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## *Telling, Showing and Interpreting Mad Discourse in Renaissance Drama*

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In both Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One*, and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, the plays which made their authors famous in the late 1580s, mad discourse is present, to a lesser extent in the first case, and more so in the second. Such discourse must have proved very popular, since Hieronimo's mad speeches received five anonymous additions in 1602, after Kyd's death, and after the appearance of other memorable mad scenes in the plays of Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists. By the closing of the theatres in 1642, many more mad scenes, which were often not present in the sources of the playwrights, came to be written. Madness was given both comic and tragic treatments in plays intended for performance by professional male actors or trained young choristers, and intended for a paying audience in a public theatre. Given the non-specific nature of the few stage directions to be found in some of the published dramatic texts, I attempt, with some audacity, in this performance-oriented essay, to help modern readers to visualise mad behaviours on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages.

Like many critics, I challenge the notion that verbal language is absolutely primary in drama. I assume that mad discourse, even more than other discourses, relies mainly on body language; that, in the theatre, mad behaviour is meant to be erratic, to shift abruptly

from laughter to tears, from moaning to shouting, and from senseless immobility to wild excitement; that vocal modulations increase the general impression of incoherence and inconsequentiality which characterises madness; and, finally, that the dramatic text is, in turn, energised, slowed down, exaggerated, naturalised, stylised, danced, sung, mumbled, etc., by the actors. In early seventeenth-century England, real-life mad behaviours could be observed and even aggravated by the custodians' or the visitors' whipping, tickling and pricking of the inmates of Bedlam or other madhouses. This pastime was, however, controversial. Theatre audiences may have found it difficult to discriminate between comedy and pathos. On the stage, Romeo could hyperbolically compare the torments inflicted on him by his unrequited love to such mistreatment and declare he was "Not mad, but bound more than a madman is: / Shut up in prison, kept without food / Whipped and tormented" (*Rom.*, I.ii.54-56)<sup>1</sup> without being taken seriously, while some compassion among the audience for real madmen was almost inevitable. This makes us more aware of the complex mixture of tonalities offered by texts containing dramatic mad discourse to the actors who interpreted them. Extreme flexibility was demanded of them.

Shakespeare's great actors playing mad Lear or mad Ophelia benefited from numerous internal and external stage directions, which give us more than hints about their performances. In *Hamlet*, for instance, Horatio *tells* the Queen and the spectators about the effects of despair on Polonius's daughter before these are *shown* as she enters. The reactions and comments of other characters complement Horatio's tale, and the actor's performance. Such a wealth of information is not always present in all the plays with mad parts produced between 1587 and 1642—hence my wish to focus on a few representative scenes. I shall not present them in chronological order, but according to the kind of madness shown, whether collective or not, and the help in imagining their interpretation provided by these richer directions, and by contemporary psychological treatises, such as Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

My first example emphasises Shakespeare's polyvalent textual direction of actors and of audience response. In his *Troilus and Cressida*, Cassandra's "Cry, Trojans, cry!" (II.ii.96) interrupts the hot debate among Troilus, Paris, Hector and Priam about the usefulness of keeping Helen in Troy. The subsequent dialogue gives

1 All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Wells, Taylor *et al.*

many implicit internal directions. Priam's question, "What shriek is this?" (96), tells us a loud, shrill cry expressive of terror and pain is heard from within. Troilus recognises the voice of his "mad sister" (97), and Hector names her: "It is Cassandra" (99). Cassandra has clearly entered when she wildly repeats her cry for the third time and is told by Hector to calm herself: "Peace sister, peace" (102). Cassandra describes her own utterance as "clamours" (99), announcing "prophetic tears" (101) and a "mass of moan to come" (106), as "Troy burns" (111). She repeats her cry three more times, amplifying it. Then, with implicit vehemence and urgency, she invites Trojan "Virgins and boys, mid-age, and wrinkled old / Soft infancy that nothing canst but cry", to "add to my clamours" (103-5) their inarticulate utterance of emotion, and "practice [their] eyes with tears" (107). The dialogue between Troilus and Hector also highlights their differing views of Cassandra. While the younger brother disregards the "brainsick raptures" (121) of a mad sister, the elder shows respect for her inspired prophecy, her "high strains of divination" (112-13). There are two versions of the only external stage direction in this short sequence. Both are conventional signals, and herald most mad women's entrances in Tudor and Jacobean drama. In the 1609 Quarto we read: "*Enter Cassandra rauing*"; in the folio version: "*Enter Cassandra, with her hair about her ears.*"<sup>2</sup> All distracted persons are supposed to rave, that is, to speak irrationally, or incoherently, wildly, frenziedly. And when women's hair is let down, dishevelled, loose or about the ears, it is a clear visual signal of madness, or rape.<sup>3</sup> More interestingly, the fact that Cassandra never addresses her brothers and her father directly, and that Shakespeare gives her no exit, implies, I think, that in her agitated mental state and passionate excitement, she is blind and deaf to their presence and that she passes over the stage bearing her prophetic warning with vacant or staring eyes. As Foucault writes, "le fou ouvrant les yeux ne voit que la nuit dans la lumière et de la lumière dans ses images" (p. 262).

