic instability. One of the most visible areas in which this manifests is the global conversation surrounding homelessness. Erin Dej provides an account of the way 'the relationship between mental illness and homelessness is often presented as innate' in writings on the subject (2016: 120). She argues that this is ultimately a result of neoliberal individualism:

The psychocentric paradigm plays out in a distinctive way among individuals experiencing homelessness, who must constantly negotiate the discourses that diagnose distress as biologically derived, but simultaneously call for them to be accountable for their social situation. (2016: 131)

This paradigm – the assumed connection between mad people and economic unrest – transfers across to texts mostly unconcerned with disability. For example, consider historian Niall Ferguson’s commentary on how the unpredictable human brain creates and exacerbates financial crises:

If the financial system has a defect, it is that it reflects and magnifies what we human beings are like. As we are learning from a growing volume of research in the field of behavioural finance, money amplifies our tendency to overreact, to swing from exuberance when things are going well to deep depression when they go wrong. Booms and busts are products, at root, of our emotional volatility. (2016: 15-16)

To conclude on a positive note, one might take comfort from the fact that medieval and early modern culture is vast. Perusing it at any length, we find mad characters like Shakespeare’s Timon and Jaques who are afforded dignity and complexity. Recent scholarship has amplified mad literary voices, drawing attention to the works of Marjory Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve (Harding 1993; Hickey 2015; Lawes 2000; Vandeventer Pearman 2010; Lochrie 1991; Walker Bynum 1987). We also find images that are heavily reminiscent of Cibber’s statues and Gower’s Nebuchadnezzar that nonetheless are imbued with wildly different meanings. Consider Donatello’s *Penitent Magdalene* (1453-1455), a small wooden sculpture of Mary Magdalene following the death of Christ and her entrance

into the wilderness. Contrasting this sculpture with artistic depictions of Magdalene that would emerge in the course of the Renaissance, in which Magdalene is often portrayed as a young and attractive woman with a lush head of red hair and a body that suggests the peak of physical fitness, one might wonder at Donatello's decision to depict her as a woman in the grip of extreme anorexia. Donatello's Magdalene is old, frail, her face haggard, her hair lank and filthy. Like Cibber's statues, her lack of clothing and possessions means that we would have no idea who she was if we did not know the title of the piece. Yet this Magdalene does not invite our horror or pity, but rather our awe. The artist's attention to the physical and mental cost of penitence makes his Magdalene a figure of courage and perseverance; one hopes that her suffering will be alleviated soon, but one does not think less of her for it. Another artwork that I feel does something similar is Leonardo Da Vinci's *St Jerome in the Wilderness* (1480). An unfinished work, it depicts Jerome in a desert location, kneeling on the ground beside the lion, his face tilted upward to heaven. An old man, Jerome has no possessions, nor any clothing besides a loose rag, and he is emaciated, with the skin stretched tight across his face and very little hair. The overall impression is one of an austerity so severe that it risks provoking a response closer to revulsion than admiration from the viewer. There seems very little about this man's situation that is tolerable, little indication that he is receiving or will receive any kind of reward for his extreme expression of faith. Although the lion lies nearby, there is nothing to suggest that Jerome has recently performed a miraculous feat by curing and taming it; it might well be considering eating him. The viewer is invited to wonder whether this can truly be the best of men engaged in the holiest of actions. The fact that all signs of religious devotion besides bodily suffering are absent from the painting means that there is no substantive evidence that Jerome is anything other than another madman in the wilderness. Can it be right and permissible that this elderly man continue to live in this fashion – must something be done about him? While the painting raises troubling questions, it invites compassion without

offering judgement. This is a phenomenon all too rare in medieval and early modern culture, indeed, even in contemporary culture.

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