The source of mad discourse is here represented as inspired prophecy. It can also appear as divine punishment or as devilish possession. Dealing with madness in his *Treatise of Melancholy*, published in 1586, Timothie Bright, a physician but also a churchman, implicates both an excess of the "spleneticke excrement" (p. 109) and divine retribution in melancholy patients: "Although no man is by nature freed from this affliction, in so much as all men are sinners, and being culpable

2 See Bevington, ed., II.ii.96 SD, and textual n. to 96.1.

3 See Dessen, pp. 36-38.

of the breach of God [*sic*] laws, incur the punishment of condemnation: yet is the melancholicke person more than any subiect therunto” (pp. 198-99). Little wonder that black magic and witchcraft are sometimes associated with madness in plays, often more seriously than in the case of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, when Feste, disguised as Sir Topas, pretends to free him, “the lunatic” shut up in a dark room, from “dishonest Satan” (IV.ii.23, 32). Burton himself calls melancholy the “Divels bath” (193.26)<sup>4</sup> even in the last edition of his great work. *The Witch of Edmonton*, by Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley, presents a case of madness caused by the witchcraft of Elizabeth Sawyer, a real woman condemned and put to death in the same year of 1621, for having bewitched her neighbour, Anne Ratcliff. In Act Four, Scene One, a non-specific stage direction reads, “Enter Anne Ratcliff mad” (172 SD). In the text, we are confronted with the mad discourse of the victim, Anne. Besides calling for collective singing and dancing, using bawdy words, and attempting to scratch Elizabeth Sawyer’s face, she threatens to sue the witch, and to ask her pig to testify. Finally, according to her father, “away she brake; and nothing in her mouth being heard, but the Devil, the Witch, the Witch, the Devil; she beat out her own brains, and so died” (IV.i.205-7). The other mad discourse is that of the supposed witch. She often talks to her favourite familiar, the black dog she calls Tomalin, who, at one point, comes in coloured white: “Have I given up my self to thy black lust / Thus to be scorn’d” (V.i.4-5). In this topical play, the dramatists obviously capitalise on the legendary attributes of witches.

When witchcraft is concerned, the recourse to formulaic Latin exorcisms, or conjurations, as in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (I.iii.16-22), is frequent. They are generally performed in special costumes and accompanied by thunder and various demoniac apparitions. The Friar in George Chapman’s *Bussy d’Ambois* “puts on his robes” (IV.ii.31) and his Latin “exorcising rites” (24) to raise Behemoth “in some beauteous form / That with least terror [Tamyra] may brook his sight” (28-29). Behemoth’s text suggests spectacular light and sound effects: “Any of this my guard that circle me / In these blue fires, and out of whose dim fumes / Vast murmurs use to break, and from their sounds / Articulate voices” (52-55). When he sends one of his “knowing spirits”, Cartophylax, back to “that inscrutable darkness where are hid / All deepest truths” (48-49), there is a stage direction

4 All quotations from Burton, except where otherwise indicated, are from vol. I of the *Anatomy*, ed. Faulkner, Kiessling and Blair, and are referenced by page numbers, followed by line numbers.

that reads, “A torch removes”. More generally, there are special costumes, not only for devils and magicians, but also for mad characters. In *The Changeling*, for instance, by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, Isabella, the wife of Alibius, the asylum doctor, puts on the “habit of a frantic” (IV.iii.127) to hide her identity from one of her wooers, who does not penetrate her mad disguise and looks down on “this wild unshapen antic” (125).

By the choice of *Sanity in Bedlam* as the title of his *Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy*, Lawrence Babb, like Berger Evans in his earlier study, *The Psychiatry of Robert Burton*, highlights the contiguity between melancholy and madness in the minds of those who were concerned with diseases of the body and of the mind. Burton, who was a divine by profession, a scholar with an interest in medicine by inclination, spent probably more than thirty years of “his time and knowledge” (8.9) at Oxford laboriously collecting his “cento out of diverse writers” (8.11-9), ancient or contemporary, “for the common good of all” (8.9-10). His *Anatomy* was already a formidable concatenation when it was published in 1621. Its immediate success was such that numerous additions were included in its five subsequent editions. His work, relying like its precursors on the Galenist medical theory which was dominant in Europe during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, constitutes a valuable panorama of the medical and psychological ideas of the time, most of which had circulated in Latin before him. The indebtedness to Burton of John Ford, who collaborated with Dekker and other dramatists on at least five plays between 1621 and 1625 and went on to write his own love tragedies, has been attested by B. S. Ewing (*Burtonian Melancholy in the Plays of John Ford*). Presumably, many playwrights, actors and spectators came to know the *Anatomy*.

Not only does Burton, like Bright, believe in the universality of his malady since the Fall, but his extensive reading leads him to warn his reader that “Proteus himself is not so diverse; you may as well make the Moon a new coat as a true character of a melancholy man” (407.28-29), and “The four and twenty letters make no more variety of words in diverse languages” (407.25-26). Referring to the four humours—blood, phlegm, cholera and black bile—he writes that melancholy is “differing according to the mixture of those natural humours amongst themselves, or four *unnatural adust* humours, as they are diversely tempered and mingled” (166.26-167.1-2). The two words I have italicised recur in all his chapters. The combination of those two defects leads almost inevitably to madness. Excessive combustion causing dryness and a scorching heat can make any humour “adust”. Differences can also arise from the seat of this malady — brain, heart,

or other parts of the body — and the kind of depravation from which vegetable, animal or vital spirits and humours suffer: “If the brain be hot, the animal spirits are hot, much madness follows with violent actions” (167.29-30); “If it trouble the minde as it is diversly mixt, it produceth several kinds of madness and dotage” (168.8-9).

Transference of spirits is also a possibility. Of the three kinds of spirits, “the vitall spirits are made in the heart of the naturall, which, by the arteries, are transported to all other parts: if these spirits cease, then life ceaseth, as in a syncope or swooning” (141.33-35). Chapman, in *Bussy d’Ambois*, gives the Count of Montsurry lines that can only be understood in the light of the medical theories of the times. When Tamyra, his wife, “seems to swoond” (IV.i.141 SD), he kisses her: “Look up, my love, and by this kiss, receive / My soul amongst thy spirits, for supply / To thine chased with my fury” (149-51). The jealous husband first hopes that his vital spirits, being transferable from one person to another through the physical senses, may revive Tamyra’s perturbed soul. He then realizes that his kiss cannot achieve the transfer because his blood is *troubled* by his jealous fury: “A headlong chaos murmurs within me, which I must digest / And not drown her in my confusions” (155-57).

Mad jealousy is, of course, a favourite with dramatists and audiences. But any intemperate passion of the mind can cause madness. “Passions cause many maladies, and wellnigh all are increased by them, for all that pain engendereth melancholy, which for the most part, nourishes all diseases”, writes Thomas Wright in 1601, when dealing with *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (p. 63). Bright, earlier, had written on “Howe melancholie worketh fearefull passions in the mind” (p. 33 [title, chap. 9]). Zabina’s short mad sequence, in the last act of Christopher’s Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine, Part One*, exemplifies the effects of several of them. Bajazeth, having sent her to fetch water, has just brained himself against the cage in which he had long been held prisoner by Tamburlaine. In preceding scenes, the captive Turkish empress’s speeches, served by the author’s powerful lines, had been scornful, fearless and constantly vindictive, in spite of her being reduced to ignoble slavery and often exposed to the obscene mockery of Tamburlaine and his soldiers. When she was left alone with her despairing husband, her passionate rhetoric of hatred had, however, given way to one of passionate love: “I may pour forth my soul into thine arms / With words of love” (V.i.278-79); “Sweet Bajazeth” (282).



Clearly preparing the spectator for Zenocrate's remorse—"pardon me that was not moved with ruth / To see them live so long in misery" (367-68)—Marlowe chooses not to offer the Turkish empress's mad scene as "a goodly show for a banquet" (IV.i.55) to the usual mocking onstage audience. Only the spectators in the theatre see Zabina's distraught self in front of the cage where she beholds her dead husband's "skull all riven in twain, his brains dash'd out" (305). After a few conventional laments (306-8), culminating in pathetic invocations reminiscent of Senecan tragedy—"O Bajazeth! O Turk! O Emperor!" (308)—Zabina's "lavish tongue" breaks into raving fragments which contrast with Bajazeth's own final heroic discourse.<sup>5</sup> The iambic pentameter is distorted and replaced by spondaic, then mostly trochaic prose. Yet, Zabina's short sentences are not defective. With one exception, they are all imperative, and suggest unhampered dominance, as well as a transformation of reality through imagination. It is through Zabina's jumbling together of various discourses that Marlowe creates a strong feeling of mental confusion, and through her telescoping past, present and future, as well as through obsessive repetitions, including her self-assertive "I"'s: "I, even I, speak to her" (312). The Turkish empress implicitly addresses her servants, Tamburlaine, his soldiers, the Turkish soldiers, and finally Bajazeth, in disorderly haste but with passion, alternately irascible and compassionate: "Down with him"; "Fling the meat in his face"; "Bring milk and fire"; "Let the soldiers be buried"; "Ah, save that infant, save him, save him!" (311-15). The rapid succession of monosyllabic words, orders and curses—"Give me the sword with a ball of wild fire upon it" (310-11); "Hell, death, Tamburlaine, hell!" (315)—gives a feeling of racing thoughts. Disorientation is, however, suggested in the traumatic picture of war powerfully conjured up by Zabina's words: "The sun was down. Streamers, white, red, black, here, here, here" (313). The printed text provides no explicit stage directions for this brief but intense mad scene, but it begs the actor to convey a whole range of embattled emotions and passions: extreme distress, rage, pride, scorn, compassion, horror, fury, loving fervour ("I come, I come" [316]) and, finally, glorious self-violence. The responsibility for making this moment a tragic peak falls largely on the vocal and expressive skills of the actor. The danger is to overdo them, and to make this tragic peak burlesque.

Of these extreme emotions, Burton says they are "perturbations and passions, which trouble the phantasie" (255.13). In melancholy men fantasy

5 Cf. Hillman, *Self-Speaking*, p. 244, as well as his essay in the present volume.

or imagination “often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things” (152.24-25). All the authors who dealt with perturbations of the mind say so.<sup>6</sup> But only Burton offers so many pleasant digressions, graphic examples and “prodigious” symptoms borrowed from all kinds of authors, many of whom were poets. Whereas other treatises were mainly concerned with theories and “conceptions”, often as much theological as medical, the author of the *Anatomy* also explored “Symptomes, or Signes of Melancholy in the Body”<sup>7</sup> with a sort of humorous voracity. These are the passages which I have found most useful in addressing my subject, especially when various sorts of madness are suggested by the stage directions.

When impersonating mad characters, actors could choose from hundreds of such “Symptomes . . . in the Body”, depending on the situation and the temperament of these characters (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic or melancholic), leaving aside internal symptoms like “griping in their bellies” (382.7), wind, palpitation of the heart, slow pulse, hard black excrements, epilepsy, vertigo, “terrible and fearefull dreams” (382.9), except where the characters themselves referred to them. This is the case, for instance, when Leontes, in *The Winter’s Tale*, refers knowingly to a jealous man who “cracks his gorge, his sides, with violent hefts” (II.i.467). If collective, unspecific madness was represented, as in the “madmen’s morris” in *The Changeling*, when trained madmen and fools, guided by the “commanding pizzles” (IV.iii.62) of doctor Alibius and his assistant, are made to dance in a paid performance, “the more absurdity” of which “the more commends it” (58, 57), the actors could, in order to vary and enrich their body language, pick from long Burtonian lists. Of those who are “far gone”, and whose “mimical gestures are too familiar”, the Anatomist offers the following panoply of symptoms: “laughing, grinning, fleering, murmuring, talking to themselves, with strange mouthes and faces, inarticulate voices, exclamations” (382.25-27); “cold sweat . . . a leaping in many parts of the body . . . a kind of itching, saith Laurentius on the superficies of the skin, like a flee-biting sometimes” (382.16-17). Mad discourse, in such cases, would be mainly comic.

The last scene of *The Honest Whore, Part One*, by Dekker and Middleton, presents several madmen. Father Anselmo, the custodian, warns various visitors to

6 Cf. Thomas Walkington’s *Optick Glasse of Humours* (1607) and Pierre Charron’s *Of Wisdom* (translated in 1606).

7 The heading of Partition 1, Section 3, Member 1, Subsection 1 (pp. 381-84).

a Bedlam located in Milan that they must leave their weapons behind because, although some of his patients, “So apish and phantastike, play with a fether” (V.ii.158), and while “blemisht and defac’d, yet do they act / Such anticke and such pretty lunacies, / That spite of sorrow they will make you smile” (159-61), others might snatch their “rapiers suddenly” and “do much harm” (165). He has to tame them: “They must be used like children, pleas’d with toyes, / And anon whipt for their unrulinesse” (242-43). Although the friar has hidden reasons for acting as he does in a play that is mainly a comedy, what he says of the mad inmates’ “pretty lunacies”, and of his own whipping habits, is exhibited in three mad discourses. He first “*Discovers an old man, wrapt in a Net*” (V.ii.175 SD), whom he introduces as “A very graue and wealthy Citizen” (170) who “fell from . . . himselfe” by “losse at Sea” (173) and has been in the asylum for seven years (173-74). This character provides numerous internal and external stage directions. Surrounded by seven visitors who speak to him and comment on his appearance—or are addressed by him and react to his lunacies, and sometimes indulge his whims—the “old man” is made to play with words, sounds and body language. He is relatively coherent in his chosen isotopy, which is related to his initial trauma, that of loss at sea: “i’me neither fish nor flesh” (186); “my net breakes still, and breakes, but Ile breake some of your necks and I catch you in my clutches” (192-94); “out you guls, you goose-caps, you gudgeon-eaters” (195-96). In such lines, even threats and incremental insults, with their repetitions, alliterations, assonances and consonances, are pleasing to the ear. The “very old man” (178) is said to “daunce in a net” (181) and pretends “theres a fresh Salmon in’t”, that he himself is “ouer head and ear in the salt-water”, in a “whirlpoole”, “fishing here for fiue ships” (188-92).

The actor who impersonates him would have been likely to gesticulate, perhaps “with a leaping in many parts of the body”, and to direct the gaze of his audience here and there. Numerous implicit internal stage directions in the text suggest changes of rhythm, facial expressions, gestic terms, interaction with the visitors: “thou shalt not speed me” (180); “O, doe not vex him pray” (184); “if you step one foot further” (188-89); “Stay, stay, stay, stay, stay—wheres the wind . . . do you looke for the wind in the heauens?” (194-97); “ha ha ha ha, no no, looke there . . . the winde is alwayes at that doore: hearke how it blowes, pooff, pooff, pooff” (197-99). The text suggests the actor’s clinging to one man or another, bursting into laughter, threatening, pushing, pulling, looking up, bulging his cheeks, puffing them out. The character almost stage-manages the scene, playing with the “heavens” above the stage, and one particular door in

the playhouse. His laughter is echoed by that of the visitors (200) in response to his rather childish “pooffing” and his metatheatrical references. Immediately rebuked as the roguish mockery of old age, this laughter is repeated twice by the supposedly “very old man”, probably in different modes and moods, as the very young actor plays with his “gray beard and head”, or rather wig, supposedly not “counterfet” (201-2), and pursues his interactive game with his visitors.

They humour him, agreeing to pass for his “eldest son” (203) or, in the case of the Duke, for his second son, holding out his hand, then kneeling down and agreeing to be treated like a foolish “varlet” with “ten-peny nails” (213-16), that is, devilish nails—“Sirra! thou there? hould out thy hand” (207-8)—and to be the butt of the comedy: “Looke, looke looke, looke: has he not long nailes, and short haire?” (210-11). After further fantasising about the nails of his son, who, as a promoter, “scrap, and scrap, and scrap, till he got the diuell and all” (217-18), and, suiting his action to his words, showing how “he scrap thus and thus, and thus, and it went vnder his legs” (218-19), the madman suddenly turns violent. He clears the decks for clamorous defensive action, first against “the Turkes gallies” (222), then against “the dambd Pirates who have vndone” (225) him and sunk his ship—that is, the visitors themselves. The latter cease to play and probably show divided feelings, as the old man destabilises their physical and moral positions. The actor needed to be a veritable gymnast, able to crawl and leap up and down, wrapped in his net, while skillfully imitating ominous sounds, like a child but with the terrified voice of an old man: “Bownce goes the guns—oooh! cry the men: romble romble goe the waters—Alas! there! tis sunke—tis sunck” (222-24). Although no extra sound effect is mentioned, there might have been accompanying thumps, cries and rumblings offstage to make the proceedings more spectacular. The whipping friar intervenes but finds it difficult to control his “unruly” client, who then asks for meat, a frequent request in dramatic mad scenes, and invites compassion: “looke you, here be my guts: these are my ribs,—you may looke through my ribs,—see how my guts come out . . . ” (236-38).

The friar orders this “very pitious sight” (240) to be taken away and replaced by two other madmen, individuals of fewer words and with different obsessions, one of which is jealousy, an obvious link to the theme of the play. As soon as he enters, the jealous individual accuses all the visitors of being “whoremongers” (255) who have lain with his wife: “whore, whore, whore, whore, whore” (256). I suppose he points to each of them in turn, identifying him as one or other of his supposed cuckolders, and orders him to “lye there” (259) next to his fellow

cuckolder, and next to his own wife. Having enumerated their whoring bawdy gestures with her, on her, under her, etc., and threatened to “prick” (268) them all, he ends with a kind of rigmarole or sing-song: “Fidler—Doctor—Tayler—Shoomaker,—Shoomaker—Fidler—Doctor—Tayler—” (268-70), which suggests that he hops or dances round them. This jealous madman, although far gone, is treated in a light way which makes us laugh, though we may resent the custodian’s treatment of him and others as commodities.

As soon as this second madman sees the third one eating, the two fight with each other for the food, whether real or fantasised: porridge, flap-dragon, rope for parrot are all part of the mad menu (272, 276, 281). The exchanges are very brisk and soon become more violent. The threats to kill the second madman in various ways, because he will not give up a morsel or a spoonful of food, reach a climax in a “bounce” that supposedly kills the third madman, who probably falls to the ground, holding his head, as he yells, “Ooh! I’m slaine . . . my brains are beaten out . . . ring out the bel, for I am dead” (287-91), and asks to be buried “into a good pit hole” (298). The unruffled acceptance of Friar Anselmo—“Take em in both: bury him, for he is dead” (297)—suggests that he is used to what has become a routine. *The Honest Whore* was performed at the Fortune in 1604-5, and again at the Cockpit in 1638. As mentioned earlier, the action of the whole last scene and the happy denouement are set in a Milanese Bedlam. The length and variety of mad speeches and behaviours must have appealed to, and fascinated, a very mixed audience, including Queen Henrietta Maria in 1638. It is my guess that the spectators enjoyed the tension between sorrow and humour, sympathy and fear, silence and prolixity; they must have loved being a party to the wrangling and banging, and above all relished being induced to cross the thin borderline between reality and illusion(s).

In Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, when Ferdinand, one of her tyrannical brothers, hoping to drive the Duchess mad, decides “To remove forth the common hospital / All the mad-folk, and place them near her lodging” (IV.i.126-27), the actors again had to play “several sorts of madmen” (IV.ii.42). Their “action” in this case, is, however, far more equivocal and difficult to imagine. This time, certainly, the context is tragic. After the “hideous noise” (IV.ii.1), probably very loud and jarring, identified by the waiting-woman as “the wild consort of madmen” (1-2), and followed by a servant’s description of their social characteristics and diverse obsessions, eight madmen are “let loose” (58). What kind of consistency or inconsistency was Webster looking for? While one Madman sings a “song which

is sung to a dismal kind of music” (60 SD), and which contains many gloomy elements meant to dishearten the two women, who sit patiently, as if watching a masque, or rather an anti-masque, what is the subsequent behaviour of the others, when four of these madmen are given intermingling mad speeches? We are told of the Duchess’s noble self-possession, which defeats her brother’s purpose of continuing to harrow her soul. As indicated in the stage directions, “*Here the dance, consisting of 8 Madmen, with music answerable thereunto*” (102 SD), is performed. Is it again a jarring, wild consort, in keeping with wild, erratic dancing, or are the music and choreography meant to be conventionally sophisticated? Does aestheticism prevail over pseudo-realism? Are the four mad speakers meant to exhibit a type of body language that corresponds to their main obsessions: astrology and doomsday, hell as a glass house, lust and damnation, heraldry, the Geneva Bible, cuckoldry, constipation? Is the treatment of the dance similar to that of the previous singing, or does it contrast with it? No comments from the onstage audience allow us to answer these questions. I presume that a line such as “You’d think the devil were among them”, which concludes the prologue (58), may sum up the general impression. Moreover, although Ferdinand is not present during this last torture inflicted on his sister, this mad scene, in its morbid theatricality, tells us much about the state of his diseased mind, and many of the mad speeches can be seen as extensions of his own insanity. Several passions—anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, lust, incestuous love—tear him apart and reach a climax in his final lycanthropy.

Referring to “*Lycanthropia, which Avicenna calls Cucubuth, others Lupinam insaniam, or Wolfe madness, when men runne howling about graves and fields in the night, and will not be persuaded but they are Wolves or some such beasts*”, although some “call it a kind of melancholy”, Burton states that he “should rather referre it to madness, as most doe” (133.19-21). He draws examples from diverse authors: Felix Plater, Hippocrates, Wier, Bodin and others. On the stage today, all kinds of hairy costumes emphasising the bestiality into which the duke has degenerated have made this other mad scene even more symbolically spectacular. This was perhaps the case on the Jacobean stage. Webster’s text provides many internal stage directions for the actor playing Ferdinand: standing apart, looking up then behind himself fearfully, throwing himself down on his shadow to “throttle it” (V.ii.38), venting his rage, then “studying the art of patience” (45) while crawling on the floor, supposedly to drive six snails ... from Amalfi “to Moscow” (47-48), “like a sheep-biter” (50-51). To the character’s contradictory

impulses—sly guardianship and aggressiveness—Burbage must have added voice modulations, abrupt changes of tempo and mood, and, above all, demonic intensity. The scene progressively evolves into slapstick or grotesque, as Ferdinand, “forced up” (52) by courtiers, faces the doctor who has vowed to “buffet his madness out of him” (26) and proceeds to “do mad tricks with him” (60). Asked to engage in a grotesque duel with forty urinals as weapons, then to cut capers, the lycanthropic duke is never afraid, never relents in his aggressiveness: “I will stamp him into a cullis, flay off his skin” (77-78). Meanwhile, Bosola, who stands apart silently, apparently awed, exclaims, “What a fatal judgment / Hath fall’n upon this Ferdinand!” (86). He seems to view his master’s “strange distraction” (86) as both satanic possession and divine retribution, a view shared by many in the seventeenth century.

The French writer Beauvois de Chauvincourt, in his *Discours de la lycanthropie* (1599), pictures his own response at the sight of “ces hommes tellement dénaturez, qui abastardis de leur première origine, quittant cette forme divine, se changent & transforment en une si immonde, cruelle & sauvage beste”: “je n’ai poil en teste qui ne dresse, une froide peur me glaçant le cœur, saisist tous mes membres” (p. 12). Bosola might share his fear and his belief that

telle abomination et meschanceté provient d’une pure volonté & libéral arbitre, détérioré et poussé par le soufflement . . . d’un mauvais esprit. . . Ces loups non naturels sont vrais sorciers, qui ayant faict banqueroute à l’Eglise de Dieu, ont conjoint et lié leur perverse volonté avec celle de Satan. (pp. 14-15)

Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is, of course, a stupendous symptom of madness in the body and in the mind. It remains, however, a rare product of intemperate jealousy. Shakespeare has given us precious clues to interpret this malady. So has Robert Burton, who writes: “Of all passions . . . this bastard jealousy is the greatest, as appears by those prodigious Symptomes which it has and it produceth” (III: 297.15-18):

Besides those strange gestures of staring, frowning, grinning, rolling of eyes, menacing, gastly looks, broken pace, interrupt, precipitate, halfe turnes. He will sometimes . . . impatient as he is, rave, roare, and lay about him like a madman, thumpe her sides, drag her about perchance. . . . As an Hearne when shee fishes, still prying on all sides; or as a cat does a mouse, his eye is never off hers, he glotes on him, on her, doth at dinner, at supper, sitting, walking etc. (III, 298:4-27)

Many of these symptoms could be portrayed by the actor in order to show the sudden irruption of jealousy into Leontes' heart and its furious flare-up in *The Winter's Tale*, from "tremor cordis" (I.ii.112) to heart-breaking conviction: "Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked one!" (187). Intense staring, grim frowning, broken pacing, half-turns, and so forth, are pointed to by the internal stage directions, whether in Leontes' own speech ("the infection of my brains / and hardening of my brows" [147-48]), or in onlookers' comments: "You look / As if you held a brow of much distraction. Are you moved my lord?" (150-51). Asides voicing Leontes' suspicions soon turn into active "angling" (181) and proceed "from suspition to hatred, from hatred to frenzy, madnesse, injury, murder and despair" (Burton, III: 304.4-5). Diseased imagination takes over, and speech was probably accompanied by facial contortions and obscene gestures:

But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,  
As now they are, and making practised smiles  
As in a looking glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere  
The mort o' th' deer—O, that is entertainment  
My bosom likes not, nor my brows. (117-20)

The jealous Leontes' discourse is more and more fragmented, as, in a kind of frenzy, he sees imaginary "goads, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps" (331) sully the whiteness of his sheets. He becomes increasingly vehement and full of rage, as he accuses Camillo of not confessing his "wife is slippery" (275): "You lie, you lie. / I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee" (301-2).

When Shakespeare dramatises the credulous Othello's descent into bestial, murderous jealousy, he gives him a paroxysmal mad speech just before "*He falls down in a trance*" (IV.i.40 SD). This speech exemplifies many characteristics of "choler adust", or "melancholy adust", degenerating into madness. "There is no difference betwixt a mad man and an angry man, in the time of his fit", writes Burton: "Anger, as Lactantius describes it, is a cruell tempest of the minde, making his eyes spark fire and stare, his teeth gnash in his head, his tongue stutter, his face pale or red" (269.9-13). Cardan, the Italian physician, according to the Anatomist, "holds these men of all other fit to be assasinats, bold, hardy, fierce and adventurous to undertake anything by reason of their choler adust" (401.1-2). Othello refers to his own trembling and shaking (IV.i.38, 40). His raving passion shatters the coherence of his speech, fragmenting it into monosyllabic words, repeating excruciating ones with scorched intensity: "Pish! Noses, ears, and lips!



Is't possible? Confess? Handkerchief? O devil!" (40-42). That this mad humour may "proceed from the divell" is one of the opinions reported by Burton (400.30). But Shakespeare, equivocal as often, allows us to experience some of the chaos in the speaker's mind. Who precisely is meant to confess? Cassio, after he is hanged? Or perhaps his wife? Or even the instigator of "such shadowing passion" (IV.i.39)? We tend to associate the "devil" with Iago, who rouses the monster in Othello, even more than with the insufferable images and perverted sensations that obscure the Moor's reason.

In Jacobean drama, the variety of mad discourses is more and more contained in one individual. I shall end my analysis with the case of Brachiano in Webster's *The White Devil*. In his death scene, he is "presented in a bed" (V.iii.80 SD), and his face, thanks, I presume, to the application of grease paint, must have the pallor of death, if we judge by the reactions of those present: "There's death in's face already" (80). The following stage direction specifies, "*These speeches are several kinds of distractions and in the action should appear so*" (81 SD). We are first confronted with two speeches which are very coherent. What "action" can turn them into different kinds of distraction? The first is the rash dismissal of someone—we assume it to be Vittoria—who is accused of real or imagined exactions: "Away . . . Make up your accounts" (81-84). Can some of Burton's symptoms be useful? Is the poisoned Brachiano supposed to be in turn furious or ridiculous, to shake and tremble, "talking to [himself] with strange mouthes and faces, inarticulate voices, strange gestures" (Burton, 382.26-27)? Brachiano's impatience, as suggested by Flamineo (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.85), can be reflected in frantic efforts to raise his weak body and revive his hoarse voice. The second speech is a kind of *mea culpa*. Did the actor utter "the dusky raven" (87) with a croaking voice, and imitate the "cloven creatures" (89) and "the devil" (88) to which he refers by crooking his fingers? It is a plausible possibility. The abrupt change of subject, followed by an immediate change of decision—"Let me have some quails to supper"; "No: some fried dog-fish. Your quails feed on poison" (90-91)—initiates the descent announced by Lodovico into "the most brainsick language" (72) of a man whose "mind fastens / On twenty several objects, which confound / Deep sense with folly" (72-74). One could say of his mad discourse and that of many others what Horatio says about the mad Ophelia in *Hamlet*, that their "speech is nothing, / Yet the unshaped use of it doth move / The hearers to collection. They aim at it, / And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts" (Shakespeare, *Ham.*, IV.v.7-10). The hearers are both onstage and in the playhouse. For Ophelia's mad body-language, Shakespeare

provides many hints in his text: she “hems, and beats her heart, / Spurns enviously at straws” (5-6), sings and distributes flowers, moves from one person to the other, and “Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself / She turns to favour and to prettiness” (186-87). Webster’s Cornelia learns much from her, in her own mad scene, near the end of *The White Devil*.

Like many madmen in treatises, mad Brachiano does not recognise those who surround him; he swears he sees, “In a blue bonnet, and a pair of breeches / With a great cod piece. Ha, ha, ha, . . . stuck full of pins / With pearls o’th’head of them” (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.97-101), the devil himself, whom he knows “by a great rose he wears on’s shoe / To hide his cloven foot” (102-4). Now behaviours such as a propensity “Upon a sudden to laugh, whoop, halloo, or run away, and swear they see or hear Players, Devils, Hobgoblins, Ghosts, strike, or strut, &c” figure among the symptoms enumerated by Burton (407.9-10). Far from running away, the duke is ready to “dispute with” the “rare linguist” he considers the devil to be (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.104-5). He sounds overjoyed by the prospect, and the actor would probably have shown it in his eccentric gestures and his excited laughter. His drastic change of mood, when Vittoria says, “My lord here’s nothing” (105), and his abrupt return to financial problems are probably accompanied by frantic efforts to leave his bed, and by vehemence and scornful authority in his disgruntled voice: “I’ll not be used thus” (108). These spectacular mood swings and hallucinations, which Burton and his colleagues would probably have attributed to “corrupt phantasie that makes them see and heare . . . that which indeed is neither heard nor seene” (Burton, 424.9-10), or to possession by a devil, continue in Brachiano’s long mad scene. He describes, and points out to his bewildered onlookers, including Flamineo himself, a circus Flamineo who

Is dancing on the ropes there: and he carries  
A money-bag in each hand, to keep him even,  
For fear of breaking’s neck. And there’s a lawyer  
In a gown whipt with velvet, stares and gapes  
When the money will fall. How the rogue cuts capers! (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.110-14)

His purely visual hallucination was probably reflected in shaking of the head and body, a face that mirrored pleasure, expectation and a mixture of childish wonder and eagerness to grasp the moneybags himself. A new peal of laughter greets the news that the lady he can see and does not recognize is Vittoria: his “Ha, ha, ha” can again be modalised, merry, cynical, witty, as he exclaims, “Her

hair is sprinkled with arras powder, / That makes her look as if she had sinned in the pastry” (117-18). Fear of his imminent death must cloud the superficial smiles of those who utterly depend on him, Vittoria and Flamineo, when he calls for a rat-catcher on seeing, so he believes, “six grey rats that have lost their tails, / Crawl up the pillow” (123-24).

Was it less difficult for an early seventeenth-century actor to keep the right balance of seriousness, compassion and laughter in the characterisation of this distracted dying man than is the case today? As always, presuming the actor was good and in good form, the audience must have been captivated by his virtuosity and his versatility. The evolution in *Brachiano*’s madness from insight to spectacular grotesque distraction becomes parodic and paves the way for modern interpretations, which tend to be fully parodic. But the belief in witchcraft and Satan must have added a tension which vied with the distancing effect brought about by theatricality. I keep in mind Stanley Wells’s reminder that “it is in performance that the plays lived and had their being” (p. xxxiii). I hope to have made some of the mad discourses on which I have focused my attention more alive, thanks to the explicit and implicit stage directions contained in the texts, to Robert Burton’s “symptoms in the body”, and to the approach to madness at the time. Telling, showing and interpreting all have a say in mad discourse. It may be worth seeking to apprehend these processes more fully.

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